

Experiencing Culture and Knowledge Diversity in Japan

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Abstract

In this article, I will share my experience of being a student in Japanese university for about ten years. The story on what is happening during that time will also be elaborated. The story will be divided into three parts, namely pre-entry, during the study, and post-study at Japan. Based on experiences obtained, the opinions and comments on doing research in Japanese university will also be discussed.

1. Introduction

First, I would like to express my gratitude to IEICE Communications Society Global Newsletter for offering me an opportunity to share my personal experience studying at Japan for ten years. My name is Nordin Bin Ramli, currently works as staff researcher at MIMOS Berhad, the research institute under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI), Malaysia.

I came to Japan in January 1995, two weeks before Great Hanshin earthquake. The purpose during that time was to seat for university entrance exam. Luckily, I was accepted to enter Faculty of Science and Technology, Keio University, and graduated successfully in March 1999. After that, I went back to serve a company, namely as Telekom Malaysia as an engineer. After three years in Telekom Malaysia, I have decided to pursue my master study again at Japan. I came back to Japan in April 2002 to enroll as the research assistance at Department of Electronic Engineering, The University of Electro-Communications, Japan. I was successfully obtained Master in Electronic Engineering, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), both at Department of Electronic Engineering, in March 2005 and March 2008, respectively.

2. Preparation to further study in Japan

The intention to pursue study at Japan came when I have been awarded the scholarship to study at United Kingdom. At that point, I felt that what is the different to others if I were decided to pursue my study at United Kingdom. After thinking awhile, I took a decision to choose the Japanese university as for my degree study which I believe that, by choosing Japan, it is not just about the qualification that I will obtain later, however it is about the language that I need to master in order to

be success in Japan. In addition, the experiences that I will go through during the study will be benefitted my very much. I think that I won't get it if I were decided to pursue my study at other countries.

Interestingly, the adventures began when I entered the Japanese Matriculation Center, at Kuala Lumpur, to study Japanese Language and another subjects related to Japanese university admission. The study was very tough as I am not having any background on Japanese or background on Chinese characters. However, I realized that during that time, it was very fun and enjoyed, as we, the students needed to master the language and other related subjects within two years. If we compare with Japanese students, who are their mother tongue, they had been studied Japanese from primary school. However, we needed to make it within two years of preparation. During that time, learning Japanese was the most priority task as we believed that it will be the tool for our success while in the university. The most difficult part was mastering the Japanese Kanji, as I was not educated with the Chinese background. Nevertheless, we were tried our best to master the language in short duration.

3. Living and Studying at Japan

In this part, the story will be divided into two parts, undergraduate study and graduate study, respectively.

3.1 Undergraduate Study

I entered the Japanese university at degree level in 1995. During the early period staying in Japan, it was the most challenging part of our life as the student, as we realized that the Japanese language used by most of the professors and Japanese students were not the "written Japanese" that what we had been studied for last two years of preparation at our home country. It made our life terrible in understanding the subjects lectured by professors. The way they spoke Japanese also vary in several dialects, such as *kansai-ben* and so on. Furthermore, their Kanji writing in blackboard in the lecture room was not easy to be imagined by us, as such environment was quite new to us. It was a hard time to us in understanding the subject since we were not so familiar with their dialects, and it became worst whenever they used the Kanji which was unknown to us. What I did to overcome this hurdle was seeking helps from Japanese friend. Although, they were firstly hard to accept me when approached, as I am a foreign

student, but by continuously trying, finally they accepted me.

After struggling for about six months, my Japanese became better and improved. Another approach that I took in order to improve my language proficiency was learning Japanese through watching television, especially news and knowledge based variety program. Through news hour, I got to know what is happening inside and outside Japan during those days. Moreover, I got to witness important news happening throughout inside and outside Japan. For example, I had witnessed the bankruptcy of oldest Japanese Bank, namely Hokkaido Takushoku Bank, and the story behind a Japanese new religious movement.

After few years in Japan, my Japanese proficiency improved and was able to complete my degree study successfully in March 1999. Upon completion, I decided to return home to work as network engineer at one of local telecommunication company.

3.2 Graduate Studies

After three years in work, I have decided to return to Japan for pursuing master degree. The reason behind that was I felt that to be more successful in the future, I need to experience the research work at Japan, as I always admired with their good way of supervision. At this time, I joined Prof. Yoshio Karasawa Laboratory at The University of Electro-Communications, Japan. At this time, I haven't felt any problem in culture or Japanese way of teaching, as I had experienced it before. I was grateful that the experiences during the first degree allowed me to adapt with research activity very fast. Luckily, I finished my master study within schedule and had been offered to continue with Ph.D program at the same laboratory. Through the great supervision and guidance from Prof. Karasawa, I was able to finish my PhD study within three years. During my six years in this laboratory, I have published many journal and conference papers.

4. Post Study at Japan

After graduated from PhD study, I decided to come back to my home country to serve at the previous employee. Currently, I am at MIMOS Berhad. In MIMOS, my responsibility is to conduct research project related to cognitive radio and mesh networking, WiMAX (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access), and IMT-Advanced. In MIMOS, I have contributed to the concept creation of new ideas by providing innovative ideas thus, contributing to the company's intellectual property right (IPR) portfolio, which will be incorporated in the final product realization. Furthermore, I have developed few new algorithms and verify the technical concept by means of link and/or system level simulations.

At the mean time also, I am quite active in voluntary works with IEEE Malaysia Communication Society and Vehicular Technology Joint Chapter.

5. Remarkable research experience in Japan

Throughout my studies in Japan, I was so lucky to be supervised by two great supervisors, namely Prof. Iwao Sasase from Keio University, and Prof Yoshio Karasawa from The University of Electro-Communications. Although, they have different way of supervision, both of them are so passionate in doing high level research and believe in individual talent. These two great professors inspire me a lot as they influence me in conducting high end research and human capital development through research.

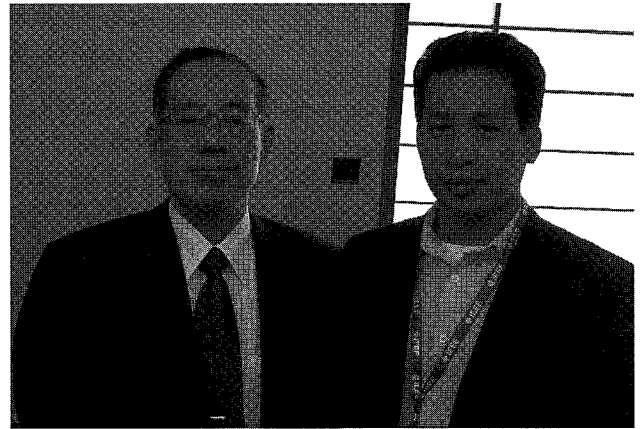


Fig. 1 Meeting with Prof. Sasase during ICC2011, Kyoto, Japan.

What I found from Prof Sasase was the way he supervised student. As shown in Fig. 1, he managed his students and at the mean time provided a training ground to those senior students with responsibility to look after their junior research. For example, for those fresh bachelor fourth year students, since they are new in research, they will be supervised by master students, and similarly for those master students, their research will be supervised by PhD students. Similarly, PhD student will be supervised minimally by professor, as they are quite independent in doing their research. He also encouraged his students to publish in the international conferences and journals. This 'triangle concept' of supervision is very critical to this laboratory, and by doing so, it was allowing him to be active at outside of university, locally and internationally, partly for laboratory branding and networking in order to make the laboratory known to the public. By successfully doing so, the chances of getting research grants and funds from the government and also from private sectors become higher. This grants and funds will be used to run the laboratory later. He also encouraged his students to 'squeeze their mind' for breakthrough research and came out with novel ideas in research [1]. He always said to us, "you have to work hard to come out the new novel idea, and the laboratory will reward those students to present their research output at any good conference at any place within the globe". This way of thought will motivate students to work harder to produce more significant

research output. The eco-system that had been used by this great professor worked nicely under his leadership, and I believe this is quite similar to another organization in Japan.



Fig. 2 Common hierarchical approach of most Japanese university research laboratory.

Next, I was also fortunate of pursuing my graduate studies under the supervision of Prof. Yoshio Karasawa of The University of Electro-Communications, Japan. Coming from industry background, he brought the different way of supervision. As he believed in each individual talent, he encouraged us to define our own research theme for our study. In order to be successful in doing research, he also believed that it is important to respect what the student want to research. He will try to magnify and sharpen the scope of research to be more valuable and novel. Furthermore, he always encourage us to challenge new things and continuously doing it, as he believed in the word of “Serendipity = Serendip + Ability” [2]. Serendipity is happening whenever someone finds something that they weren't expecting to find, especially for breakthrough research. Thus, he encouraged us to continuously focus on the daily research and appreciate any findings. Some findings might not bring any value at that time, but at other time, those findings will answer many problems which that student asked earlier.



Fig. 3 Meeting with Prof. Karasawa before leaving Japan for good in March 2008.



Fig. 4 Graduation day with family, in March 2008.

I felt very lucky as I have spent six years under his supervision, and generally, I am very pleased with his supervision. As being the foreign student, he was like our father, who had been taking care very much on our personal matters and welfare. His concerns were just not limited to research, however covers other matters including student's financial and family matters.

In this article, I would like to express my appreciation to these two great supervisors. I was so lucky to be their students and they had admired me very much as they influenced my life. Without both of them, I would have been lost. Thank you for guiding me, inspiring me and making what I am today.

6. Conclusion

In this article, the experiences staying in Japan for ten years have been highlighted. The experiences had been divided into three parts, namely pre-entry, during the study, and post-study at Japan. The story on research supervision by two great professors also has been included. Based on the experiences obtained, the opinions and comments on doing research in Japanese university also discussed.

Reference

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- [2] Karasawa et. all, “Story of cycle-slip (in Japanese)”, http://radio3.ee.uec.ac.jp/IEEE_APS_JC.pdf, 2010