

## Simulating Fieldwork “in action” through Digital Technology among Ferris University Students<sup>1</sup>

Cynthia Neri Zayas, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Natsuko Uchida, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Eri Ono, PhD<sup>3</sup> and Erina Asano<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of the Philippines, Quezon City 1101 Philippines

<sup>2</sup> Ferris University, Yokohama, 245-0002 Japan

<sup>3</sup> Dokkyo University, Soka, 340-0042 Japan

<sup>4</sup> Yokohama National University, Yokohama 240-8501 Japan

**Abstract.** Our paper is an account of inspiration coming from Filipino and Japanese approaches of remembering through hearing and seeing - wido in Filipino, learning and remembering through hearing (Yamomo, 2018), and kusyo 空書 in Japanese, the motion of writing kanji in the air or on one’s body to remember Japanese character (Sasaki, 1987). We argue that wido and kusyo fall within the realm of karada de obo, remember with your body (Megat Mohamed Noor, 2008:84). As culture bearers, we considered these approaches as experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) that could be employed to assist learners to reflect on their “experience of doing” something and hearing, through digital technology. This paper is experiential learning from the field by Ferris University students both in real and virtual time zones with the use of digital technology. The Zoom platform was used to beam sociocultural and economic data from the field as students can’t be 100% present in the classroom. The gathering of data from Goza, Shima City in Mie Prefecture was made possible through the cooperation of the key informants which included an *ama* or free diving woman and a pearl culturist and jeweler. With the use of simple gadgets, e.g., cellphones, pc tablets, and pocket Wi-Fi, key informant interviews, and on-site descriptions of material culture and heritage objects, cultural and sociological information reached the students. Data such as diving gears, tools, and baskets, running descriptions and functions on site of stone representations of sacred objects, pearl plucking from the mother of pearl shell and pearl jewelry making, etc., were conveyed as a traditional livelihood in Goza. Students who joined the actual fieldwork attested to robust learning directly from the key informants. Meanwhile, students who were in the virtual classrooms or viewers of recorded zoom events were surprised as to how they could obtain information from a distance. However, at times there were difficulties when sounds were muffled due to winds. Overall, the students were thankful for the rare chance to encounter a different aspect of Japanese culture focused on the sea. As a whole, simple gadgets, when properly utilized together with digital technology, are possible and inclusive even for non-professional users.

**Keywords:** Fieldwork, digital technology, simple gadgets.

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<sup>1</sup> WCCE 2022 - IFIP TC 3 World Conference on Computers in Education Towards a Collaborative Society Through Creative Learning. Sunday 21st to Wednesday 24th August — Venue: International Conference Center Hiroshima International Conference Center Hiroshima (ICCH)

## 1. Background and Introduction

In pre-pandemic times, experiential learning has always been part of our pedagogical tools in teaching the social sciences. Students went to the field, the natural environment, to experience ordinary people's ways of living. With the current global pandemic, this is no longer possible nor is it encouraged by the university to bring students out of school. In the University, we face the challenge of hybrid classes, i.e., students have the choice to come to class or stay at home and be in class through Zoom. Digital technology is one method to creatively find ways to bring the natural environment to virtual classrooms. To make up for the absence of experiential learning, we thought of bringing students and researchers to Mie Prefecture to have a glimpse of the ama 'free diving woman' and everyday life through key informant interviews on the life and activities of the ama and the pearl culturist/jewelry-maker, on-site description of the Ishibotoke sacred shrine and its significant artifacts, inventory and uses of tools and containers of an ama, pearl plucking from the mother of pearl shell and pearl jewelry making experiences, among others. These undertakings were to be broadcasted as virtual lessons. Simply put, our class was in broadcasting fieldwork mode.

The fieldwork site was Goza, Shima City, Mie Prefecture, Japan. Preparations were first made by Prof. Cynthia N. Zayas and Prof. Uchida Natsuko doing a reconnaissance from December 2 to 5, 2021 before the actual fieldwork to obtain the cooperation of our hosts and informants to be; as a protocol for research, prior and informed consent, were obtained then. The actual fieldwork took place from January 14 to 16, 2022. The site is a fishing village which some years back was a flourishing site of a robust ama population. Our fieldwork began with an initial consultation with Ms. Yamashita Machiyo, an accomplished ama, and with Ms. Yamaoka Yoshiko, the proprietor of Pearl Miki pearl farm and a pearl jewelry maker. Our fieldwork was in conjunction with the three courses Prof. Zayas taught at Ferris University from October 2021 to January 2022 as an exchange professor from the Center for International Studies, University of the Philippines, viz., Cross-cultural training, Modern people and religion, and Asian encounter and cross-cultural experiences. She thought that through this fieldwork, she could thread the commonalities of the said subjects in three points: cross-cultural training, communication, and socio-cultural exchange. Ama's life in a village community and the ups and downs of the pearl culture industry will illustrate the said points. Aside from the four authors of this paper, two student volunteers, Takeno Mai and Wakatsuki Aika joined us.

As a backgrounder, Prof. Zayas has known Ms. Yamashita and Ms. Yamaoka since 2008 and 2016, respectively. For the past 13 years, she had been visiting Goza to continue her interest in the life of the ama. She has published an article in *Aghamtao*, the official journal of the Philippine Anthropological Association, on the ama, in particular, on the life of Ms. Yamashita. Goza, therefore, was the best choice for exposure for her students. Informants' trust is very important in successful field research. A former colleague of Prof. Zayas, who joined our Zoom sessions twice commented:

*Dr. Zayas' research on the Ama women fishers of Japan contributes to sustainable ecology and equitable world-making. She does this by collaborating with women fishers who embody the women fishers. I am stunned personally by the trust that she receives from the community she works in Japan and the support that she obtains from a new generation of young Japanese scholars (communication with Dennis Gupa, University of Winnipeg<sup>2</sup>).*

As a cultural anthropologist, Prof. Zayas always wanted her students to experience life beyond the confines of the university. The students were not required to come along, but volunteers were asked to join, as the Covid pandemic prohibited requiring students to

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<sup>2</sup> Emails from: Dennis Gupa, Ph.D. Department of Theatre and Film, Faculty of Arts, University of Winnipeg, Canada.

attend face-to-face class sessions. As an alternative way of making them participate, Prof. Zayas thought of beaming the most important activities from the field by using the Zoom platform. For students who could not join in real-time Zoom, the event was recorded so that they could have access to it. It should be noted that besides Japanese students, one foreign student from Slovenia was enrolled. Japan is 8 hours ahead of Slovenia, following is a positive comment from her.

*The pros to distance learning and virtual fieldwork are short and simple. It is, in its way, quite convenient to be able to join from anywhere there is an internet connection. Firstly, in terms of fieldwork, the biggest con is simply that I even could take part in something I otherwise simply couldn't because of distance and Japan's COVID measures. When choosing between "participating" and "not participating", it is of course a win to even be able to participate. And it was a great opportunity, and I am thankful. Secondly, the recordings of the panels from the fieldwork being uploaded to the cloud are extremely helpful to review information. I think it is helpful for everyone, whether they were there in person or not, as you can easily review your data. It is of course vital for virtual participants. Having the literature on the topic shared on the cloud as well was very helpful for someone like me, who could not access Japanese libraries from another country (communication with Dominika Kalafutova, Comenius University, Bratislava<sup>3</sup>).*

During this global pandemic, we have accepted challenges to bring our investigation from the natural environment to the virtual classrooms of the university using digital technology. We shall demonstrate examples of simple, yet global and mobile opportunities that we utilized to share fieldwork goings-on with Japanese college students who could have joined us in the field, but due to the COVID pandemic situation, opted to be in the virtual classrooms instead. As the leader of this multi-interdisciplinary team from Ferris University, our default setting is creative simplicity. We use only the available resources we possess and what the university has. Digital technology has expanded the learning space from lethargic virtual classrooms to invigorating rustic local sceneries and sounds emanating from the countryside. Through demonstration, our key informants likewise realized the possibilities of the use of digital technology in their personal and entrepreneurial needs.

This paper consists of three parts:

1. Framing: Kusyo and wido, the body remembers (what the mind forgets) experiential learning by Prof. Cynthia Neri Zayas.
2. Data presentation: Fieldwork in action and fieldwork in distance mode. Technical settings section by Prof. Uchida Natsuko and students' response section by Prof. Ono Eri and Ms. Asano Erina.
3. Analysis and conclusion (by all authors): In doing so, we succeeded in enabling students to see and hear fieldwork “in action” through the image of fieldwork in distance mode

## 2. Framing our paper

"True learning is complete only when action has been put forth."

- Xunzi, ca 313-238 BC

### Limitations

As the COVID-19 pandemic played center stage in our learning activities, the face-to-face mode has been set aside for distance mode, or in some instances a blend of both. Being educators in the field of the social sciences, our bias for meaningful learning is

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<sup>3</sup> Dominika Kalafutova, Comenius University in Bratislava Slovakia, Department of Japanese Studies. Currently an exchange student at Ferris University, Yokohama, Japan.

for the students to experience the abstract in whatever concrete form it makes take shape. The results of our reflections in this presentation, teachers, and students are initial forays on the possibilities of bringing the action from the field into knowledge gained with the use of our cultural faculties of kusyo and wido through the medium of IT.

We will argue that in combining the local ways of learning of Japanese and Filipinos plus digital technology, our team realized the possibility of “fieldwork in action” and “fieldwork in distance mode”. This is how we frame our presentation.

We drew inspiration from David Kolb’s Experiential Learning - a four-stage, continuous process that describes how people learn by doing. We shall not be delving into Kolb’s theory, but share instead our version of experiential learning where memory has emphasized the mediation of Information Technology. There is a similar idea found in the Japanese’ karada de oboeru where our native reckoning is contained - kusyo and wido the Japanese and Filipino approaches of remembering through seeing and hearing respectively.

KUSYO 空書 in Japanese refers to the motion of writing kanji in the air or on one’s body to remember a Japanese character (Sasaki, 1987). Imaginary writing in the air or one’s own body, say a hand, or an arm, makes it possible for a finger or that part of one’s body to trigger visual memory of that particular character (kanji). The body remembers (what the mind forgets) so to say.

WIDO, a loan word in Filipino from Spanish oir, meaning hear. In the context of Philippine culture, the Spanish oido ‘heard’, wido as it is transcribed here, means learning by ear. In ‘normal circumstances’, learning is often aided with written text, especially in cultures with the ancient developed writing system. The Philippines have many kinds of pre-colonial writing systems. However, its development has been aborted with the coming of invaders who used the Roman alphabet exclusively for the elites. Be as it may, it helped advance the orality of learning. Among Filipinos whose lives were distant from western civilizations, oral traditions, e.g., oral literature such as epics, songs, stories, and indigenous knowledge, etc. have been transmitted through hearing and observations. As a result, Filipinos until the present time, easily learn through observation and listening, thus the word wido ‘heard’ or learned.

These kusyo and wido or visual and auditory senses are activated through the mediation of the IT, i.e. when we zoom actual fieldwork activity in real-time. Through IT mediation, abstract or virtual experience, students can relate (Fig. 1 ). Because actors (teachers or researchers and two students in the field, except for the informants) are known to them. They could have been them if only they were able to participate in the fieldwork. We shall not elaborate on the process of zooming as this will be taken care of in the next section.

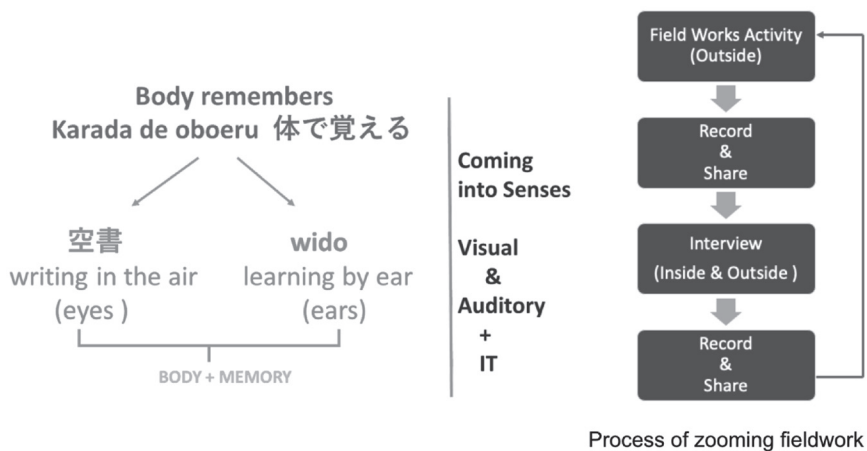


Fig. 1 Framing karada de oboeru and the IT

### **3. Data presentation: Fieldwork in action and fieldwork in distance mode**

#### **3.1. background and Design Policy**

With COVID-19, online educational environments have become widely used. As a result, tools such as Zoom, Meet, and Teams are also used in higher education. This has facilitated online guest lectures. On the other hand, in the world of Ama, the target of this study, the use of ICT is far away. In addition, the corona disaster has made it difficult to conduct fieldwork that involves traveling medium to long distances.

In research areas not specializing in information, which have not been active in the use of ICTs, online lectures for fieldwork on the go are not yet common. Therefore, taking equipment outdoors and conducting fieldwork with a variety of equipment is still not an easy task for everyone.

We devised and conducted our fieldwork using equipment with which faculty members who are not information specialists are familiar. We chose the following equipment, which Professor Uchida is familiar with and can easily use without specialist knowledge.

- Laptop PC
- iPad, Smartphone
- Mobile Wi-Fi router
- Speakerphone (Jabra Speak 510)
- Wireless Microphone (Alvoxcon USB Wireless Microphone TG-3W)

The devices do not need to be expensive. What is important is a stable communication environment and clear audio. For this reason, we carefully selected the wireless microphone. In addition to these devices, we used Zoom and Google Drive/Document for keeping records and sharing information. We thought about using an LMS, but it did not fit into our practice environment, so we chose to use Google Workspace, which anyone can use.

Online classes are becoming increasingly active, and the practice of inviting guests to the classroom is increasing. However, the adoption of online field research has not yet reached an environment where it is easy for everyone to do so. The combination of fieldwork and lecture is expected to effectively convey the local situation more clearly to the online learners, thereby increasing the participants' awareness.

#### **3.2. Overview of fieldwork**

We have devised not only the equipment but also the configuration of the fieldwork and the use of the software.

Before starting the fieldwork, some literature was needed to learn prior knowledge. These can be shared by utilizing Google Drive. For outdoor fieldwork, Zoom will be used for online communication for members who cannot attend on-site. This allows for real-time interactive communication. We will also make recordings for students who could not participate in real-time. The recordings serve not only as a complement to those unable to participate but also as a reflection. Fig. 2 shows the overall structure of the fieldwork.

To observe the field in detail and further understand the research field in depth, we combined outdoor fieldwork with indoor interviews. This allows us to step into local life and learn more about it.

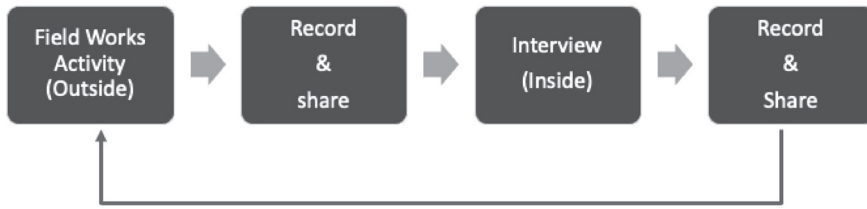


Fig. 2 Process of indoor and outdoor activities

Everything will be recorded and shared on Google Drive. This allows students who were unable to participate in real-time to catch up. In addition, these will also serve as a record of field activities.

### 3.3. Ferris University Case Study

#### 3.3.1. Practical examples indoors

Activities in the room can be similar to those conducted in the classroom. However, outside of the school, the environment may not be the same as in the classroom.

School classrooms have microphones and speakers, but accommodations and homes do not have these devices. There is also no projector. Therefore, a setup like the one shown in Fig. 3 must be organized. In addition, since informants may be unfamiliar with microphones, care must be taken to make the conversation as natural as possible. For this reason, we prepared two wireless microphones that could be connected to a single PC to connect teachers and informants.

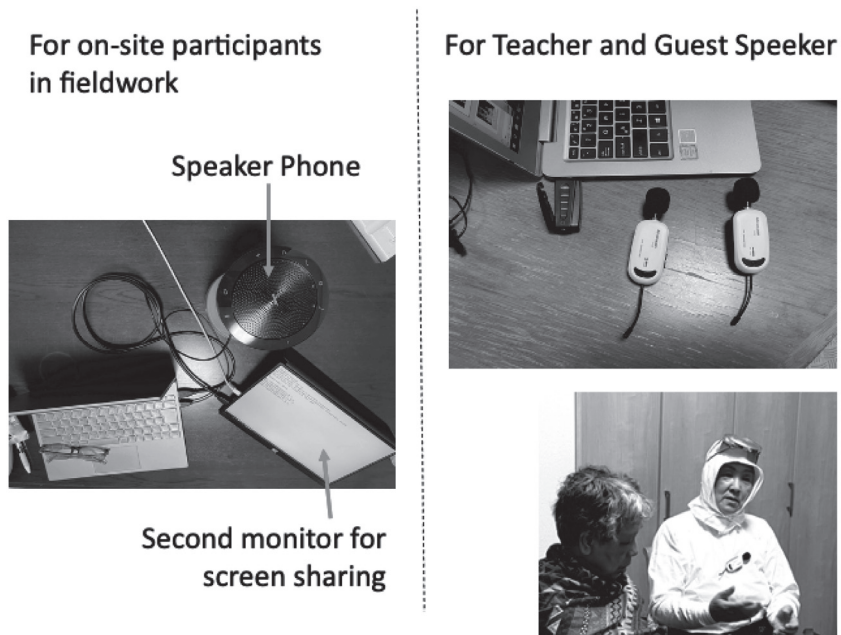


Fig. 3 Equipment used in the indoor lecture

For the local participants, a speakerphone and an auxiliary monitor were provided as devices to accommodate multiple participants. If the room had a large monitor, it would also be beneficial to connect to it. A mobile Wi-Fi router was used for this test since there was no Internet access. The two PCs were connected to a separate mobile Wi-Fi router to distribute the communication load to ensure a more stable communication environment.

### 3.3.2. Case study: Outdoor Fieldwork

Outdoor fieldwork involves human motion and environmental sounds such as the wind and vehicular sounds. As a result, we ensured that clear audio reaches the participants online, so we prepared a wireless pin microphone.

Since we were using Zoom, the host PC would not be moved but installed indoors (at lodging or a divers' hut) to create a stable connection environment. An iPad was used for the moving video, and two microphones were connected (Fig. 4, Fig.5 and Fig.6).

### 3.4. Field Limitations

From our experience, we encountered three limitations manifested in the camera, audio, and Wi-Fi router.

First, we used an iPad camera. But when we wanted to focus on the details, the camera had its limitations (Fig. 5). In the future, it would be best to check the camera's capabilities to adapt to the needs of the place and the natural environment.

Second, during outdoor investigations, we had problems with the use of the speakers. An earphone is needed to listen to the reception of the online participants. To remedy this, we used the chat feature of the recorder to check the audio condition. The best remedy was to continue the session indoors.

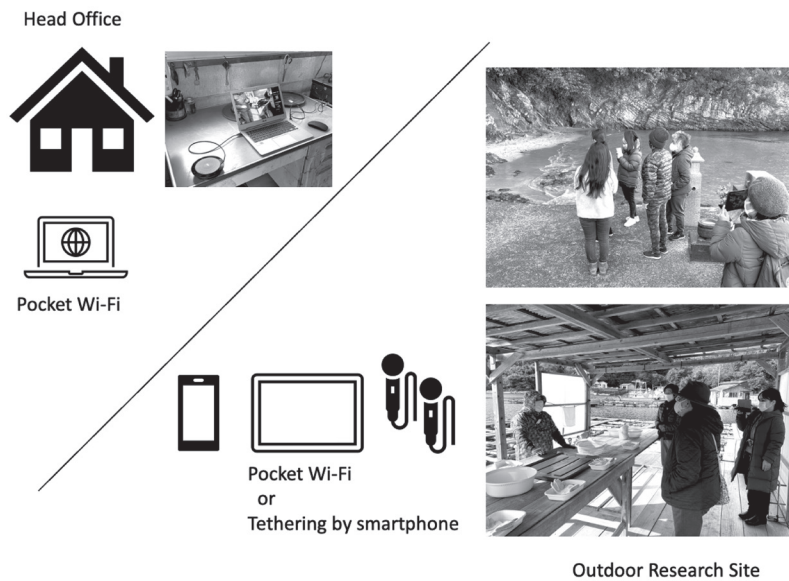


Fig. 4 Setting of outdoor fieldwork

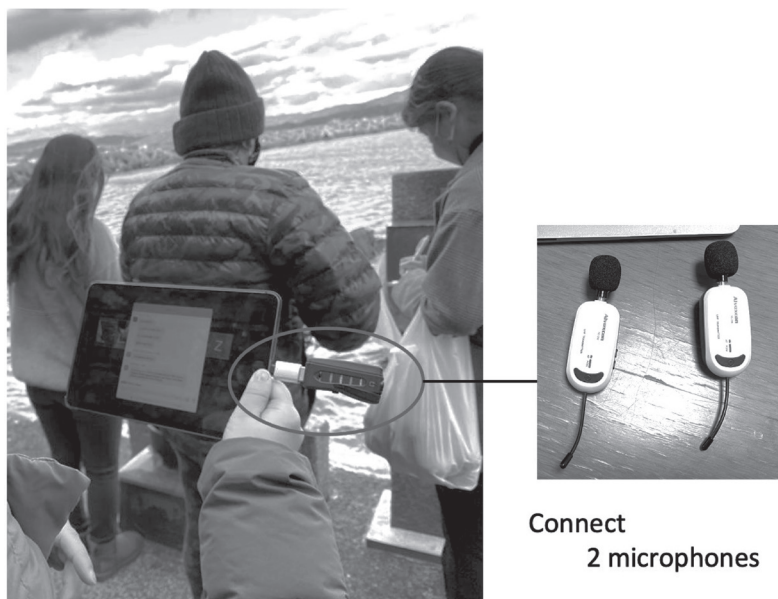


Fig. 5 Day1-Fieldwork at Ishibotoko

### Layout of the diver's hut



Fig. 6 Day 2-Fieldwork at ama goya

Finally, we used a mobile Wi-Fi router only to discover that many factors affected its performance, i.e., the device itself and the carrier. In this study, we compared three mobile routers and found the differences, as shown in Fig. 7. The surveyed area was a sparsely populated seaside area, and there were places where the communication environment was not fully developed.



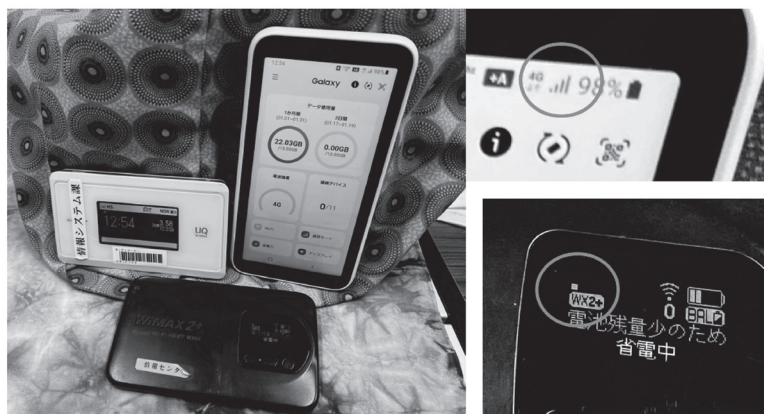


Fig. 7 Communications system, equipment, and problems

#### 4. Daily activities and students’ responses

Ten students “participated” in our fieldwork in Mie. Two joined us in the field, and the rest stayed home. These students were all enrolled in the three subjects taught by Prof. Zayas, viz., Intercultural training, People and religions, and Encounters with Asia and cross-cultural experiences. There were two ways of participation, on the real field and via Zoom link. It should be noted that other participants were invited to the Zoom sessions. These included colleagues in the Philippines and Canada. A student from Slovakia joined Zoom as well. Before the actual fieldwork, students were provided with reading materials. So the first task was to read individually the materials and literature related to ama. The students joined this fieldwork with the theme of “symbiosis with different cultures” common to all three classes.

On the first day, we walked around the fish port and Ishibotoke ‘stone Buddha’, and interviewed an accomplished ama, Ms. Yamashita. Goza on the Shima Peninsula is a town with a thriving fishery industry. This area is one of the few places in Japan where ama divers are active. The Ishibotoke at Goza Port, an indigenous belief enshrined in the area, is thought to have the power to protect the lower part of the body of women. Thus, many pregnant women come to pray for the safe delivery of their babies. It is said that it is a daily routine for ama to visit the Ishibotoke before going out to the sea and praying for a big catch.

On the evening of our first night, we conducted a key informant interview with Ms. Yamashita. She talked about her life story, and successions, pregnant ama practices, among others. For about an hour of question-and-answer time. This interview and open forum were of course shared with the members of the class through Zoom.

On the second day, we visited Pearl Miki, a pearl farm and atelier. The participants experienced the process of taking out pearls from Akoya pearl oysters (*Pinctada fucata*) and making them into accessories. During this visit, the proprietor of Pearl Miki, Ms. Yamaoka, spoke about the history of pearls in Japan and the hard labor and skill in processing pearls. We left the atelier to have lunch at Ms. Yamashita’s restaurant. Later in the afternoon, she brought us to her ama goya ‘ama hut/cottage’ to tell us about what amas do inside the hut during their rest periods in-between diving. Ms. Yamashita lighted the hearth of the ama goya as we listened to her stories while heating our bodies around the hearth. Later she ushered us into an adjacent shack where she stores the gears, tools, and containers for diving. The session with the ama ended here.

In the evening, we continued our interview with Ms. Yamaoka where she spoke about the history of Pearl Miki, the different kinds of pearls, and the various problems facing the current pearl industry. After that, we had a question-and-answer session. This was of course shared in the zoom link.

On the third day, because of the warning for people near the shore to evacuate due to the effects of the Tongan earthquake, our schedule had to be changed. The planned fish port observation was canceled and instead ended up visiting Tsumekiri fudosen only. Auspiciously, it was also the feast day of the shrine. Tsumekiri fudosen is a temple said to have been created by Kukai Kobo Daishi, the founder of a Shingo sect. He went on pilgrimages to many places to spread the Shingo sect in Japan. It is said that he visited this place and dug "Daimyojin" with his nails in the stone. People visit the temple to pray for a good harvest and a big catch. Amas also visit at the beginning of the year of fishing to get protection from God.

Overall, the short 3-day field visit was made possible with the kind assistance of Ms. Yamashita who shared her life with us, cooked food for us, and provided us with lodging. She with Ms. Yamaoka drove us around from place to place according to our hectic schedule. In the end, both women drove us to the train station to catch our ride back home.

#### **4.1. Technical aspects of recording and students' responses**

As a recorder of the field works activities, Prof. Zayas shot some videos of Ishibotoke, Pearl Miki, and Tsumekiri fudosen, as well as videos of the informants' lectures. Based on her experience reading the students' essays, and the responses from the questionnaire formulated by Prof. Uchida, she called attention to two points.

##### **4.1.1. Simple gadgets made big progress in the field trip class**

Prof. Zayas only used an iPad mini and a set of mobile microphones in shooting the videos, but it worked. The visuals were not distorted and neither were there any freezing and time lag with the pocket Wi-Fi device. Real-time viewers enjoyed almost clear visuals and sound just as the participants did. Instead of using a tripod, she carefully used an iPad mini folding case with her hands so as to have a stable recording. This was not a special iPad case but one for ordinary daily use. It worked well. To quote one of the comments in the questionnaire:

*"I felt comfortable when watching the video because the camera did not shake and it was*

*very good. I could hear sounds clearly for most parts of the broadcasting. Only wind-disrupted sounds when broadcasting from outside. I did not have any problem with sounds."*

Did the students really "encounter" different cultures especially with the key informants and "experience" activities through Zoom videos? Dr. Zayas found that many students who joined online from their homes were able to know more about the life of the *ama* and it was beyond their expectations that they enjoyed encounters with different cultures even at home. Some students admired the strong body of the *ama* and her vast knowledge.

*"I could not go to the on-site fieldwork in Mie but I learned from books about ama and the recorded videos in the field. Before this class, I know little about ama, for example, the drama "Ama-chan" which was popular when I was an elementary student. I only had the idea that there were a few ama and more elderly than the younger generation. Even I did not know ama is a*

*kind of professional job. However, my impression drastically changed, I discovered something new big thing.” (Funa)*

Some even became more curious about the economy of the *ama*, and were surprised that women can earn a lot of money by their diving skills alone. *It is interesting that ama has a lot of money and saving after retiring. I thought ama worked so hard but they were not paid enough. However, the skillful ama can save enough money until when they retire. It is completely different from my idea.” (Yumiko)*

Many students also referred to religious beliefs.

*“It is interesting that ama has strong religious beliefs. My surprises are there are three gods such as Tsumekiri fuduson, Daimyojin and Ishibotoke. More surprises for me is that ama have different rules and reasons to pray to each of the gods. I visit a shrine only when the beginning of the year while ama visit gods every day. I think this is because ama works in constant danger under the sea. That is the reason they strongly believe in gods.” (Yumiko)*

*“Ishibotoke helped ama emotionally. I am not familiar with religious things but I recognized from ama’s story how religious beliefs have good affection for those who believe in them. I can learn about different cultural understandings, even though that culture is in the same country. This is what I learn from this fieldwork.” (Rena)*

One student who did not even join the fieldwork noticed *ama* Yamashita’s key sentence in writing her essay as the most impressive one for her. To quote:

*“Yamashita-san told us: we amas are always by the sea, so it is not difficult to dive into the sea.”*

These impressions were possible because the student listened to the informants’ lecture videos many times on demand. Thus, through these simple gadgets, it was possible for the students who joined from home to watch clear videos or visuals, listen to high-quality sounds, and study local culture. Many students in their essays said that they have “encountered” different cultures.

However, as Prof. Zayas had to talk to the real-time viewers repeatedly, it was quite difficult. Multi-tasking, she had to shoot videos carefully, listen to informants’ explanations, explain the situation to real-time viewers in detail, and ask questions to the informants and viewers as well. In effect, she was not only a recorder but also a narrator, sometimes a facilitator. For example, “We are now heading to …”, “This is the place where ama prays for …”, “Can you see the video and hear voices clearly?”, and “Do you have any questions?” are typical narrations during the filming. As she always took care of the question-and-answer time with students and ask the informants many questions, she thinks that the role of the recorder should be shared by others.

Another point of observation is that thanks to Prof. Uchida. Prop Zayas realized the importance of telling what is going on and how the situation and environment are for real-time viewers. According to the comments in the questionnaire after the class, students who joined from their homes had good impressions. To quote some of the comments, *“As I joined real-time broadcasting, I was worried and doubted how it worked as the fieldwork. But I enjoyed it because there was question and answer time, and the teachers often talked to me (through the screen). It was a good experience.”* and *“Students who could not go the field can join online. It is also good to ask questions right away (in the chat box).”*

Although real-time narration was difficult for Dr. Zayas as a nonprofessional recorder, it was crucial to make the field trip “real”. As one commented, “*It was great that we, both students who went to the field and those who did not, could share ‘what is happening NOW’. Broadcasting was like a news program!*” It is noteworthy that students could recognize how their experiences were interactive via Zoom and learn the impact on their own. Even without any advanced gadgets, it can be said that this is a great achievement. Our simple method is a huge contribution to the better understanding of students in the city.

About how informants talk to strangers like us (except Prof. Zayas who has known Ms. Yamashita for almost 14 years now), it is always necessary to have a relationship of trust as well as give the informants comfortable space for them to open their minds to us even it is a first-time interview. As we are focused on the side of local women, our use of simple gadgets made it possible for them to do their work and show their culture comfortably from their hometown, without them having to take any long-distance transportation. Local people and culture went beyond the distance just as they are. Ms. Yamashita was more relaxed in her hometown in front of the iPad mini camera. What is most impressive is how proudly she spoke about her work.

Fourth observation, there are still tasks to resolve in the future. Basic IT skills are required for our method, but women in Goza currently have not had the opportunity to learn about them. Gadgets and apps, such as PC, E-mail, Zoom or Skype, and other IT gadgets are not always necessary for their daily life and work. This reminds us that IT and SNS development leave behind people who are engaged in the agriculture and fishing industry in rural areas. There are limited chances to use the internet for rural women, consequently, a growing gap between women in urban and rural areas exists in terms of access to online space.

#### **4.1.2. Students’ responses obtained from the questionnaire**

*“I enjoyed a lot the field trip exploring ama and her tools. Ama whose life is so different from my life. These things I will never know if I did not join. It was great to have this chance. I am happy that I did not choose a remote class.”* (Mai)

This comment implicitly indicated the limits of the online field trip. Mai’s essay was a clue to know the limitation of our method. She pointed out the decline of a small company in the pearl industry and the importance of our visiting the place. Because she met Ms. Yamaoka in person, she could describe the reality of the pearl industry. Compared to other students’ comments, two participants, Aika and Mai, wrote about how they learned from the site’s cultural conversations which could not be possible for those who were just watching videos from home.

The second limitation of our method is that students in the virtual mode cannot eat and smell what the students on site ate and smelled. For example, Aika had the chance to eat ama’s version of tekone zushi. She thinks that the rice tastes stronger and sweeter than what she knows. She found out the reason why as she wrote in her essay. According to her, amas need more salt and sugar so that they can dive into the sea and work hard all day long. From the lecture, she knew that amas work hard, and from her own experience of eating sushi, she learned a part of ama gastronomic culture.

## **5. Conclusion**

We could say as a whole that blended learning, where the field is a classroom too, is a big change that influenced students. We say so because until the actual fieldwork began, the students showed little interest in ama. They thought that ama were people who had nothing to do with their lives. Students who were online seemed to participate to pass the subject only. However, the actual fieldwork gave students the feeling that they were participating and this changed their attitude toward involvement. It is natural for

the students who participated in the field to change their consciousness because they were directly exposed to the culture. On the other hand, the students attending online were inspired by the reactions and comments of the students on site. It seemed that the students online experienced the feeling of simulating fieldwork.

For us, it was a wonderful achievement that students who did not join the field trip were given a chance to “encounter” the local people, enjoyed the different facets of their culture, as well as communicate through videos. To have an effective class, what we had experienced is suggested, i.e., the combined use of field trips shared through video for those who could not join the trip physically. Ideally, this out-of-school learning aided by digital technology should begin with reading the available literature on the subject matter. This will then be followed by video chats with informants and, finally, actual fieldwork where students travel to a specific area for an actual encounter with the local village people. This class will bring students a more meaningful impact.

Of course, all these connections from Mie to Slovakia, Canada, the Philippines, and Japan, were possible through the benefit of information technology and simply available gadgets and, most especially, through the cooperation of informants who have been well informed of the goals of the research. Prior and informed consent is a must before one can proceed with the research, especially so when it entails broadcasting fieldwork.

With the advancement of technology, everyone now owns a camera accompanied by a communication environment. By using ingenuity, we propose to create an environment equivalent to a classroom even in the absence of a technician on-site, to set up an environment with minimal equipment, and backup systems such as substitute wi-fi routers and internet facilities. During this fieldwork, not only the participants but also the local collaborators showed interest in improving their ICT skills and using the equipment. The next step is to improve their skills. We believe that this will enable us to repeat the research at any time. The use of ICT is still not considered easy and inexpensive for everyone. However, with a little ingenuity and practice, hybrid field surveys can be made possible. Of course, an important feature of its success is the collaborative work with the social sciences and the host community’s hospitality.

Finally, going back to Xunzi, true learning can only be gauged when learners can practice what they have learned. We will continue to document the benefits of IT-assisted learning, as we practice it both in the field, in virtual classrooms as well as in blended mode.

### **Acknowledgment**

I thank the Center for International Studies, University of the Philippines, specially our Director Prof. Sarah Raymundo and Japan Studies Coordinator Prof. Adelina Umali III for giving me the opportunity to be the first Exchange Professor to Ferris University. Likewise, my heartfelt gratitude goes to Ferris University through its President Arai Makoto for inviting me to teach and live in Japan for four months. I would also like to thank Prof. Ogaya Chiho, my counterpart at Ferris University, who has always been supportive of my endeavors and encouraged me in silence. On behalf of my co-writers, I would like to recognize the people behind the success of our fieldwork which would not have been possible without the assistance and participation of Ms. Yamashita Machiyo and Ms. Yamaoka Yoshiko, whose knowledge of free diving and pearl culture, respectively, they generously shared with us. In addition, it should be noted that Ms. Yamashita lodged us and prepared sumptuous local meals for us during of our stay in Goza. Both Ms. Yamashita and Ms. Yamaoka drove us to the targeted sites of study. They also picked us up at the port when we arrived and sent us off at the train station on the day, we left Mie. Special thanks to Mr. Philip Noveras from the Philippines, Prof. Dennis Gupa from

Canada, and Ms. Dominika Kalafutova from Slovakia for their live participation during our Zoom sessions. Finally, to our onsite and virtual classroom students whose full cooperation made us realize that it was worth trying to hold an out of school learning experience despite the threat of COVID-19 within in our midst. As our output have been an endeavor of women teachers, students, informants, we toast to all women who continually educate and learn through cross-cultural experiences. Should there be misinterpretation or inappropriate use of information from the field, errors are ours alone.

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