

# philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

---

## Obituary

**Lydia N. Yu Jose,  
1944–2014**

Ricardo T. Jose

*Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*  
vol. 63 nos. 1 (2015): 153–56

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu](mailto:philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

# Obituary



## Lydia N. Yu Jose, 1944–2014

Lydia N. Yu Jose was born at a time of great uncertainty, with the Philippines occupied by a foreign invader. Little did anyone know that Lydia would become a key figure in fomenting greater understanding between the Philippines and the country that occupied the archipelago, Japan.

Born on 27 March 1944 in Barrio Olympia in Makati, Lydia was christened Lydia Honora Nepomuceno Yu. Her Chinese father had fled from southern China during the Sino–Japanese War and settled in Makati, marrying Benigna Nepomuceno in 1943. The two managed a *sari-sari* store. The eldest of five siblings, Lydia helped tend the store and learned early on that she could not eat the sweets without permission.

*above:*

Lydia N. Yu Jose at the conferment of the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon, with the Ambassador of Japan to the Philippines Toshinao Urabe, 29 April 2012

She started formal education in public schools: Santa Ana Elementary School and Felipe G. Calderon High School, where she graduated with honors. She entered Far Eastern University (FEU) in June 1961 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Education, cum laude, in March 1965. Her devotion to study netted her the Most

Outstanding Student award of the Institute of Education. After graduation, she taught at the Malate Catholic High School where, from June 1965 to March 1967, she handled classes in History and English. Although teaching was fulfilling, she did not like the intervention of her students' parents and after two years decided to leave.

While aiming for the History Department, serendipitously she found a job as graduate assistant in the Political Science Department of the Ateneo de Manila University in Loyola Heights beginning in June 1967. At the same time she began to take graduate courses in Political Science. In search of new horizons, Lydia also began sitting in Nihongo courses offered by the then newly opened Japanese Studies Program (JSP). She befriended one of the young teachers, Yoko Yoshikawa, who encouraged her to pursue language studies in Japan. She took Yoko's advice. With a Mombusho (Ministry of Education) scholarship, Lydia entered the Graduate School of Public Administration of the International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo in April 1969. A month later, however, tragedy struck: her father, who had been ill, passed away. Grief-stricken, Lydia hastily returned to Makati for the funeral.

Feeling unable to return to Japan after the funeral, Lydia returned to Ateneo as assistant instructor for one semester. Meanwhile, her professors at ICU encouraged Lydia to continue her language studies by offering to pay for her return ticket. So Lydia flew back to Tokyo. On her return to the Philippines, she completed her M.A. in Political Science at the Ateneo with Dr. Jose Abueva as her adviser. Lydia then rejoined the Ateneo's Political Science Department as a full-time faculty member. As a junior faculty member, she taught basic courses, such as the mandated course on the Philippine Constitution. Lydia felt constrained in teaching the course as the country was under martial law. She thus took a different tack and pioneered in teaching the course in Filipino, with positive results. She also took it upon herself to translate John Stuart Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government* into Filipino. Later she translated Edwin O. Reischauer's *The Japanese* into Filipino.

As Lydia rose in rank, she became one of the department's stalwarts. She taught political theory, research methods, and other upper-level courses. She was known as strict and demanding, with a heavy load of readings, graded recitation, and nonnegotiable deadlines. While she demanded much from her students, she also demanded the same of herself, always coming to class fully prepared. She spoke her views frankly, but also respected her students' opinions. A dedicated mentor, she guided graduate students to finish their degrees.

Lydia always felt there was more she could do. Part time she taught Japanese language courses at the Japanese Embassy, then on Taft Avenue, from 1975 to 1984. She found time to study French. She enrolled in Chinese painting under Master Hau Chiok, a major practitioner of the Lingnan School of Chinese painting. All this time she was living in Makati with her mother and siblings and commuting everyday. (When it flooded she would take a boat to make sure she got to school.) From November 1980 to April 1981 she took time off from Ateneo to teach English to Vietnamese refugees at the Bataan Refugee Processing Center.

Lydia entered the PhD program for International Relations at Sophia University in April 1985. She knew what she wanted and after careful study chose Prof. Kimitada Miwa as her adviser. She studied in the Yotsuya campus, finishing all academic requirements required of Japanese students, as opposed to the English-language program for foreigners at the Ichigaya campus. In 1988 she completed her dissertation and defended it entirely in Japanese. Expectedly she passed with flying colors, one of the very few women who successfully hurdled such a PhD program in Japan.

Lydia and I met as she was finishing her dissertation. We first met on a fateful Easter Sunday of 1988 in front of St. Ignatius Church next to Sophia University. We had heard of each other through mutual friends. The friendship deepened, and I was there to support Lydia in the closing days of her graduate studies. She in turn helped in my own graduate studies. We were married in Tokyo in May 1989, shortly after Lydia's graduation, surrounded by friends from around the world.

Returning to Ateneo in June 1989, Lydia assumed the JSP directorship, which she held until 1996, and then again from 2004 to 2007. She built the JSP into a mature institution offering courses, exchange programs, annual conferences, and publications. Lydia also chaired the Political Science Department (at the time freshly reorganized after years of merger with the History Department), which she nurtured into robustness with promising young faculty, active participation in conferences, and a stronger publication profile. She advocated the establishment of the Ateneo Center for Asian Studies (ACAS). As its director from 2004 to 2013, she mobilized her vast network of friends to build ACAS into an internationally recognized research center, attracting numerous fellows, holding annual conferences, and publishing monographs. These stints displayed Lydia's talent as administrator and institution builder.

An indefatigable researcher, Lydia published actively. She authored books now considered classics in the field, such as *Japan Views the Philippines* (her dissertation, published in 1992, revised in 1999—which was launched

together with my *The Philippine Army* in a rare husband-and-wife book launch); *Filipinos in Japan and Okinawa* (2002, published while she was still a visiting professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies); *Philippines–Japan Relations* (with Setsuho Ikehata); and *Philippine External Relations: A Centennial Vista* (with Aileen Baviera). Since 1994 she published at least one significant work every year.

For her numerous achievements in teaching and research, Lydia won many awards, scholarships, grants, and professorial chairs. She was named professor emeritus in 2013. The highlight of her career was the conferment by the Japanese government of the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon, in 2012, in recognition of her achievements in developing greater understanding between the Philippines and Japan. She was one of a very few Filipino recipients of this important honor.

Beyond academics, Lydia loved flowers and our pet dogs. She liked classical as well as soft popular music. She had a strong religious faith, and we went to mass every Sunday and First Friday. She cherished her family, and we made regular visits to her and my mother. Her interest in Chinese painting remained strong, and she was a regular member of the International Studies for Chinese Arts group where she exhibited new paintings every year.

She took her health seriously, undergoing annual check ups, watching our diet, and insisting on regular exercise, be it swimming, tai chi, or chi gong. In August 2008, after a prolonged bout with a sore throat, she had her tonsils removed. It was then discovered she had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and immediately underwent chemotherapy. For a while everything seemed all right, but the cancer recurred. Chemotherapy and various other remedies proved unsuccessful. She remained active intellectually, doing emails despite her condition. But while Lydia remained alert, her body weakened. She passed away peacefully at St. Luke's Global City in the early morning of 3 August 2014, at the age of 70, of which twenty-five were spent with me.

Lydia used to tell me that no one is indispensable, including her. Perhaps so, but Lydia's passing has left a gaping vacuum no one can ever fill. Her legacy remains in all her publications and in the students and institutions she nurtured. I pray we will remember her always and that the foundations of academic research and teaching she so ably planted be strengthened.

**Ricardo T. Jose**

Professor, Department of History  
Director, Third World Studies Center  
University of the Philippines Diliman  
<rtjose42@gmail.com >