

Report of the JDS Study Tour to Okinawa

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Introduction

Thanks to the thoughtfulness of the members of ICU's JDS/JICE committee, we, the JDS scholarship students in ICU GSPA, were given the wonderful opportunity to take a study tour to beautiful Okinawa, and take part in a conference at the Okinawa University. The Annual Conference of the Japan Society for International Development was in its 18th year since first being organized, and it featured 106 presentations in over 30 sessions, and 8 poster sessions.

We arrived in Naha, Okinawa on Friday, the 23rd November 2007, and attended the conference on Saturday the 24th, and Sunday the 25th November respectively. The 26th was spent sightseeing in Okinawa, and then flying back to Tokyo.

Conference presentations

There were about 11 presentations and 5 poster sessions scheduled to be in English. These were our target during the conference days. Some of them coincided with each other in terms of timing, which further narrowed down the number of sessions we could effectively understand. Nonetheless, the ones we did attend were quite informative and stimulating.

In my case, I started with "Contribution of Knowledge and Agglomeration Economies to Economic Growth in OECD countries" by Tatiana Khomiakova from Nagoya University. This was clearly a PhD-level research, way more advanced than anything we might attempt. She had used an econometric model based on the economy-wide aggregate production function, in an attempt to demonstrate that the greater the level of knowledge economy variables in one country, the higher its economic growth, and the higher the concentration of economic activity, the higher is the growth of GDP. Here I realized even deeply how important a good methodology is for one's research.

This was followed by "Government Expenditure on Education in Indonesia: Who Benefits from It?", by Wawan Juswanto from Nagoya University, and "Intergenerational Mobility in Poverty State of the Chronically Poor in Rural Bangladesh: A Markov Chain Model Approach" by Motiur Rahman and Mohammad Karim from the University of Dhaka, Noriatsu Matsui from NIAD-UE, and Yukio Ikemoto from the University of Tokyo. Both of these had also used elaborate calculations for their quantitative methodology, with graphs and tables for better illustration of results.

Although the presentations that were in English ended here as far as day 1 was concerned, there was one more presentation in Japanese, on Mongolia which attracted my interest and attention: **モンゴルの遊牧経営と都市へのアクセス** by three students from **国際農林水産業研究センター**. My limited command of Japanese enabled me to at least understand that the presenter had lived in the Southern part of Mongolia with a rural family for several months, learning the way of life and in particular about animal

husbandry as it is practiced in Mongolia. Then, he and his colleagues had tried to use a computer simulation method to show the number of animals and people that a small area of a given size could effectively sustain, along with the number of wells that would be required. Indeed, utilization of pasture land is quite a hot topic back home, and the source of concern for many a local administrator these days.

Day 2 started with a session on the Education Sector in Yemen. Out of the three presentations in that session, two were in English, and were the results of MA-level research. “Analysis of Public Basic Education Policy and Local Realities: The Case of Yemen”, by Toyohiko Yogo from Kobe University, examined the implementation of the Yemeni Basic Education Development Strategy (BEDS). This was followed by a similar presentation “Achieving Education for All in Yemen: Focused on Girls’ Education”, by another Kobe University Student, Ayumi Matsunaga. Matsunaga had attempted to determine the reasons why “girls stop coming to school”.

These two studies both had looked at the obstacles that prevented either the BEDS implementation, or education for girls. Among the common reasons such as poverty and low education of parents, and so on, they were quick to point out the adverse role of tradition. I thought they should try and look beyond that simple assumption, and really look deeper to see to what extent tradition hinders education, and to what extent encourages it. Here, I have been able to clearly see the difference between a PhD and an MA-level research. Attending the conference also boosted my confidence about completing my MA thesis this year.

Beyond this point, all presentations were given in Japanese, including those that were scheduled to be done in English. The posters that were displayed in the lobby were quite interesting, especially that on Mongolia: “Sustainable Development in Education in Mongolia – Analysis on Important Factors to Promote Sustainability of the Project”. Students from Tokyo Institute of Technology – Ricardo Martins, Ceelia Leong, and Shingo Enoki had presented the results of their evaluation mission to Mongolia on an education project implemented with funding from the United Nations Human Security Fund. The findings did seem quite appropriate, although the evaluators’ lack of knowledge of Mongolia’s culture was also evident in certain places.

There were three more posters that presented results of quantitative studies. “Studying Poverty in Light of Social Accounting and Multiplier Analysis: the Case of Nepal” was made by Hokkaido University student Sanjaya Acharya. His calculations had shown that demand injection to agricultural sector, and transfer injection to poorest household group generate the highest growth in the volume of income expenditure flows in Nepalese economy. “Debt service – Growth Nexus: A Co-integration Analysis of Indonesia” by Muhammad Cholifihani from Nagoya University demonstrated that one percent of increase in debt service would cause the GDP to decrease by 3.7 percent in Indonesia. “Economic Governance, Foreign Direct Investment, and Per Capita GDP Growth ” by Penghuy Ngov, also from Nagoya University, had used regression analysis on the Per Capita GDP growth of 78 countries to demonstrate that governance quality in low income countries does not have much impact on growth performance, and FDI attraction, while it plays a crucial role for middle income countries.

Among the presentations in Japanese, there was one more that focused on Mongolia, which I have been able to attend: モンゴルの租税制度と租税収入 by Professor Ueno from Nanzan University. He openly praised the high GDP growth rates registered during the recent years in Mongolia, explaining

that the source is the booming mining industry. In this regard, the government has undertaken a tax system reform recently, which introduced the windfall tax system, to reduce the risks related to changes in the price of minerals on the world market, which the professor recognized as a smart move to make at this time. The discussion that ensued was mainly about the way the tax revenue would be used, and showed that many of the participants were knowledgeable about Mongolia's context, some even having visited several times.

Sightseeing

The weather was excellent during our stay in Naha, and we tried to take every chance we got to look around. This included the Nami-no-Ue beach during one of the Japanese-only session times, and shopping and dining on Kokusai Street in the evenings.

The 26th was dedicated for sightseeing, and it included the Shuriyjo Castle, the Peace Memorial Museum, and the Cultural Park. I learned so many new things about Okinawa's as well as Japan's history and culture, and admired the amazing natural landscape, and ocean view. I was explained that the white beach is due to the proximity to coral reefs, and heard about the beach with star-shaped sands that bring love and happiness.

The flowers in full bloom in mid-November, and the average year-round temperature of 22 degrees Celsius were all sources of great astonishment and envy, particularly for a Mongolian like me. The atrocities of war, and the resolve of the peace-loving island people were deeply moving.

Conclusion

The study tour was a welcome change of scenery after a full, busy term. The combination of conference with sightseeing made this trip well-balanced – informative and enjoyable. Most importantly, we got the much-needed exposure to many different types of research, various methodologies and topics, which would no doubt be of great help to our work. The conference and the tour itself were well-organized, which maximized the benefit to us, the participants. I am deeply grateful to all those who organized this tour, and who made this tremendous experience possible for us.