

Professor Michio Suenari's Contributions to Education: A Student's Perspective

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Reflecting on the extensive academic contributions of Professor Michio Suenari, which span from East Asia and are grounded in an immense number of on-site investigations across various regions, I find it far beyond my capacity as a mere student to address his profound body of work in this short essay. Therefore, I shall leave the task of capturing Professor Suenari's scholarly and personal legacy to more distinguished academics and focus instead on my own memories of him during the latter years of his teaching career, as a humble tribute.

I was a student during Professor Suenari's tenure at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo (東京大學東洋文化研究所) and later at Toyo University (東洋大學), beginning in 1997. Compared to my senior colleagues, I was from the later stages of his teaching career among his other students. During his time at the University of Tokyo, I primarily had the opportunity to learn from him through lectures and research seminars. Following his transition to Toyo University, I participated in his graduate courses and was privileged to work closely with him as a teaching assistant. This role afforded me the rare opportunity to observe his research process up close and assist with organizing his materials. Looking back, I now realize that the insights he shared during those moments of the material organizing and processing work were truly invaluable to me.

As an undergraduate student, I developed an interest in anthropology within the contexts of Japan and China. I joined the Japanese Society of Ethnology (日本民族學會 now the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology 日本文化人類學會) and carried Professor Suenari's edited volume, "The Forefront of Han Studies" *Cultural Anthropology*, 1988. Vol. 5 (《文化人類学》, 卷5(1988), 《漢族研究の最前線》), to conferences, hoping for a chance to ask him questions. However, such opportunities never materialized due to the constant crowd of attendees surrounding him. Once I advanced to graduate school, I was finally able to attend his lectures. However, since he was approaching retirement, he no longer accepted any new students. Fortunately, I got advice from him, "If you are studying China, you should also be capable of handling written sources." Encouraged by this guidance, I sought supervision from a historian, which marked a shift in my academic path. In this sense, I cannot claim to have been one of Professor Suenari's so-called "direct" students. Nevertheless, Professor Suenari provided me with pivotal advice and introductions to other scholars at critical junctures in my academic journey, for which I remain deeply grateful. Although I was not one of his direct mentees, I am honoured to count myself among the many students who gathered around him. It is from this perspective that I have written this reflection.

1. Reflections on Professor Michio Suenari's Classes and Academic Contributions

To begin, I would like to reflect on Professor Suenari's classes. During his undergraduate courses, he often presented video recordings from his fieldwork in Vietnam, pausing occasionally to provide explanations. At first glance, these lectures might have seemed monotonous, and despite being held in a large lecture hall, the number of attendees was relatively small. Professor Suenari conducted these sessions in a calm and measured manner.

By contrast, his graduate seminars were dynamic and demanding, featuring substantial assignments and rigorous feedback. These sessions frequently involved lively and intense discussions. A glimpse into the student roster from 1997 (Professor Suenari prepared seminar rosters in Excel files each year) provides insights into the diverse group of students who attended his graduate classes. The list includes names such as Ms Chen Bin (陳彬Transdisciplinary Cultural Studies), Mr Zhang Xi (張曦Transdisciplinary Cultural Studies), Mr Masao Kashinaga (榎永真佐夫Transdisciplinary Cultural Studies), Ms He Bin (何彬Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, External Research), Mr Motonori Makino (牧野元紀Regional Cultural Studies), Mr Takuju Minakuchi (水口拓寿Human and Social Sciences), Mr Chihiro Miyazawa (宮沢千尋Transdisciplinary Cultural Studies), Ms Wang Yonghong (王永紅Transdisciplinary Cultural Studies), Ms Xie Li (謝荔Ochanomizu University お茶の水大学), Ms Zhou Rujun (周如軍Regional Cultural Studies), and Mr Haru Omura (大村晴Regional Studies). Notably, Professor Suenari's address on the roster simply stated "Office," with no personal contact details, as one might expect. Along with the laboratory telephone and extension number, the roster included after-hours contact information for the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia. This reflects Professor Suenari's dedication to his work, as he was often present in his office from early morning until late at night, except during fieldwork trips. The diversity of the students listed on the roster underscores the multicultural and interdisciplinary nature of his seminars. Professor Suenari's classes consistently attracted students from varied cultural backgrounds and academic disciplines—not limited to anthropology but also including history and regional studies. This trend continued after he moved to Toyo University, where his students pursued fieldwork in Japan, Mainland China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Myanmar, and came from disciplines as varied as anthropology, religious sociology, and Japanese folklore. Despite his extraordinarily busy schedule, Professor Suenari generously made time to mentor this diverse group of students, for which I can only express my deepest gratitude.

This openness to disciplines beyond anthropology is also evident in the "Senjin no Kai" (仙人の会The Immortals' Society), a research group integral to the study of Asia in Tokyo. While Professor Suenari consistently upheld his anthropological perspective, he also maintained a keen interest in other fields of research. On several occasions during the Society's meeting, he remarked that the strength of the Society lay in its interdisciplinary nature, describing it as a venue where one could always "take home a souvenir" of new insights. This expression was echoed by Professor Zeng Shicai 曾士才, who was involved in the Society from its inception and attributed the phrase to Professor Suenari. It seems this was Professor Suenari's way of articulating the value he saw in the Society.

Professor Suenari's ability to bring people together—whether within his classes, research seminars, or collaborative projects—was a testament to his exceptional capacity as a unifying force across disciplines. This quality is evident in his landmark contributions, such as the foundational bibliographic surveys *An Annotated Bibliography of Anthropological Studies of China* (《中国文化人類学文献解題》)¹ and *Anthropological Studies on Vietnamese Culture: An Annotated Bibliography* (《ベトナム文化人類学文献解題》).² He also played a central role in launching and revitalizing major academic journals and publications, including *Taiwan Indigenous Studies* (《台湾原住民研究》 from 1996), *Vietnamese Society and Culture* (《ベトナムの社会と文化》 from 1999), and the refreshed *Hakusan Review of Anthropology* (《白山人類学》 from 2004). Professor Suenari not only provided instruction in the classroom but also created platforms for research presentations and academic exchange. Through these avenues, he worked closely with younger scholars, offering them opportunities to collaborate and develop their skills under his guidance. In this sense, he was not only a distinguished scholar but also a visionary founder and coordinator of academic organizations.

2. Reflections on Professor Michio Suenari's "Perspectives" and Fieldwork

The concepts expressed by the professor through the terms such as “viewpoint,” “perspective,” and “perspective-taking” seem to represent a vital aspect of their intellectual framework. The term “perspective” was used by the professor in both a macro and micro context. On a macro level, it referred to the contributions of cultural anthropology to other academic disciplines or the impact of East Asian studies on anthropology in other regions. On a micro level, it pertained to how one observes, extracts, and interprets specific elements during fieldwork. In this reflection, I aim to delve into the latter by exploring the micro-level perspective as it relates to fieldwork.

As previously mentioned, I had the privilege of working as a teaching assistant and document organizer under the professor's guidance while he was at Toyo University. This role afforded me the unique opportunity to spend significant amounts of time in the same room with the professor, who would usually work alone in his office. Sharing lunch with the professor and engaging in occasional conversations provided rare and invaluable opportunities for me to gain insight into his thoughts. On one occasion, while I was scanning and digitizing photographs from the professor's field research in the Wuhu (五湖) region of Taiwan, I happened to notice the professor's computer screen as I completed a segment of my work. At that moment, the professor, seated back-to-back with me, was editing a video of funeral rituals in a Vietnamese village. The professor typically spent his time in the office seated in front of the computer, engaged in writing, managing extensive correspondence with various collaborators, and handling a considerable workload. During this period, however, he devoted significant time to organizing and digitizing past writings and editing videos. As I caught sight of his computer screen, I saw the depiction of funeral rites in a rural Vietnamese village. Although I usually avoided interrupting the professor while he was working, I found myself commenting, “Vietnamese graves are so small. Even the coffins appear to be just barely the right size.” The professor, smiling, responded, “You noticed that? Spot on! That's the anthropological perspective.” He then paused his work to explain the importance of this perspective in anthropology. The subsequent discussion left a lasting impression on me, as it was rare for the professor to speak at length during their working hours.

The professor explained that in East Asia, at first glance, written texts often created an illusion of mutual understanding. However, there were realities that could not be fully grasped without direct observation. He noted that while Chinese cultural influences might seem pervasive, the actual practices shaped by these influences could vary significantly, underscoring the importance of noticing differences. Rather than focusing solely on shared cultural elements, he emphasized the value of examining the distinctiveness and diversity of each context when studying East Asia. Furthermore, he explained that a “grassroots” perspective is central to anthropology. When executed rigorously, this perspective could also yield valuable insights for other disciplines. He pointed to a concise articulation of this concept in note 1 of his work, “Buddhism at Grassroots Level in the Central Vietnam: the Case of Thanh Phước Village” (〈中部ベトナムにおける草の根レベルの佛教〉).³ The professor also observed that, in addition to history, legal studies—an often-overlooked area—deserved careful attention within this framework.

The conversation extended into a tea break, during which the professor elaborated further. The professor shared that the burial practices depicted in the video were among the initial sparks that ignited his interest in Vietnam. He noted Vietnam's unique position: although it initially appeared to mirror Chinese cultural patterns, closer examination often revealed significant deviations. In some respects, Vietnam might even seem closer to Japan than to Taiwan or Korea. The professor also highlighted that in anthropology, visual media such as video and photography had an unintended value. It is because these mediums often captured elements beyond the original intent of the filmmaker. He highlighted the importance of documenting, preserving, and disseminating such materials. In Torii

Ryūzō's (鳥居龍藏) era, photography served a similar function, although the role and nature of photographic documentation in Torii's time differed from those in contemporary research. Even though my comment had interrupted the professor's work that day, the resulting discussion allowed me to understand the intricate connections within his research. It was an illuminating experience that deepened my appreciation of the breadth and depth of the professor's intellectual pursuits.

3. Reflections on Professor Michio Suenari's Advice on Fieldwork

I would like to recount another memorable episode related to the advice I received about fieldwork. Before embarking on my first extended fieldwork, I had the opportunity to consult the professor on how to mentally prepare for such an undertaking. The professor began by asking whether my question pertained to "fieldwork for the first time" in general or specifically to my "first long-term fieldwork" outside Japan. This distinction was likely informed by the awareness of my prior experience conducting ethnographic interviews in rural Japan. I clarified that I sought advice on preparing for my "first long-term fieldwork," and the professor offered the following insights.

First, he emphasized the importance of initial impressions, noting that these first impressions often provided insights that later proved essential to one's analysis. He advised me to stay in the field as much as possible, even when it seemed unproductive, to avoid missing key phenomena (this advice was also imparted to me by Professor Masahisa Segawa(瀬川昌久) of Tohoku University(東北大学), whom I had been introduced to during the previously mentioned "Sennin no Kai" meeting by Professor Suenari). His guidance emphasized not only the importance of preventing the oversight of critical phenomena but also the value of maintaining a sustained presence in the field, which allowed for a moment when the intricacies of society begin to reveal themselves. Certain aspects might gradually become more comprehensible over time, while others might emerge with clarity at a specific juncture. In the field, it was crucial to maintain a quiet and unobtrusive presence, blending naturally into the environment. The professor also advised that particular caution was necessary to avoid becoming overly assertive, a tendency that could arise when conducting short-term, interview-based research commonly practiced in Japan. The professor advised that one should aim to encounter individuals who could intuitively grasp the researcher's inquiries and objectives—not by actively seeking them but by remaining receptive to such connections as they naturally occurred. To ensure these opportunities were not missed, it was essential to remain vigilant and attuned to the field. Patience, rather than force, was vital in conducting research. This advice, received during my early fieldwork, had since become a cornerstone of my approach, guiding my efforts both during and beyond the field. These words of advice, offered before my departure, have remained a cornerstone of my approach to fieldwork, proving invaluable not only during my time in the field but also in my later research endeavours as well.

In hindsight, I suspect that the professor offered me such thorough guidance because I was, at the time, a particularly uncertain and inexperienced student. Indeed, my plans at that stage were vague: I intended to study anthropology in China and had tentatively considered enrolling at the Central University for Nationalities (中央民族大学) now Minzu University of China). My only connection to the university came through an introduction from Professor Yuko Mio (三尾裕子), then based at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (東京外国語大学), who had introduced me to Professor Suo Wenqing (索文清) of Minzu University of China during sabbatical. One day, likely concerned by my lack of concrete planning, the professor suddenly asked, "Do you know Professor Zhou Xing (周星) at Peking University (北京大学)?" When I replied that I was familiar with Zhou's work, he pressed for my thoughts on it. By the end of that day, the professor had written a letter of introduction for me and contacted

Professor Ma Guoqing (麻國慶), one of Professor Suenari's students and a scholar based at the same institute as Professor Zhou Xing. Thanks to this network of introductions, I was eventually able to undertake long-term fieldwork in Mainland China, a path that originated with the professor's initiative and guidance.

This invaluable advice was given to me in 1999. Years later, I came across an interview article titled "Surrounding Professor Suenari" (〈末成先生を囲んで〉) in *Fieldwork: The Practice of Anthropology in the Chinese Field* (《フィールドワーク——中国という現場、人類学という実践》) edited by Haruhiko Nishizawa (西澤治彦) and Hironao Kawai (河合洋尚).⁴ The article, skilfully shaped by the interviewers, offered a multi-dimensional perspective on the professor's thoughts on fieldwork. I found numerous points of overlap between the advice I had received and the insights articulated in the interview. The article captured the professor's reflections on conducting long-term research across various field sites and served as a vivid representation of his intellectual approach to anthropology.

On another occasion, I asked the professor for recommendations on books that might inform my fieldwork. The professor recommended two books, and among the two books he mentioned, one was *Kuei-shan Tao* (《龜山島：漢人漁村社會之研究》)⁵ by Professor Wang Sung-hsing (王崧興), which was published in Japanese translation in 2024. Although I missed the opportunity to ask why this particular book was mentioned, based on the insights Professor Suenari occasionally shared, I infer that the recommendation stemmed from its potential to teach the sharpness of observation required of an anthropologist—specifically, how to observe and what to focus on in order to understand the society. Regarding the notion of understanding society, Professor Suenari often emphasized the appeal of anthropology as a discipline that involves contemplating the mechanisms by which societies function and, at the same time, examining the roles individuals occupy within those mechanisms through observation. In this sense, it is undoubtedly true that *Kuei-shan Tao* is a highly fitting choice.

4. Regarding Professor Michio Suenari's Publication of Research Materials

Professor Suenari consistently emphasized the importance of publishing reports. He produced numerous reports not only on regions where he conducted long-term research but also on areas he visited for short-term fieldwork, often remarking that he travelled there merely "to absorb the atmosphere." However, the professor expressed deep regret about not producing a comprehensive study or report based on his research in Meixian (梅縣), Guangdong Province, China. This regret seemed rooted in his sense of duty to the people of the field site, and the commitment to what he regarded as the proper etiquette and ethical practices of a researcher. Central to this ethos was the professor's dedication to the dissemination of research materials.

Professor Suenari was also deeply invested in exploring and adopting new research tools and technologies for organizing materials when they became available. Among these innovations, video technology was of particular interest. As soon as home video cameras became commercially available, the professor incorporated them into his fieldwork. With the advent of smaller and more portable video cameras, he began carrying one to every field site, filming events and surroundings whenever the opportunity arose. It was a similar case with Torii Ryūzō's photographic methods as discussed earlier, Professor Suenari saw great potential in video recordings as a medium that could be shared with both local communities and fellow researchers. He argued that videos captured not only the intended subject matter but also incidental details beyond the filmmaker's control, offering alternative perspectives and enabling others to derive their own interpretations.

At first glance, the professor's research themes—such as kinship and rituals—might appear to align with

traditional anthropological themes. However, through the use of video, Professor Suenari was quietly pioneering innovative reforms in anthropology during a time when the discipline faced intense criticism. A hallmark of this forward-thinking approach can be seen in his ground-breaking ethnography *Social life and Ancestors in a Vietnamese village on the outskirts of Hanoi* (《ベトナムの祖先祭祀：潮曲の社会生活》).⁶ This work was accompanied by a CD containing video recordings that served as the primary data informing the book's interpretations. By doing so, the professor made his findings verifiable and encouraged diverse understandings, significantly expanding the possibilities for ethnographic scholarship. This commitment to open access and collaborative research further materialized in the initiative "Welcome to the East Asian Anthropology Video Archive." Through this project, the professor selected and publicly shared video footage from his extensive collection of over 1,000 recordings. These included scenes from Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Meixian, Guangdong Province.⁷

After that, the professor explained that a key feature of anthropological methodology "lies in its pursuit of analyzing concepts derived from data without severing their connection to concrete facts obtained through a steady meticulous observation, while simultaneously situating these facts within their broader context" (as noted on the referenced website). This approach is exemplified by presenting a portion of such "steady meticulous observation" as part of the methodology. Anthropology, often prone to being perceived as subjective or arbitrary in its interpretations, was continually strengthened and rendered more robust at the level of data through the individual's efforts to establish a methodology open to diverse interpretations. The exploration of the potential for collaborative research in anthropology could also be situated within this same context. The envisioned collaborative research extended beyond individual long-term fieldwork to include scenarios where multiple researchers investigated a single field site or conduct coordinated studies across multiple sites. In this sense, during a period of crisis for anthropology, the professor not only worked to fortify the discipline's academic foundations but also effectively conveyed its significance and intellectual appeal through his own practice.

5. Conclusion

My opportunities to accompany Professor Suenari on fieldwork were extremely limited. However, even during the few instances in which I had the privilege to do so, I observed how he listened with genuine curiosity to the issues he encountered, posing numerous questions informed by his extensive experience in field research. As one of the many students drawn to his guidance, my impression of Professor Suenari was that of a scholar who held himself and his discipline to rigorous standards, maintained impeccable manners, and approached eager young researchers with a generosity of spirit. At times, he was strict, but he also provided guidance through brief, incisive remarks delivered in an unassuming manner. Above all, he exuded an insatiable curiosity and a profound joy for anthropology.

From now on, it is unlikely that I will ever encounter another individual like Professor Suenari. To me, he exemplified an ideal scholar—a "mentor/teacher" whose example I aspire to follow but will never fully attain.

References

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末成道男教授與東洋文庫錄像資料

濱下武志教授 (東洋文庫研究員)
(蔡志祥譯)

末成教授是一位對東亞社會進行廣泛而深入研究的知名文化人類學家。他的代表作包括《台灣アミ族の社会組織と変化: ムコ入り婚からヨメ入り婚へ》(《臺灣阿美族之社會組織及其變化: 從招贅婚到嫁娶婚》)。東京: 東京大學出版社, 1983) 和《ベトナムの祖先祭祀: 潮曲の社会生活》(《越南の祖先祭祀: 潮曲の社會生活》, 東京: 風響社, 1998) 等。1990年至1998年間, 末成教授在東京大學東洋文化研究所工作。任職期間, 接替退休後的中根千枝教授, 擔任「汎アジア部門人類学」(汎亞人類學部門) 的負責人。我曾與末成教授在東京大學東洋文化研究所共事過一段時間, 因此, 有機會從未成教授那裡聽到了一些關於亞洲社會的識見和視野, 其中給我最深刻的印象是他認為喪葬禮儀的傳承性是亞洲社會的共同特徵之一。他的提點, 是我在考察廟宇以及通過碑銘、墓碑等來了解地方社區歷史時的重要指引。

此外, 在與末成教授討論的過程中, 我知道他的田野考察筆記非常細緻和有系統。這不僅對

人類學專業, 而且對其他領域都是非常珍貴的資料。因此, 我計劃將末成教授的田野筆記數碼化並且對外公開。同時, 末成教授是被認為在田野調查時, 以錄像形式將社會調查的經過和成果完整記錄的第一代日本研究者。這些錄像, 目前收藏在東洋文庫的數碼圖書館中, 並且對外開放。我相信, 透過研究這些影片資料, 將會出現更多繼承末成教授的調查研究的研究者。

以下是末成教授在東洋文庫的錄像博物館的鏈接以及引言:

東亞人類學錄像博物館簡介(http://124.33.215.236/movie/suenari/indexEastAsiaMovie.html#okinawa_bonogami)

歡迎來到東亞人類學錄像博物館。在我們的博物館中, 精選了從1988年個人攝影機問世以來, 1,056部在東亞地域的社會人類學調查中拍攝的錄像。與照片不同, 在錄像放映之前, 觀眾無法了解影片的具體內容。因此, 我們準備了錄像的摘要版本, 讓觀眾可以預先快速瞭解錄像概