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COMMENTARY ON THE RECENT ICU-JDS STUDY TOUR IN OKINAWA

There were around 111 research papers set to be presented during the 18th Annual Conference of the Japan Society for International Development last November 24 and 25. From these, there were 10 studies written in English. So as per the recommended itinerary, we could choose as many sessions as our schedules and interests would permit. However, for reasons not elucidated to us, most of these researches supposedly written in the English language were presented in Japanese. And since my proficiency in the language is scanty, I was not able to fully appreciate the said studies. It would have been very remarkable to hear the researches proposing for an alternative to the Human Development Index as a measure of development and quality of life; or the one about Currency Integration in the East Asian Region; or the Donor Performance Index; or about the Education for All (Women included) campaign in Yemen.

On the positive note, I was able to attend some of the most interesting presentations during this conference, one of which is the lecture on the contribution of knowledge and technology to agglomeration of economies in the OECD countries. The researcher emphasizes on the 5 Pillars for Development and thus, recommends a new economic equation which can be used to compute for Total Factor Productivity, among others. Basically, she posited that advancement in knowledge and technology brings about economic growth to these countries. Commentators, though, pointed out that such relationship is not always linear and one-directional, but it could also be a reverse causality.

Another research was about Government Expenditures on Education in Indonesia. It was essentially a cost-benefit analysis of the government spending on education and which income class actually benefits from it. Commentators asked the researcher to clarify the definition and classification of "poor", show variations in the unit cost of education since assuming that educational expenditure of the government is flat and uniform is not always true since there is private education, and recommended the usage of a more differentiated analysis for different income groups.

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Third is the analysis of Public Basic Education in Yemen. It aims to examine the National Basic Education Development Strategy that the Yemeni Government set to implement from 2003-2015 and its impact on the local realities. In all honesty, I have not understood the comments given here because they were said in Japanese.

On the lighter side, we had ample time to explore the city center after the sessions since we were billeted only a few blocks away from the famous Kokusai Dori. We looked around the shops (got fascinated with the snake soaked in awamori!), tasted the local fares, enjoyed watching street performances and dined together every night. We had the chance to take pictures at Naminoue Beach, albeit only for a couple of hours.

Monday was our sightseeing day. We superbly enjoyed our trip to the Shuri-jo Castle, Okinawa Peace Memorial Museum and Okinawa World. If a tourist has a very limited number of days to go around Okinawa, these are the places one must see since they collectively show a very comprehensive picture of Okinawa's past and present.

By and large, the whole Okinawa trip was a very nice experience especially for me. I had this opportunity to participate in a scholastic conference, and meet different people from the academe, as well as appreciate the "other" side of Japan. By "other" I meant, a more relaxed and warm atmosphere and people.

Okinawa is very different with that of Tokyo. Obviously, differences in climate, topography, environment and local culture are the main bases for such differences. Interesting to cite, however, that I have observed that people here in Tokyo and the nearby cities are more reserved and time-efficient, which, I think, can be easily misconstrued as coldness and apathy. Of course, it is a bit stereotypical with big cities.

Okinawan environs remind me so much of our countryside. Mango, banana and guava trees are as common as the sakura, ginko and kaki trees in the mainland. The warm weather was a welcome break to Tokyo's cold autumn breeze. Moreover, a long exposure to tourism has made the Okinawan people warm and welcoming and yet maintains the Japanese tradition on discipline and courtesy. I am very grateful to the university for giving us this exceptional experience. The journey took time, but I can say that it was definitely worth it.