

Reports

7 DAYS IN JAPAN

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It was a great honour and a valuable experience for me to get a scholarship to attend the 31st International Workshop for Teachers of English at the LIOJ (Language Institute of Japan) Asia Centre in Odawara, Japan from August 7th - 13th, 1999.

There were about 80 participants. Most of them were Japanese English teachers. Among the non-Japanese participants were six international awardees from Vietnam, Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand. The two Thai-TESOL representatives were Ajarn Siriporn Pongsurapipat (Chulalongkorn University Language Institute) and myself.

All six international representatives had the opportunity to present their papers twice. It was coincident that Siriporn and I presented the same theme in writing although our points of emphasis were different. We were satisfied with our presentations because a lot of people attended our session and asked many questions on various matter. Interaction with these audience was satisfactory and lively.



Siriporn and I with Harbans, a Malaysian



Kimono & Thai Costumes

Teacher

Life at the LIOJ

Life at the LIOJ was quite strictly regimented. We started with the morning class where six interesting topics were provided. Each was held in a different room. Siriporn chose teaching the four skills, and I chose activities relevant for junior and senior high school students. Each topic was relevant and useful. They provided crucial guidelines for the teachers of English to adapt to their own situations.

In the afternoon, the participants attended the plenary session of their choice. The evenings were for special activities such as a welcome party, international night, etc. The atmosphere was exciting, stimulating and enjoyable.

Brief diary of our experience.

Day 1 : Our UA. Flight took off from Don Muang Airport at 7.30 a.m.(on 7th August). It landed at Narita Airport at 3.25 p.m., taking a total of 6 hours flight. It seemed as soon as our feet touched Japan, everything happened in a whirl. It was a great adventure in a strange place. Our only guide was the written instruction provided by LIOJ office. We double checked with the passers-by from time to time just to make sure we didn't get lost and that gave a tremendous sense of achievement.

Tokyo Station was incredibly crowded. After a little confusion over unreserved seats, we were on the bullet train to Odawara and managed to arrive the place 30 minutes later. Just before we got off, a lady asked us if we were going to the LIOJ. She was a participant from Hong Kong and happened to be on the same train. We took a taxi to the Asia Centre which was 5 minutes away. It was 6.30 p.m. After checking in and resting for a while, we joined the staff's welcome party.

Day 2 : We went on a tour to Odawara Castle for 2 hours. The castle was exceptionally beautiful and exotic.

At the orientation session, the LIOJ director- Jim Kahny briefed on how we could make the most of our time in Japan. The opening ceremony was quite impressive with an excellent M.C. (Jim) and a wonderful speaker (Kathleen Graves). After having our photos

taken, we had another orientation session in the morning class. In the evening we had great fun at another welcome party with all the participants.

Days 3 & 4 : We attended the scheduled session, and went to the Book Fair organized by many wellknown publishers. The books were quite expensive.

Day 5 : The highlight was the International Night. There were various booths exhibiting articles from the participants' countries.

The Thai booth was organized by Siriporn and myself. We decorated it with lots of souvenirs and sweets from Thailand so that we could promote our country and culture. Thanks TAT Tokyo, for the very useful brochures.

The exhibition was followed by a cultural show. I demonstrated the "PONGLANG" dance, and Siriporn explained the steps. The audiences joined in the dance enthusiastically. It was well-received and enjoyed by all.

Day 6 : Every class ate out at the place of their choice in the evening. My group went to Amataro, a Japanese restaurant downtown. The food was good and the atmosphere was friendly. The Karaoke was a great fun.

Day 7 : This was our last night in Japan. The farewell party was organized for all the participants including presenters, international scholars and the LIOJ staff. Every class presented an 'item'. The highlight was a lovely song (below) composed by the staff for all international participants.

THE TREATS of LIOJ.

CHORUS.

*So how can you tell me you're gloomy,
And claim that you're linguistically deprived?
Let me take you by the hand
And lead you through the corridors
Up to the drinks machine on level number three.*

CHORUS.

Dear Oi comes from Thailand, way up in the Northwest,

It's her first time to attend LIOJ.

The Japanese gentlemen are all extremely interested

In this exotic creature from so far away.

CHORUS.

And what about dear Siriporn, sitting in her room at night,

Busily correcting her students' writing tasks?

It almost makes her patience snap, correcting all this verbal crap.

God knows how she does it; it's a labour of love.

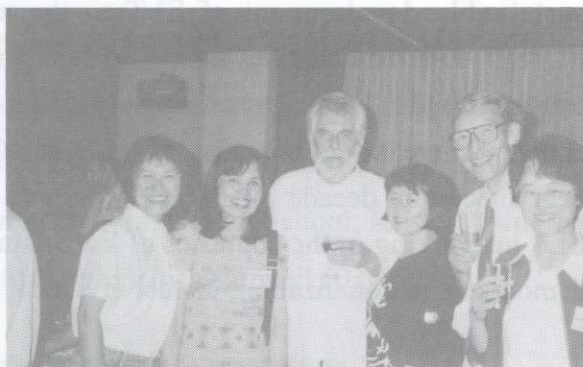
Day 8: Jim arranged for us to go to Daiyuzan Temple. Unfortunately, the heavy rain changed our plans. We went shopping downtown instead. After lunch we left for Narita through the same route we came. Our flight left as scheduled, and we arrived in Bangkok at 11.00 p.m. on 13th August.

It certainly was a wonderful learning experience, most memorable and personally satisfying. The friendships made will not be easily forgotten. If I could, I would go Japan every year.

I'd like to express many thanks to Thai TESOL and especially to the President-Ajarn Naraporn Chan-Ocha who has helped me with the whole process. I'd also like to thank Jim Kahny who gave me a scholarship to attend this wonderful conference. His staff was helpful and nice. Lastly, I'd like to thank all of my tutors at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok for encouraging me to take this opportunity.



Night out in a restaurant downtown



With Alan Maley & participants



My presentation on process writing



Thai dance demonstration