

# Remembering Manong Frankie in Tokyo

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**M**anong Frankie visited Tokyo frequently, usually writing, having meetings with his translators, or speaking during conferences.

When I became a Japanese Ministry of Education (Monbusho) scholar at the University of Tokyo (aka, Todai) from 1993 to 1995, Manong Frankie, and his wife, Manang Tessie, traveled across Japan. Manong was working on a new novel. He also received a Japan Foundation fellowship to do archival and field research on Artemio Ricarte.

Ricarte was the first chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (1897-1899). Initially, Ricarte fought with the Philippine revolutionaries against Spain. But he refused to take his oath of allegiance to the United States, so he became an exile in Guam, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Yokohama from 1915 to 1942. During World War II, the Japanese government brought him back to the Philippines to help pacify “the Islands” and establish a pro-Japanese civil government. No wonder Manong was so into him.

Manong Frankie also brought me to bookshops, museums, libraries, and engagements, where he was often the keynote speaker or guest of honor. He also invited me to eat in high tea places in Shibuya and Shinjuku. And each time, before leaving, he ordered fluffy Japanese egg sandwiches for me to take home.

One afternoon, I took a train with Manong from Shibuya to Roppongi. He was then writing chapters of his new novel in the atelier of a Dominican priest and artist in Nampeidai. One of my classmates at Todai’s

Department of Comparative Literature and Culture lives in Nampeidai. It is an exclusive neighborhood near Shibuya's central business district. Japanese prime ministers and CEOs live there too.

Upon reaching Roppongi Train Station, Manong and I walked for about 30 minutes to the International House of Japan (IHJ). Founded in 1952, the IHJ received support from the Rockefeller Foundation, several Japanese organizations, and the former estate of Koyata Iwasaki of the Mitsubishi business empire. Since then, the ISJ has hosted many international conferences, meetings, and events. To a certain extent, it is Tokyo's multidisciplinary intellectual hub.

Manong brought me to the IHJ several times. He introduced me to his vast network of Japanese diplomats, professors, writers, researchers, translators, and students. Soon after, I received invitations to speak at the IHJ during their frequent meetings and fora involving international students from Japanese universities. There were also invites to publish papers and poems, mainly in Japanese.

Until then, I knew little about Japan and its people. I had the most wonderful teachers and schoolmates in Todai. However, outside my usual engagements in the university, Manong Frankie brought me to the IHJ and places previously inaccessible to Filipinos with modest means, such as myself.

Before Manong Frankie and Manang Tessie returned to Manila, I went to Nampeidai for the last time. They gave me baskets and boxes containing food, drinks, slightly used pots, pans, and utensils for me and my Japanese dormmates. They paid for the cab that brought me back to far-away Mitaka, where the University of Tokyo maintained a dormitory, mainly for Japanese undergraduate students.

After Japan, Manong recommended me to other scholarships and fellowships overseas. But I will never forget our frequent get-togethers at the IHJ. He also brought me to other similar spaces. I saw Manong through his kindness, especially during my student years in Tokyo.