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**PANEL I – THE VALUE OF OUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE
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My experience as a foreign student in Japan by

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**THE VALUES OF OUR LEARNING IN JAPAN:
THE STYLE OF JAPANESE MENTORING
and “My Experience as a Foreign Student in Japan”***

By

I Ketut Surajaya**

Prolog

I had never imagined that one day I would get the opportunity to continue my study in Japan. One reason was because when I was still in Senior High School in Tabanan, Bali, there was not any information about Japan. The information available was only about European countries, America and Australia. It was not until I prepared myself for continuing my study in Jakarta that I was exposed to information about Japan and especially about its education system.

In the beginning, I was more interested in economics and English, yet the destiny seemed to lead me to take Japanese as a major, though it was not even a choice at first. Soon it became the beginning of my learning about Japan.

Osaka Gaidai

I was chosen by the Dean of Faculty of Letters, University of Indonesia, to continue my study in Japan by making use of a scholarship from the Japanese Government (*Monbushoo*, now *Monbukagakushoo*), provided that on my return from Japan I had to be a lecturer in Japanese Department, Faculty of Letters, University of Indonesia. I left for Japan in April 1976 and went straight to Osaka to improve my Japanese in Osaka Gaikokugo Daigaku (Osaka Gaidai).

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Higashi Hanazono Ryugakusei Kaikan

Any foreign student who will continue his/her study in any Japanese University, either as a regular or a research student is required to understand Japanese. This is necessary so that he/she can comprehend the lecture and the research generally conducted in Japanese.

Before the Japanese course began, Osaka Gaidai held a placement test to know the Japanese proficiency of each foreign student. Amongst the 30 foreign students who did the placement test, 8 students who were from China passed in advanced Japanese (*jookyuu*). Seven other students, one from Indonesia (I), two from Brazil, one from Argentina, one from Germany, one from Philippine and one from Denmark passed in intermediate Japanese (*chuukyuu*), and the rest passed in basic Japanese (*shoukyuu*).

There are four components in Japanese at *chuukyuu* level: Grammar (*bunpou*), Reading Comprehension (*dokkai*), Composition (*sakubun*) and Listening Comprehension (*choukai*). Besides those courses, there are some elective courses, namely, Japanese history and culture and introduction to Japan (*nihon jijyou*).

Dokkai course included the discussion about newspaper article and that article had to be translated into English, or German, or Spanish. Such an activity was assigned because in Osaka Gaidai there were experts who mastered those languages. One time I expressed my complaint about the system because in my opinion the system was unfair. I reasoned that there was no doubt that student whose first language was either English, German, or Spanish would only face fewer difficulties in re-writing the translation into their mother tongue. As for me, the most difficult part was to re-write the translation of the text into English, whereas to translate it directly from Japanese into Bahasa Indonesia would be much easier.

Therefore, I made a suggestion that the translating should be allowed to be done in Bahasa Indonesia. Unfortunately, the idea was turned down even though there was Indonesian study program in Osaka Gaidai. I was extremely disappointed and almost gave up. Luckily, there was a solution in which I was allowed to summarize the text in Japanese.

The most interesting course is *choukai*. The lecturer of this course was so creative that he taped the materials from television programs with various topics such as news, discussion, sports, drama and cooking demo. It made us the students to comprehend the lesson more easily.

Such audio method is what I eventually apply in the audio-visual laboratory. Generally, this method is pretty effective and attractive to the students.

History, culture, and society which were part of *Nihon Jijyou* course were also interesting and practical. Besides attending the lecture in the classroom, the students were invited to observe some festivals, such as *oobon* and *Aoi matsuri* ceremonies. Afterwards, they had to write a report about what they had watched. In the end of the semester, the students visited some historical places, such as Himeji fortress, Osaka Castle, and those which are in Kyoto, such as Ginkakuji and Kinkakuji. Such a use of field method was interesting and the students could witness and imagine historical events that took place in the past.

Language courses like grammar, kanji writing and composition, usually, did not much differ with the material in the textbooks. Such a course is fundamental in language mastery. It gave us so much homework. Sadly, that homework wasn't reviewed or discussed comprehensively though it was needed so that we know the mistakes we should not make in the future.

As for me, the improvement of my Japanese during a semester in Osaka Gaidai was not significant in supporting the lectures I attended in Hitotsubashi University. It was not surprising because even since the placement test, I had already learned that the lessons given were not based on the lessons in *chuukyu* Japanese which followed the standard issued by The Japan Foundation. Nevertheless, attending Japanese courses in Osaka Gaidai served more as a preparation and stamina building before becoming familiar to and experience the daily life of Japanese society and the campus atmosphere.

Osaka Ryugakusei Kaikan

The dwellers of the dormitory were students from many different countries. They were from North America, Latin America, Asia and Africa. Most of them were from Asia.

Unlike in Hanazono Dormitory, all levels of Japanese course for foreign students who wanted to improve their Japanese were provided in this dormitory. The Japanese in this dormitory was more effective since the learning process was individualized. The course was arranged according to each learner's need and Japanese proficiency. I was well assisted by a Japanese tutor prepared by Komaba *Ryugakusei Kaikan*, in cooperation with Japan International Education Association.

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Komaha Ryugakusei Kaikan

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Chokosei in Hitotsubashi University

To take courses in master's program, one must undergo some tests. At that time my Japanese was not good enough to make me qualified enough to enroll and do a master's research. Therefore, an advising professor suggested that I take an audit program (*chokosei*), as a preparation for the master program.

I was taking an audit program (*chokosei*) for a semester. I realized that the lecture in Japanese was indeed very hard. In the classroom I could comprehend only about 45 percent of the lecture. To understand more I listened to the lecture I taped while consulting my vocabulary dictionary for some difficult words. This technique was quite fun though sometimes it made me bored.

I was allowed to attend some courses without having to take the credits, simply because they weren't needed. The history of economics in Edo era and the history of Japanese thoughts were the most interesting courses among four courses given in the graduate study. Whereas the history of politics in Showa era was the most exciting for the undergraduate study. Nevertheless, all those three courses were similar in their level of difficulty.

The most interesting lesson I got as *chokosei* was that I began to get accustomed to listening lectures delivered in Japanese. Reading the literature of the history of economics in Edo era drained off my energy and mind, since most economic terminology and vocabulary in Edo era used specific terminology I had never studied in my undergraduate study in Indonesia. I managed to comprehend most part of the history of politics in Meiji era course because I had studied it in Indonesia. I even wrote it in my undergraduate thesis. The advising professor supervised my academic progress through his assistant assigned to guide me. I found this individual mentoring very useful.

The time to prepare for the master program entrance test finally arrived. January 1977 was a very decisive period for me. It would decide whether I had to return to Indonesia or continue to master program. The test conducted in two phases – written test and interview. I was worried with the written test because I was a bit restrained by my limited Japanese. On the contrary, I was satisfied with the interview because I managed to explain my research plan if I am enrolled in the master program. The topic asked by the examination committee was about my comprehension regarding “Jiyuu Minken Undoo” and my next plan in doing the research about the history of Japanese democracy in Taisho era. Luckily, I had read

the books by Tetsuo Najita about Taisho Democracy and a book by Hirokawa Daikichichi about Jiyuu Minken Undoo. The test result was quite satisfying. I was enrolled as student of master program in Department of Sociology (Shakai Kenkyuuka) in Hitotsubashi University, under the supervision of a professor in the history of Japanese thoughts.

As a Student of Master Program

The interesting part of this program was there were only few courses which were theoretical and methodical. There were no courses in research methods on social and history. Unlike in the universities in the United States and in Indonesia, in Japan the tendency of method and theory in history as well as theories in sociology were never discussed specifically in the research seminar.

The courses were more focused to specific materials, for example, the courses on *kokugaku* thoughts from Motoori Norinaga, *bakunan* system, religious thoughts and movements during Meiji era, the history of economics in Edo era, etc. The topics in these courses generally were more focused to the discussion of the primary written sources and that of the previous researches regarding the topics discussed.

Each student was expected to produce an original research. The theory built in such a way would be a new finding of the already discussed theme. According to this method, the research was not based on a theory previously built by other experts, but it was a new finding or perspective of the subsequent researchers. From this finding, new concepts enriching particular themes were expected to develop. For example, the theory of "Christianism Ethic" from Max Weber which talked about the birth of capitalism ethic, or which was later on followed by Rebert Bellah who discussed the birth of the seeds of capitalism in Japan based on "Zen Buddhism" ethic did not have to be the primary references in conducting a research about the birth of Japanese capitalism. The students were encouraged to develop original findings based on primary sources required as references. In doing so, a researcher is allowed to directly explore various data and documents, without having to start from the 'grand theory'.

In Indonesian universities nowadays an academic researcher is required to commence his/her research by applying one of the 'grand theories' he/she masters. The purpose is what will be examined should first be determined based on the grand theory. The positive side of this is the basic theory has been decided before the research on any specific theme is being conducted. The difficulty will happen when

finding data or *zeitgeist* (the spirit of era) which was different or not supportive or even against the “grand theory”, the researcher will face a big problem.

When I designed a research about the thoughts of Yoshino Sakuzo in Taisho era, my professor suggested that I do three things, namely: (a) to read all the previously conducted researches (at that time there were 9 researchers conducting research on Yoshino Sakuzoo). From the 9 researchers’ works, I had to identify: to seek the similarities and differences in views and findings of each researcher, investigate primary and secondary sources used and find out if there was a new perspective, or the result was merely a duplication of a work of other researcher.

This kind of research prioritizes the finding of idea rather than ‘idea building’ based on the “grand theory”. As a result, a rather complex research is produced, because it discusses or investigates a specific theme into details. Such a result is the one considered original.

As a Student of Doctoral Program

After I graduated my master study in January 1979, I was faced by three important problems: (a) I had to return to Indonesia as the time for the scholarship receiver was over, (b) I could try to continue to doctoral program, and if I passed the entrance test, the scholarship from Monbushou would be extended, still in a condition that there was no guarantee that I would earn a doctoral degree because the academic tradition and system in Hitotsubashi University were still “conservative”, (c) to continue a doctoral study in any university in the United States, with condition that my TOEFL score must reach at least 550 points, besides having to get another scholarship from other sources. These three options were equally hard.

I decided to try the entrance test for a doctoral study and had to bury my dream to study in the United States. In the early 1979, I applied for a doctoral study in the same department, Department of Sociology. Before the oral test was held, each applicant had to make a research proposal. This time I extended my master research by focusing on "Taisho Democracy in Yoshino Sakuzoo’s thoughts." It is an extensive research theme because Taisho Democracy covers up an extensive and complex issue despite its short period (1912-1925). Besides, the thoughts of Yoshino Sakuzoo include problems that are extensive and complex. Yoshino’s thoughts discussed various concepts of ideology from liberalism, democracy, Tennooism, anarchism, socialism, fascism and Yoshino Sakuzoo’s version of democratic state.

As a reformist figure as well as a thinker in Taishoo era, Yoshino was a lecturer of institutional law course in University of Tokyo Empire. He was an activist in political movement opposing the government. His idea about constitution reformation (Meiji Constitution), institutional (Kizokuin, Sumitsuin), right to vote and the general election system, women's movement, labor movement, academic freedom, had shaken the worlds of academic, politic and ideology in Taishoo era. These were the issues I raised in my research proposal.

I encountered another problem during the oral test. It was the questions asked by six professors who were the examination team. Among the questions were the following: (a) besides English, do you master two other languages, for example, Chinese, German, French, or Russian? (b) Are you sure that you will produce a new finding in your research regarding Yoshino Sakuzoo, though you had written this in your master thesis? (c) Are you sure that your research result will be more original and better than those conducted by the previous researchers on Yoshino Sakuzoo? (d) How would you work to produce an original result? And there were other questions regarding my family etc.

Here are my answers. (a) I answered as followed: "I can only speak Japanese and comprehend a little English. I don't master any other languages. Learning the answer, one of the professors said, "in that case, you don't qualify to take the doctoral program since you don't master two other languages besides English and Japanese. I continued to explain my argument, "What I need is the mastery of Japanese, including old Japanese needed to read sources particularly from the period of Meiji-Taishoo. It appears that in order to be able to read those sources, my mastery in Japanese would be enough. Supposedly someday I conduct a research about, for example, the occupation of Japanese military in Indonesia or in Bali, then I will use sources in English, Japanese, Bahasa Indonesia, and Balinese."

When I finished with my argument, one of the professors asked his staff to take Chuuo Kooron magazine published in 1914. I was told to read the article of Yoshino Sakuzoo in that magazine. His article discussed about constitutional government. "*Kensei no honggi o toite sono yushu no bi o nasu no michi o ronzu*". I could read the article very well because I was quite familiar with the style of Yoshino Sakuzoo's language I learned when writing my master thesis. After reading the article, I was told to leave the room and wait the result.

Ten minutes later I was summoned by the examination committee and one of the professors said: “*Surajaya kun omedetou gozaimasu . . . kimi wa gokakushimasu . . . kore kara mo hakase katei de gambatte kudasai ! Kyou wa hakase nyuugaku sentaku wa awarimashita . . .*” (Mr. Surajaya, congratulations . . . you passed . . . from now on you must work hard in your doctoral study. The selection to enter the doctoral program has finished)

I could answer the questions (b), (c), and (d) very well and those were not any obstacles at all. Afterwards, I imagined the difficult times I would soon encounter.

The Difficult Life.

The hard times were in front of me.

- (a) The major difficulty was to read and gather texts by Yoshino Sakuzoo which were the primary data for the research.
- (b) To read research results written by those who conducted researches on Yoshino Sakuzoo, to identify the validity of each data, duplication, new finding or new perspective on Yoshino.
- (c) To make an original research proposal, to avoid duplication. In making this proposal I devoted all my energy and every academic effort because I had to read the research results on Yoshino by other researchers. In the proposal I did not have to deal with theory and research methodology which I had comprehended by reading books on theory and research methodology.
- (d) To write the proposal in Japanese which was not a simple thing at all. My mastery in Japanese remained an obstacle although I had written my thesis in that language. The Japanese mentor – prepared by the University – was very contributive in helping me improve my Japanese composition.

That was the hard times I experienced as a foreign student in Japan for six years. The following is some interesting things I encountered, especially in the field of research.

Research Seminar

In semester one, four weeks was for individual consultation and nine weeks was devoted for the discussion of proposal presentation of each student. My turn was in the seventh week. I had to present and report the content of books which were the collections of writings by Yoshino Sakuzoo. There were eight volumes. Each volume varied in its number of pages, between 280 and 350 pages. For me, reading eight books – in Japanese – in seven weeks period and at the same time reporting it in Japanese were a fatiguing job, mainly because of two problems. First, to comprehend Yoshino's thoughts in very complex sentences. Second, to report Yoshino's thoughts – found separately in eight volumes – in appropriate Japanese.

To be honest, the work was too much. I was also depressed because I could not finish the assignment within seven weeks. In the presentation (*happyou*), I began by saying “*sumimasen ga repooto ga mada dekimasen ga, . . . konkai no hokoku wa muri desu ...* (I apologized for not finishing the report yet . . . and it would not be possible to present the report now . . .”). Knowing this, the professor assistant who directed the presentation was upset and said harshly : “*Nan da totsuzen . . . kimi ga sekinin ga nain da . . . ima made nani o surun no? benkyou shinai no? Asonderu bakari no? Korekara nani o suru no? Kuni e keru ka? Shougakkin o enchou suru ka? . . .*” “*Hai, ..., hai, . . . mo iinda. Kimi no hokoku wa saigo no shu ni shimashou . . . kore kara nombiri to kompa shimashou!*”. The professor said coldly! The translation: “What is this . . . suddenly . . . you're irresponsible. . what have you done so far? Didn't you study? You aren't serious, are you? Now what will you do? Go back to your country? To extend your scholarship? Well, this is enough. You will have to present your report in the ninth week . . . now let's relax and drink.”

I felt sad and lost my dignity. However, I still had about two weeks to finish my report. In that two weeks period I worked nights and days and gave myself only a little time to rest.

Eventually, two weeks later I managed to present the report successfully and the result was satisfying. Many friends of mine complimented me. “*Surajaya-kun . . . omedetou kimi ga erain da . . . kore kara mo gambatte kudasai . . .*” (Surajaya . . . congratulations, you are good . . . keep up your hard work”). That's the first words sincerely said by the professor assistant to me. In retrospect I come to realize that the tasks and responsibilities of Japanese adviser, particularly a professor assistant, is very hard. He must be responsible vertically, downward to the students he supervises and

upward to the professor giving him the tasks. I will never forget this experience and I regard such a hard education is what encourages me to work even harder.

Tangi Shutoku Ronbun

Another problem I faced after finishing the research was when the dissertation defense would be conducted. The due to the submission of the dissertation was 31 March at 1 p.m. Not submitting until the given time would mean I had to repeat another semester. There was time when I worked for 23 straight hours to meet the deadline. I only rested for an hour and used that to have lunch while soaking in hot water in *ofuro*. My wife and little baby had to suffer too due to my incessant work. Finally, exactly at ten to 1 p.m. I managed to go through the snow by riding an old bicycle to reach the faculty office to submit my dissertation. I won my race against the time. However, there was still a bigger problem. It was because *shutoku ronbun* was not a dissertation that would give me doctoral degree. It was for finishing the doctoral study. It means I had to do another special research to earn a doctoral degree. For a Japanese, it usually takes 5-10 years. In this condition, it means I had to return to Indonesia without any doctoral degree.

As luck would have me, however, there was a solution. My lecturer in the Faculty of Letters in University of Indonesia suggested that *shutoku ronbun* should be translated into Bahasa Indonesia before I returned to Indonesia. Consequently, I had to propose an extension of my scholarship to Mombushou for another six months period. In September I returned to Indonesia. I handed in the *shutoku ronbun* in Bahasa Indonesia version to a promoter and he proposed the forming of an examination team. In his opinion *shutoku ronbun* in Bahasa Indonesia was qualified enough to be examined because it had met the standard of dissertation.

In 18 December 1982 my dissertation defense was conducted in an academic Senate convention. No less than 30 professors and around 150 invited guests consisting of lecturers, journalists, students and my family were present in the event. The examination team was composed of three Indonesian professors, two Japanese professors, and two Indonesian doctors. This was the most unique dissertation defense at that time since the examination team were from two different countries and it was conducted in two different languages – Bahasa Indonesia and Japanese. Though not cumlaude, the result was very satisfying.

Epilog

My doctoral examination appeared in some headline news in some eminent mass media, including TVRI, Jiji Press and Asahi Shinbun in Japan. Among the media which covered the event were : Kompas, Sinar Harapan, Merdeka, Suara Karya, Pelita, Terbit, Berita Antara, KNI, Angkatan Bersenjata, Berita Buana and Tempo magazine. Some notable comments were: Kompas daily newspaper (20 December 1982) with the title "I Ketut Surajaya, The First Doctor in Japanese Literature – Discussing the thoughts of Yoshino Sakuzoo." Overall, all mass media that covered the news about my doctoral defense gave positive reviews, especially on the importance of understanding the history of Japanese democracy for the sake of the development of democracy in Indonesia. Also the importance of comprehending Japan more intensely so that a more balanced bilateral relationship between the two countries would be created. It was the high time to develop more in-depth Japanese studies, besides Japanese language. University of Indonesia had made a breakthrough in developing area studies in Indonesia. Dr. I Ketut Surajaya is the first and youngest doctor in Japanese studies in Indonesia.

Jiji Press wrote, I Ketut Surajaya studied in Japan and earned a doctoral degree in Indonesia. Some of the 2000 Indonesian who continued their studies abroad especially in the United States and Japanese in the fields of economics, medical and others managed to earn doctoral degrees, but now for the first time in Indonesia a doctoral degree in Japanese Literature was earned.

The evening edition of Asahi Shinbun in 18 December wrote " A new system in doctoral degree for foreign students has been invented – to study and conduct a research in Hitotsubashi University, yet to earn the doctoral degree in University of Indonesia. This is to contribute to the Japan-Southeast Asia relationship". Asahi started the article with " Even though attending graduate study in Japan, students from Southeast Asian countries still find it difficult to earn a doctoral degree in Japan. Therefore, when they return to their countries they are less prestigious than those getting the degree in European countries and the United States. It is not surprising if they who have studied in Japan would study again in Europe or the United States to earn in an easier way a doctoral degree. Isn't that a big problem especially to the good relationship between Japan and Southeast Asian countries? This criticism surfaced repetitively in some Southeast Asian countries. To answer this problem, a young lecturer from University of Indonesia who in this summer has just finished his

doctoral study in the Faculty of Social Science, Hitotsubashi University, Japan, managed to earn his doctoral degree in University of Indonesia. The examination team which was composed of some professors from University of Indonesia and Hitotsubashi University, examined his dissertation with a very satisfying predicate. This indicate that with the recommendation from supervising team in Japan and the possibility of conducting the examination in Indonesia, a wide open opportunity has been there for any Indonesian students who want to continue their studies in Japan.

A professor from Miyagi University, a member of the examination team who was a guess professor in the University of Indonesia viewed that in Japan writing a dissertation in the field of literature could only be done by those who could bear the sufferings and the research usually took years. The dissertation of I Ketut Surajaya was regarded to have a high quality. This was the reason why the dissertation defense of I Ketut Surajaya was conducted in Indonesia, not only because of its high quality but also because of the academic tradition of Hitotsubashi University which was still conservative, especially in the fields of literature and humanity.

Epistemology

Speaking about Japanese studies epistemology, it appears that personal experience is one of many sources that can be used because it vividly describes how a field of study is being studied, disseminated, applied and developed. From the data exploration and in-depth analyses and accepted inputs, new theories and better research methodology will develop. I could successfully conduct an original research on Yoshino by gathering primary sources particularly Yoshino's short writings found in various mass media in the period of 1913 to 1928. These short writings were not included in the collection of Yoshino's writings and overlooked by the previous researchers. From my research, I discovered that Yoshino was a 'connecting thinker' between journalistic and academic worlds. In that position, Yoshino was inconsistent with his thoughts, more pragmatic and influenced by the trends. This conclusion was what made my research different from other researches previously conducted and, therefore, it was an original finding.

There haven't been any significant changes in the research on the history of Japanese thoughts. The subject of the research is still rooted on the figures' ideas. The only development is related to the figures themselves, not only those who were intellectuals, politicians, religious figures, cultural observers and artists, but also those

who weren't too influential in national scope, yet quite known in limited community and whose ideas and thoughts were still limited in grass root level. This kind of research requires excellent Japanese mastery, including the ability to read sources written in Japanese handwriting style commonly used in personal correspondence or personal diary.

To conclude, the research on the history of Japanese thoughts in order to produce original results requires greater efforts and better academic proficiency.

My dissertation about Yoshino Sakuzoo was published in Bahasa Indonesia version in 1995 by my alma mater Faculty of Cultural Science, University of Indonesia. It is obvious that big publishing houses were reluctant to publish the book because commercially it was considered less profitable. I do not know for sure if this research contributes to the development of Indonesian society in general – just like what has been expected by mass media in their comments on post-doctoral defense, which was quite interesting side. One thing for sure, the reformation process taking place in Indonesia at this moment has some similarities with the process of history taking place in Taisho era. Nowadays this book becomes reference for students interested in Japanese history.

Jakarta 6 September 2003

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