Final Report

—Activity Report—

The Japan Foundation Asia Center
Asia Fellowship Report

Ken Tongol Ishikawa

Title: Field Research on Educational Support Efforts for Filipino Japanese Children as Part of Research for the JFC Book Project

I。Reunion

“Magkikita tayo mamaya Kuya Ken.” We will see you later, Kuya Ken (Kuya means older brother in Filipino). It’s been seven years since my last visit to Hyoutan-Yama and it was a big surprise for me to learn they’ve started a Benkyou-Kai in their small slice of Osaka.

Hyotan-Yama lies around 18 kilometers east away from the hubbub and neon lights of Namba, Osaka’s booming downtown and commercial district, and is one of the smaller municipalities peppering Higashiōsaka, Osaka’s frontier facing Nara. I heard one of my respondents before called the locale an inaka. Inaka is a charming way to put it since Higashi-Osaka used to be an industrial powerhouse before factories started closing in the area around the 1990s due to the rise of competition from China and Korea. Higashi-Osaka itself still bristles with life and work as a population of around 512,000 residents tarry on about their day across the district’s many cities.

Aside from the many businesses and factories still operating around the area, Higashiōsaka itself now houses several senior care facilities some JFC who work there call rojin homes. Where there are care facilities, there are caregivers and caregivers are, usually, Filipino. Before I left the Philippines, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) advertised that Japan needs around 60,000 caregivers. Although most caregivers would go through the Trainee system, there’s a small batch of caregivers in Higashiōsaka who were able to come here on the strength of their children’s ties to Japan.

In 2011, a former lawyer of the Development Action for Women Network in the Philippines devised a way to bring in DAWN’s clients to Japan through a care agency called JuJu. He opened a company called Magonote which is symbolic since it means grandchild’s hand and possibly even intended as a way to give flesh to the idea of having the younger generation care for their elders. The lawyer contacted the parents of Japanese-Filipino Children and convinced them to settle in Japan as caregivers while their children studied or found work in the same care facilities. By 2012, around two batches have left the Philippines and began living in Higashiōsaka in Hyoutan-Yama.

Those are the JFC I’d be seeing that afternoon.

Hyoutan-Yama remains the sleepy town I remember from 2012. It still had the same McDonald’s near the train station – the only business, aside from the konbini, to remain burning neon late into the night and early onto the morning, unlike the shops which the small business owners shutter around after 9 pm. The shoutengai still had the same shops but since we went on a weekend, there were

droves of people milling around and shopping. We traced our steps and proceeded to the public use facility called Minami Plaza.

Once we were inside, Professor Mario Lopez introduced himself, me, and members of his family to Anno-sensei. Anno-sensei stood around 5'11" and appeared like a stately man in his late 60s with a straight gait and a dignified sheen of silver on his hair. Prior to his retirement, Anno-sensei was a high school teacher which explains his professor-like presence. His key advocacy in life involves Japanese-Filipino Children and he has been a key coordinator for DAWN in Osaka since he organizes the venues for DAWN's theater shows in Japan. He led us to the room where the children held their benkyou-kai.

My, how the kids have grown. There's Sofiya who is now studying at Doshisha University and Shoko who was the baby of the group in 2012. We played volleyball in the park near their place before and during that time, the girls talked about their difficulties fitting in school because of the language barrier. Now, these young ladies easily glide into Filipino, English, and Japanese in the classroom without much difficulty. Joining them are JFC like Naomi, Katsuya, among others, who also found their way into Higashiosaka.

Now and then, Anno-sensei would show me pamphlets of the past Crane-Dog performances DAWN held in Japan since 2011. (The Crane-Dog is a children's play that tells the story of a group of children who descended from, yes you guessed it, dogs and cranes. It's an allegory of Filipino-Japanese intermarriages and the resulting offspring.) Anno-sensei leafed through the 2011 pamphlet and showed Shoko her picture when she was just around 12 or 13 years old – something which elicited a shout of glee from the JFC. Another time, Anno-sensei showed me his list of JFCs from DAWN who had found their way into Japan and who are and have, one way or another, lived in Higashiosaka. Recruitment activities may have continued even if Magonote had already closed and that's why there are newer batches of JFC I've yet to meet.

Dr. Megumi Hara, a sociologist who has been studying JFC since 2008, said Anno-sensei had only thought of coordinating the DAWN shows as his contribution to the JFC advocacy but when the JFCs themselves started flooding into his part of Osaka, the sensei thought it was his destiny to help and guide them. And it appears, in one way or another, there's a strange thing at work there as I also felt I was there in the right place and the right time.

Anno-sensei wrote to Professor Lopez that he expects to see us again and again in the benkyou-kai. We'll be there with pleasure to see and listen to these youth. As Anno-sensei probably said it: Unmei no yo ni.

II. Learning What Names Really Mean

Prime Minister Abe's policy of increasing tourism into Japan up to 40 million visitors a year has made itself felt dramatically in Namba, Osaka with a daily surge of tourists crowding its shoutengai, alleys, and canal pathways. According to Dr. Megumi Hara, tourism's economic stimulus has skyrocketed rent around these hotspots in Chuo-ku save for isolated areas occupied by the

headquarters and offices of traditional anti-social groups. The Japanese avoid living in this portion of the city but foreigners place their stakes here because of the lower rent.

It is in this area where one can find the Chuo-ku Kodomo Kosodate Puraza (Chuo-ku Child and Childcare Plaza), the venue for Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu. Mr. Kim Kwangmin, an activist and writer, established Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu through the support of the Korean NGO Center out of compassion for newcomers to Japan. The volunteer group he leads to teach the children and support their academics has its offices in the Korean NGO Center in another ward since they cannot hold offices in the Chuo-ku Child and Childcare Plaza.

Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu held its Name Workshop for Students and Volunteers last July 30, 2019, during my second visit. Mr. Kim and the volunteer coordinators thought it important to teach the children the value of appreciating their names to instill the pride and dignity of their unique identities. Aside from teaching the children, the more experienced members also taught the rest of the volunteers on how to deal with the children regarding their names and what various legal aspects, like ordinances in Osaka, that deal with this aspect of an individual's identity.

The Name Workshop assembled four speakers to talk about their unique names and their identities. The first speaker was Mr. Kim Kwangmin himself. Mr. Kim told the story of his struggle as a Zainichi Korean in Osaka and how he initially had to take on a Japanese name to avoid any harsh treatments. He also had to study Japanese to assimilate better but ultimately Mr. Kim reflected that there's a subtle betrayal in hiding behind a Japanese name. He began using his Korean name to instill pride in himself and his heritage while seeking harmony with Japanese society.

The second speaker was Masaki Laborte. Masaki was born with the surname of his original father but had to take on Yamada's last name when his mother remarried. He used his stepfather's surname until 2nd-year college but he later opted to use his mother's last name Laborte after his mother and stepfather divorced. Mr. Kim encouraged the children in Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu to follow in Masaki's footsteps by taking pride in their names.

The third speaker is Pami, a longtime volunteer. Pami's parents both possessed Korean ancestry but the pairs have chosen to keep mum about this and assumed Japanese names. They, however, used Kanji characters for Kaori but call her Pami which is the Korean analog of the said Japanese name. Pami once asked her father who she is and her father told her she is Japanese. This has led to some confusion on Pami's part and some strain in the relationship between daughter and father. Pami outgrew this internal confusion about her identity and reconnected with her Korean roots. Unfortunately, her father died before she was able to tell him she is proud to be Korean.

Caption: Yuta talking about his preference for the name Patrick in the Name Workshop

The last speaker was Yuta Patrick Tanaka. Patrick has been attending Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu since its inception. According to Dr. Hara, some JFCs avoid using their western 2nd names to avoid breaking the mold and appearing different. Yuta, on the other hand, has chosen to use his second name in school. He says his schoolmates remember him better and find him more interesting since he uses a western first name.

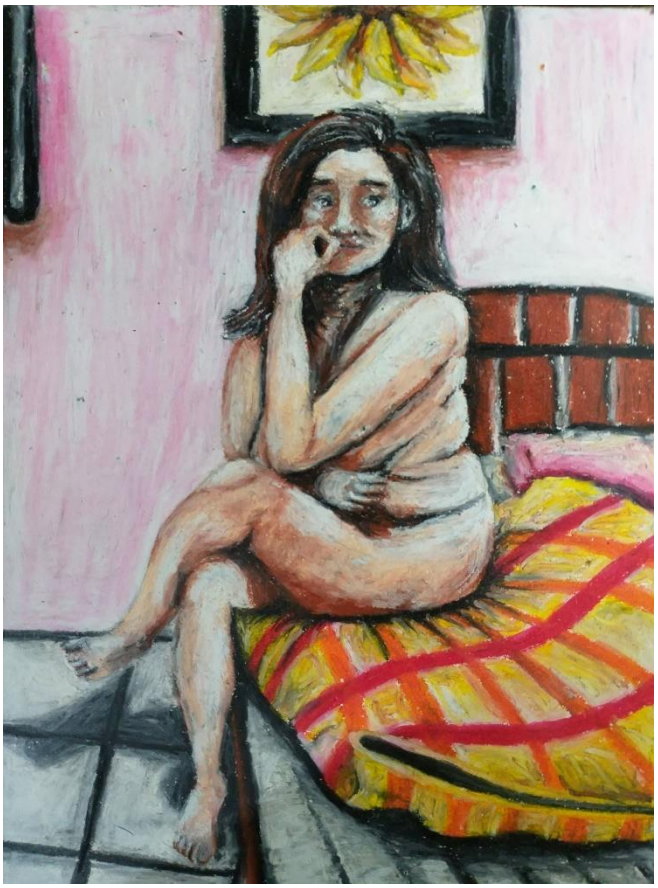
During the workshop, Mr. Kim encouraged the students to say their non-Japanese names out loud and told them they were beautiful. A lot of the kids displayed very coy smiles while some of the Chinese students were too shy to say their names outright since most Japanese speakers have a hard time pronouncing their real names.

The children went home that night with a better appreciation of their names – something that will bolster their confidence as they find their place in Japan and Japanese society.

III. A Muse Makes Her Own Art

Like the canvas she paints on, Cecille has made her body a medium for art. On her upper left arm, she brandishes a tattoo of a woman's head. The woman resembles Frida Kahlo and the lines and the colors seem to approach the conventions of Mexican folk art – very florid and lively. Beneath the woman's bust lies the head of an elephant against a cherry red circle. In her right leg, the outlines of several hibiscus flowers blossom. She told me the artist, a half-Japanese like myself, has yet to colorize the buds of the plants as he is busy inking other bodies in Taiwan.

I asked what those two tattoos mean and she said the woman represented herself. I don't know if Frida Kahlo serves an influence for Cecille but like the illustrious and fiery Mexican painter, she loves to draw paintings of women and most of the time, only a lone woman graces the entirety of the canvas. The women Cecille draws are decidedly earthy and big and she picks the darker shades of brown to portray their skin. Cecille has run her brushes across tens of canvases now and the big, earthy woman figures in most of them as a subject.



"What does the elephant on your lower arm mean?" I asked.

"Nothing. I just like elephants." She said. I was taken aback by her answer since most art, especially tattoos mean something. During the Philippine pre-colonial period, and even now among indigenous cultures, tattoos boast of the achievements of their wearer like the number of foes they've decapitated or animals they've successfully hunted, etc. A tattoo is essentially a scar telling stories of milestones, victories, and lessons.

"Are your paintings a series of self-portraits of yourself?" I asked. I designed the question to be revealing because I have been betrayed by my expectations of the elephant symbolizing something significant.

"No. I just like painting women."

"Is it possible you're painting yourself?"

"I haven't thought about it that way."

Prior to this conversation, she told me of the many years she spent in Japan. How she worked in two Philippine Pubs in Namba where she'll go to the first club from 7 pm to 12 pm and the second one from 1:00 am to 5 a.m. This was her routine for the better part of her ten years as an entertainer until 2010. In 2008, she had to come home for a brief period to bring her children, Anda and Armanjun home after a difficult and traumatic separation from her Japanese husband.

She reunited with her former boyfriend from her teenage years, Kristoffer whom she says, has reminded her of all the things she used to love when she was young namely rock, skateboarding, and drawing. She has also begun wearing the clothes she's most comfortable with, shorts and T-shirts as opposed to the fashions one would find in an omise.

"I suddenly remembered who I was, what I loved doing, when we got back together."

Cecille in front of her mural at SALA restaurant in Kobe. Picture taken from the Sala website at http://kobe-sala.asia.

This transformation has also carried through her sphere of influence and activities. Just five years after coming home in 2010 and punctuating her stint as an entertainer she became an entrepreneur, a leader of the other women in the Batis Center, and an artist who has exhibited her works in Japan and the Middle East. She also returned to college and was a Fine Arts sophomore in University of the Philippines until she decided to halt her studies for a while to be with Kristoffer in Kobe.

I see Cecille painting for a very long time. Like her, the women in her paintings are bold and strong. I suspect that painting for Cecille is an act of self-renewal and re-invention. I look forward to what she crafts out of her easel next.

IV. Chance Meetings at Revolving Doors

The servers began filling the tables with food and syllables of loud, boisterous Tagalog issued out from one group to another. This would be a typical Filipino gathering, only it's happening in Nishi-Kasai, in the eastern part of Tokyo, in an area largely associated with its Indian community. The presence of the Kasai Catholic Church in the area also guarantees a sizeable Filipino presence. That night, several Filipina church community members organized the gathering for Sister Remy Locsin of the Assumption Sisters, who is now in her twilight years and has retired in a convent in the area. Sister Remy has always championed Filipino-Japanese causes when she was younger and has gained the respect and adoration of the Filipinos in their church community.

Aside from celebrating Sister Remy, the Filipinas also wanted their children, who are half-Japanese like us, to reconnect with members of Batis-YOGHI in Japan. These youths grew up alongside each other as their mothers would take them to church and send them to summer camps to spend time with one another. Prior to the triple disaster of 2011, they'd hold those summer camps up in the mountains around the Tohoku area where youth leaders also expose them to social issues via presentations. I joined such a summer camp in 2012 where they held it in the Urayasu area in Chiba.

Although they're very similar to the JFCs of Batis-YOGHI, at least biologically, these JFY possess Japanese cultural identities. Things come naturally to them in Nihongo and like some Japanese, struggle when confronted with English. One would think they would have an easier folding into Japanese society but some of the JFC possess the sun-kissed complexion of their mothers as well as less aquiline noses common among the Malay race. Because of this, some of the JFC faced bullying and isolation at school. Some Japanese kids their age would question if they were Japanese at all despite displaying the skills of a native speaker and displaying the cultural intangibles one would associate with being Japanese.

Despite the difference in cultural identities, the JFCs and the JFY get along marvelously. In 2014 and 2015, their mothers also sent the JFY to the Philippines so they'd get to know their Filipino roots. The Batis-YOGHI hosted them twice and the group bonded on those occasions. Now that there are more JFCs migrating into Japan, solidarity between Filipino-Japanese and Japanese-Filipinos will become more and more crucial.

V. A Hard Journey North

The storm Hagibis had already billowed past the Kanto region a week after I had arrived in Tokyo by late October and yet hard rains pelleted Marunouchi and the streets surrounding the Tokyo station.

Salarymen struggled against the strong, freak winds and fighting hard to keep their umbrellas from turning downside up. Schoolgirls frantically sought shelter near the entrances of buildings along Kajibashi-dori. The cold bit my fingers and it nipped at my toes as the rivulets doused my shoes wet. After reaching the train station and I traveled all the way to Ueno and found an Internet cafe to rest for four hours. Again, it had been a restless 9 hours on the night bus with its starts and stops - I was tired and I opted to let the weather pass by before traveling later in the afternoon.

By the time I was in Ueno, however, the crowds swelled as they waited in the platforms for the Joban line to return operations. The electronic bulletins announced trains would come and leave in 15 minutes' time but no cars halted and took passengers. I didn't want to delay my trip any longer since I promised Takumi I will be coming that night so I took the express headed to Tsuchiura.

Once I was in Tsuchiura, I figured I'd take the next train that'll get me closer to Hitachi. Fresh off the platform at Tsuchiura, I hopped on the one headed for Katsuta, the station after Mito. Unfortunately, the train remained for 30 minutes in Tsuchiura with the driver announcing "Omataseitashimashita" every 15 minutes. The train roared to life and I had thought that we well were on our way until we reached Kandatsu and the train chugged to a stop once more. The other passengers looked at their phones or hunched in the corners of their seats. It seemed as if Hagibis had not left after all - it was still able to whip its tail on the way north. I called Takumi often and he talked about how super strong the winds were on his way home from the factory.

Now and then the train would come to life and press on past unlit stations and landscapes covered by a starless night. By the time, I arrived in Mito at 10 pm, I swore I finally attained salvation. The driver's words "Omataseitashimashita" dashed my hopes - we waited for a full two hours for the other trains to arrive before the train lumbered forward at 12 am.

While I remained hostage to the train service suspension, I thought about how Japan's fabled emergency preparedness was working to get the trains going. I was fairly sure some oji-san wearing a safety helmet and a yellow reflective vest was frantically waving his glow sticks in the night along some site in Ibaraki while his crew climbed up poles and fixed high-tension wires. I was fuming mad at the situation and hopeful as well that I will not be using my duffel bag as a pillow and turn in for the night in the train car. At some point, a small distant fear welled up inside of me. What if these freak weather patterns happened again and again? Would Japan be able to keep the trains going? Who will help the Japanese keep the lights on when 2/3rd of the population withers away and torrential rains that stopped the trains that night become the norm?

I arrived at Hitachi-Taga around 2 am and the roads bore no hints of rain except the moisture and the cold that bit at my hands. Takumi was still up and he told me to ride a cab going to the nearby supermarket. The trip didn't take more than 10 minutes and Takumi surprised me from the shadows of the supermarket after I alighted from the taxi. Although he bundled himself up in layers, I could tell he had gained weight from three years since I saw him last. Once we were inside his one-bedroom apartment,

"Kanina pa naghihintay yung adobo sa iyo, Kuya Ken. The adobo has been waiting for you for a while." he said as he took a plate and began filling it with rice. After spending 7 hours stranded in three separate trains, the adobo felt like a gift. But even by itself, Takumi's adobo was delicious. He used pork ribs and kept the bone in the meat to give the soy sauce and vinegar sauce more flavorful. At first glance, one would think that Takumi was slow in processing things because of his relatively quiet aura and his ordinariness but he surprises people with his kind nature and his penchant for hard work. Once I saw him fix a chair someone else broke without being ordered to do so and work at it for two or more solid hours. He also has a good singing voice and can dignify a Michael Buble's Save the Last Dance for Me in the videoke without looking like an idiot.

We chatted for a bit before tiredness and the cold overtook us and we slept well into the later hours of the morning. In the afternoon, we walked all the way down to Yuraku no Sato by the beach. Having been cooped up near the foot of Mt. Hiei for months, it had been a while since I have seen the sea. The cresting waves seemed to curl up inside of me and balled into this sense of gladness I've never felt for a long time. I have been to one factory town before in Iwata visiting a JFC named Joji and it felt like a small and isolated place with only a drug store as the sole hangout spot for miles. Needless to say, I felt an instant connection to Hitachi once I saw the brackish blue waves lapping its shores.

Takumi and I bought hamburgers in a shack nearby and ate them on benches bleached by sun and beaten by winds. We talked about lives for a while and about some happenings here and there. He told me about how one night, a drunken technical intern caroused too hard and swam in the beach. The sea took him as it took all the wayfarers, adventurers, and gamblers across the ages. We also talked about the tsunami in 2011, whether it impacted the area. One can surmise that it did as some houses bore watermarks in one wall or the other.

Half an hour later, several of Takumi's workmates, around five Filipino trainees, came to the beach. It was Saturday and it was their day off. Takumi says this is what they usually do for rest and recreation. He introduced me to a 21 year old guy by the name of Jonathan. Jonathan carried a camera and changed his lenses now then from macro to zoom and vice versa. That afternoon, he focused his shots on the flowers in the koen by the sea.

Takumi also introduced me to Robert, a man in his early 30s. Robert complained about a penalty their landlord is making them pay - the drain in the washing machine area had clogged and there was some water damage due to the water rising up. The landlord was asking 80,000 yen for the damages. They have already talked to the representative of their temp agency about getting the insurance company to cover the expenses since it wasn't their fault. Their recruiter insisted that they pay the fee anyway

much to their chagrin. Each member of their crew living in the same apartment would share around 10,000 yen each to come up with the amount.

At some point, we parted ways with the trainees and Takumi and I talked about their circumstances. According to Takumi, the trainees only get around 800 yen an hour, around 300 yen short of the minimum wage in the area. That's roughly 140,000 yen plus per month. Those trainees lived in one room apartments similar to Takumi's but there are two of them in one room. The temp agency charges each of the trainees 30,000 yen each for the living space when each trainee can have their own room for that sole amount. The temp agency maybe earning off at least 30,000 yen for every room two trainees occupy. I don't know how temp agencies in Japan operate but it appears that aside from earning from the labor of their trainees, some also skim off their wards in some ways like this. The trainee life is not all blood, sweat, and tears according to Takumi.

When their contract ends, the kaisha will send them off with around half a million to a million yen these trainees laid away through salary deductions. I pinned my eyes on the pale, grayish sea and imagined the stretches of water becoming bluer and bluer until it reached the white sands of the islands which these trainees call home. Two or three years from now, they will be coming home to a house they've managed to have built through their remittances and to the hails of their families as heroes. They will feast on lechon, adobo, sinigang, inihaw - all the Filipino food they weren't able to eat in Japan.

After all that's been said and done, would they think kindly of Japan? Whatever as it may, when the rice runs out and their savings run dry, they'll look to this country again for opportunities. The waves will bear their warm bodies up north once more for the production lines.

As a writer and researcher whose interests lie in Filipino-Japanese, one of the key threads I focus on are the measures civil society undertake in order to help JFC. I've had an intimate view of the legal aid organizations like JFCNet and the JFC Lawyer's Association having seen their work first-hand. I've also been a member of Batis Center for Women for more than 8 years and I'm familiar with Batis Center for Women's programs for the JFC. It was a rare opportunity for me to see how organizations in Japan address JFC's integration issues, one that was fulfilled when I observed the JFC Benkyoukai and the Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu in Osaka.

The JFC Benkyoukai arose out of the need of JFC migrants from the Philippines. Mr. Katsumi Anno, a retired teacher, organized the benkyoukai to help newly-arrived JFC students with their assignments. They'd meet every Saturday afternoon in a public space called Minami Plaza in Hyoutan-Yama.

Anno-sensei showed me his tally of JFC in Higashiosaka and they number around 80 plus. The youths attending the benkyoukai have come out of their shells thanks to their increased ability to speak Japanese. Members of the first batch I encountered way back in 2012 had all grown up and three of them will be graduating this 2020. As Anno-sensei has proven, these intimate spaces provided by concerned Japanese can effect change in the lives of JFC and the JFC themselves will be in a better position to contribute to Japanese society.

Just 30 minutes away by train from Higashiosaka, the Korea NGO Center has been putting effort in assisting JFC through a similar after-school program for foreign children in Namba. Their project, Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu, has been running for three years now thanks to the passion of its more than twenty volunteers who make themselves available to tutor the kids every Tuesday, the local government of Osaka, and the Korea NGO Center itself. There are more than 30 students attending the program and at least 80 percent of the kids there are Filipinos. Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu's history of operations has garnered it quite the reputation – journalists, teachers from other school districts, and representatives from other NPOs take time to visit and learn about their best practices.

There's more than meets the eye regarding the volunteer's methodology in teaching the children. Much like a real classroom, the people behind Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu practice classroom management and behavioral management to take care of the kids. As I also personally observed, the volunteers are highly invested in the children's growth. If they observe the children showing signs of stress or neglect at home, they coordinate with the officials in the affected children's schools to find out about their students' behaviors. Aside from monitoring the welfare of their charges, the volunteers also take the time to hold workshops for the teachers and the volunteers. The volunteers' approach in helping the children is a very involved process, one that I am confident will yield adjusted and good citizens from these mixed-heritage and foreign children.

As a researcher, a writer, and a Filipino-Japanese in search for solutions to the issues challenging JFCs today, the models the JFC Benkyoukai and Minami Kodomo Kyoushitsu provided give me hope about our potential re/integration into Japanese society. In Batis Center for Women, we had piloted free Japanese language classes for Batis YOGHI but had found challenges in terms of the course, teachers, and most of all, the commitment of some of our members towards serious study of Nihongo. What we've been missing all along has been made obvious to me through my short time observing these benkyoukai and that's making them realize they have a stake in their own development of their Japanese identities. This could only be possible if the organizations I belong to actually engage the students to as deep a level as these Japanese organizations have gone.

Once I complete the publication of the book, I intend to draw JFCs closer together, help with forging a JFC organization in Japan, and aid in strengthening Filipino-Japanese communities in my two countries.