

Report for Institutional Program for Younger Researcher Overseas Visits,  
Center for Southeast Asian Studies  
Kyoto University

<b>Name :</b> Loh Kah Seng	<b>Date :</b> August 2012
<b>Position in CSEAS :</b> Postdoctoral Fellow, Program-Specific Researcher	
* Check an appropriate entry (Lecturer · Assistant Professor · Research Assistant · Postdoctoral · Ph. D. Student · Master's Student · Undergraduate Student)	
<b>Host Institute (Counterpart, Institute and County) :</b> Dr Anna Marie Karaos, The John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues, Manila	
*Circle the appropriate entry for host institute ( University · Research Institute · Company · Others )	
<b>Position at Host Institute:</b> Visiting Affiliate	
<b>Term :</b> (3 July 2012) ~ (30 July 2012) ( 28 Days)	
<b>Research Purpose:</b> * Check any appropriate entries. ① Research/Laboratory Work ② Fieldwork ③ Seminar ④ Internship ⑤ Take course or class ⑥ Attend Academic Meeting ⑦ Earn credits ⑧ Other	
<b>Research Area:</b> * Circle the appropriate entry. ① Humanities ② Social Sciences ③ Mathematics and Physics ④ Chemistry ⑤ Engineering ⑥ Biology ⑦ Agriculture ⑧ Medical Science, Pharmacy and Dentistry ⑨ Integral Area of Studies ⑩ New Multidiscipline	
<b>Outline of Overseas Visits</b> (About 300~400 words)	
<b>Research Project:</b> A Social History of Natural Disasters in the Philippines, 1945-2010, with A Focus on an Informal Community	
<p>The aim of the fieldwork was to obtain both archival material and oral history interviews for mapping a social history of natural disaster in the Philippines after World War Two. The schedule was divided for library and agency-based research and for interviews with residents of informal settlements in Manila.</p> <p>With the help of a research assistant from the University of the Philippines, I obtained archival and published material on the history of natural disasters in the Philippines from Rizal Library (Ateneo de Manila University), National Disaster Coordinating Council, Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASAY), Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, among other agencies. Negotiations are ongoing to obtain as yet unpublished material from Manila Observatory and other agencies. The materials comprise of census and population reports, and reports on landuse, human settlement, poverty, migration, and development, in addition to material on natural disasters.</p> <p>In addition, I was able to interview about 50 informal settlers living in Barangay Banaba (San Mateo municipality) living in flood-prone areas such as the Riverside, Banaba Extension and South Libis. I spoke to the residents about how they had been affected by Typhoon Ondoy in 2009, which caused a particularly severe flood in Manila. I also spoke to some fire victims in Martinis Street in Mandaluyong and fishermen living at the edge of the sea in Malabon. My fieldwork in Banaba was assisted by colleagues at the John Carroll Institute of Church and Social Issues, by a local people's organization in Banaba called Buklod Tao and by the Centre for Disaster Preparedness (CDP). My interviews in the other areas were facilitated by an NGO called Urban Poor Associates. I also interviewed the members of Buklod Tao and community organizers of CDP.</p>	

**Research Achievement on this Program (300~400 Words)**

The fieldwork has been immensely important and valuable. The amount of archival and published material that has been collected is immense and diverse (with more due to be collected). I will need to further analyse the information and data but they will provide important insights into the historicity of natural disasters in the Philippines in the last 65 years. This is particularly the case in relation to the interaction between the natural environment (with rivers in particular) and human processes such as demographic change, migration, urbanization, economic development, environmental degradation, and the public policies (or lack of) of the state.

When I have sufficiently studied the documentary evidence, it will be used fruitfully in conjunction with my oral history interviews. The value of the interviews, which are rich and full of local detail, is readily apparent to me at this juncture; they provide a window into the social and mental worlds of informal residents, whose perspectives and interests are often neglected in the academic literature. The interviews demonstrate that not all communities are equally vulnerable to floods; neither are they equally resilient or capable to coping with hazards. They suggest that disaster mitigation work must pay attention to social and historical context: it must take into account the profiles of the people affected (according to income, age, gender, migration status), the wide spectrum of challenges that they grapple with on a daily basis (including employment, the education of children and health), and the range of local knowledge and resources they have at their disposal. One particularly important finding from the interviews is that floods are also historic events that precipitate change in people's mindsets and behaviour. While urban Filipinos are accustomed to some degree of flooding, Typhoon Ondoy (2009) has ostensibly transformed the attitudes of informal settlers towards the risk. This has moved many of my interviewees to selectively accept community-based and developmental approaches to disaster risk reduction. This suggests that communities are not static and local attitudes and resources are fluid and subject to change. It also shows that local capacity, even of underprivileged communities, may intersect positively with external professional expertise and assistance.