

MEMORIES FROM UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, ASIAN DIVISION: PART I

Awareness of Multiple Cultures—Tokyo Orientation—August 1990

Edward B. Davis
September 2020

I was first introduced to this program from word of mouth. My wife of two years had taught English and was taking Chinese lessons in Beijing just the year before we were married in 1988. I was teaching at SUNY Fredonia at the time and she was interested in returning to Asia. So I contacted Ralph Millis in January 1990 and asked for an interview. This was granted and Diane and I drove to Adelphi to explain why we would be a good match for teaching in the Asian Division. We were delighted to be accepted and our journey began that summer (August of 1990) when we arrived in Oakland, CA for the MAC flight to Tokyo.

One of the interesting aspects of this program was our ability to maneuver among several cultures all at the same time. Since the UM has had a contract with the DOD since 1948, one of the dominant cultures we first meet is the familiar one of American academia. After many years of undergraduate and graduate education in a variety of colleges and universities, landing a teaching career in this same environment is one of the goals many of us hope for. When I was selected for a UMAD teaching position I had already taught at several colleges and universities, had conducted research for my dissertation, had directed research for a consulting firm in San Francisco, and had lived in India conducting research on community development organizations. I had also been in the US Naval Reserves for six years and was familiar with the next major culture we would be facing in our career with UMAD—the United States military.

So the Military Air Command flight from Oakland to Tokyo on a Federal Express 747 was not a complete shock to me. Nor was the UMAD orientation meetings held at Yokota Air Base near Tokyo. Getting our military IDs, enduring the military lectures prior to boarding our flight and landing at Narita to board military buses to Yokota was somewhat familiar to me. However, some new teachers did not have exposure to military culture, and this was one of the cultural shocks they were first exposed to. The third major culture each of us were exposed to was the various Asian cultures that we passed through or ended up living in, whether that was Japan or South Korea. As members of American academia we were to provide this kind of classroom culture to American service members in countries that were once war zones in our parent's generation. We brought the college classroom experiences to military bases of various kinds (Marines, Navy, Army and Air Force) in countries that were either our previous enemies (Japan) or one we assisted in almost a three-year war with North Korea and China.

Under such circumstances, and under the direction of the UMAD staff at Yokota, our new group of teachers quickly bonded after several days of meetings about syllabus preparations, textbook distribution logistics, travel arrangements to our teaching assignments, and how to live “on the economy” once we did arrive at our various destinations. But our initial bonding ceremony culminated in being bussed out of Fussa to a Japanese country inn that had been built about the time Jefferson was writing our Declaration of Independence. Only 40 minutes from Yokota Air

Base was one of the most picturesque and enjoyable evenings of my life. It was truly a magical place, one that captured the essence of Japanese culture and the beauty of the Japanese countryside. It was here that we celebrated our new life as UMAD teachers and provided us with a unique window of things to come. The people who provided us with the new information we would take with us in our journeys would be the people who supported us throughout our UMAD careers: Julian Jones, Ted Frank, John James, Lorraine Suzuki, Dennis Doolin, Rick Hess, Emory Trospen, Larry Hepinstall, Mel Mederos, Scott Wiley, Bill Berglof, Gene Stong and a host of others we would meet as we moved to our assignments. Our UMAD adventures were about to begin.