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# Conversion from promotion for overseas study to learning in campus with a co-educational environment

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*The expressions and the order of the topics dealt with in the article might be slightly different from the original Japanese version. The charts, case study details, and other reference data which have been used in the original Japanese version have been omitted from this summary.*

## **Abstract:**

The international flows of mobile students in Asia has significantly increased recently. The chances of contact with foreign students have increased even in the Japanese universities with high ratio of domestic students, which advances the diversity in their campuses. This article introduces the actual scenes of coeducation at the classrooms of International Student and Local Student with the interviews of the lecturers and the analysis on the inter-cultural education. It further examines the Citizenship Education which supports the conversion from promotion for overseas study to coeducational learning with mobile students.

## **keywords:**

Mobile Students, Campus Diversity, Intercultural Communications, Citizenship Education

## **1. Student Mobility in Asia**

Internationalization of universities or cross-border education has been accelerating. The number of international students worldwide has already reached 4.5 million people<sup>1</sup>. In terms of places of origin, China comes first with 710,000 students, followed by India with 180,000 students. Including 120,000 students from South Korea (ranked 4th)<sup>2</sup>, the number of international students from Asian countries occupies 68% of the total.

The recent increase is due to the emergence of “Mobile Students” in Asia, who study in the neighboring nations in the same region. This development is attributed mainly to the higher education policies taken by strategies of

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<sup>i</sup> 砂岡和子,室井禎之編『日本発多言語国際情報発信の現状と課題ーヒューマンリソースとグローバルコミュニケーションのゆくえ』2016年3月朝日出版社刊

countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and China to recruit international students aggressively, more precisely removing barriers to the mobility of students and university staff by, for example, inviting foreign world-class universities to locate campuses in their countries or increasing the number of programs delivered in English in local universities. The shift from the traditional higher education model which focuses only on local students, to the more international, cosmopolitan academic environment in which local students and international students could inspire each other will be sped up in Asia.

Japan is located at the low position of 25 in the ranking of international student destinations with only 30,000 students. Japan should accelerate the shift toward internationalization of its universities to keep up with the higher education trend worldwide. Among the international students studying in Japan, the top two countries of origin are China and South Korea. Nevertheless, as far as we see the frictions between Japan and China or Japan and Korea today, the current Japanese higher education strategy apparently has not been very effective in contributing to the peaceful settlements of the international disputes in the region. To develop future leaders who can understand diplomatic issues in the region and grapple with them, the campus environment in which local students and international students can learn together or interact with one another through social life beyond the differences in languages or purposes of their study should be ensured.

Currently, the curriculum in our university is separately designed for each course and the language in which it is provided. As a result, local students, international students and faculty are all segmented into the language groups or course groups in their academic and social life and have few opportunities to talk with a member of different groups.

There have not been so many empirical studies in how understanding or collaboration between international and local students/faculty on campus affects their thinking and behavioral patterns. In this article, I will seek to examine the interactions between local students and international students in 4 examples of the classroom practices which I am involved in at our university as a lecturer and consider where the internationalization of the Japanese higher education system stands today and how we could improve it.

## **2. Case Studies of International Educational Practices in Japan**

### **2.1 Interviews with Foreign Language Lecturers**

I conducted in-person interviews with 9 foreign language lecturers whose classes include international students. The nationalities of the international students in their classes are Korean, Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, Vietnamese, American, and German in order of decreasing prevalence. In terms of numbers, 2 or 3 students in the class are international students, which is less than 10% of the class.

In general, the lecturers consider the presence of international students as an opportunity to make the class a more international and stimulating environment. They say they do not treat the international students differently in the class. Nonetheless, the lecturers seem to have been trying a lot of ideas to improve their classes by harnessing the power of diversity. They believe that they can bring on more stimulating learning spaces for local students by integrating international students more and making them feel more comfortable in the class.

Most of the lecturers suggest that foreign language education in Japan should start at an earlier age and its

approach should be more effective and practical. They also indicated that in the Japanese universities, the ethnic composition of the class should be more internationalized and diversified and there should be more international cultural exchange events, foreign language summer camps and study-abroad opportunities for local students. As commonly said as one of the characteristics of Japanese people, there is a tendency for local students to keep their distance from others, which hampers effective communication in the class. Therefore, they propose that the size of the classroom for foreign language classes should be small and have a flexible seating system to give students a sense of community and opportunities to talk with each other more easily.

## **2.2 “Asian Students’ Conference”**

In cyberspace, without the necessity of transportation to physically bring together members from different geographic locations, it is much easier to establish an environment for international academic collaboration such as face-to-face debates online. "Asian Students' Conference" is a video conference course to which students from universities in Japan and other countries in East Asia subscribe for face-to-face debates. The participating universities come and go from time to time. But so far our university has a record of debate sessions with as many as 9 universities throughout this course. These universities are Peking University, Tsinghua University and Capital Normal University from China, and National Taiwan Normal University, Tamkang University and Yuan Ze University from Taiwan, Korea University from South Korea, Keio University and Waseda University Graduate School of Information, Production and Systems (IPS) from Japan.

When this course started, most of the students who represented each university were local students. In recent years, however, with the increased student mobility in the region and the increased share of international students in each participating university, the cultural backgrounds, the language skills, and the identity of the students became more diverse. As a result, the standard of language skills, information gathering techniques and capacity to value diversity of the students in the class has dramatically risen across the board. Initially, the languages allowed for use in the debate sessions were limited to Chinese and Japanese in alternate shifts. As time has gone on, this rule has been loosened and now the students can use Chinese, Japanese, or English.

With the assistance within their own team or from the teams of other member universities, translation of statements or posts is immediately provided and the conference proceeds smoothly in general (Cross-classrooms Peer-to-Peer lending discussion). In Chinese education in Japan, there exist Chinese language courses in which only simplified Chinese characters and predetermined special characters are allowed to be used (Such classes are called "Hidden Curriculum".), in “Asian Students’ Conference”, however, the current policy of the course is to respect each local spoken language and characters of Japan, Mainland China, and Taiwan.

Debate topics are usually picked by the students and the debate moderator is also chosen from the students. The students are inclined to pick topics which are common talking topics among them. These kinds of topics reflect their cultural backgrounds and thoughts really well and the debate sessions often gain steam. The exposure to the different values gives them an opportunity to rethink the bias or stereotypes they had and gain an objective perspective. In order to express their true opinions in the session, building trust is essential. The more 90-minute sessions they have

gone through together, the more lively the discussion has become with smiles and laughter from all the participating teams.

The use of smartphones or tablet devices is allowed during the debate session for search or dictionary functions. It was also found that before and after the sessions, most students talk with classmates about the sessions through SNS such as LINE and WeChat. For them, discussing the debate themes has become their daily habit. The students who take this course learn that in the international debate there are different communication styles depending on the social structures they are from and they attain international social skills which enable them to discuss constructively beyond the cultural differences.

### **2.3 Course Taught in Chinese with Q&A Sessions**

“Chinese Society” is an omnibus lecture series to deepen the understanding of the society of Chinese descent, which is provided in Chinese. The lecture includes a question-and-answer session as a part of it and the lecture themes covers politics, diplomacy, economy, law, environment, science and technology, journalism, history, religion, and language. There are two types of lecture delivery methods. One is the traditional classroom lecture which is provided by 12 lecturers in shifts, 8 of whom are native Chinese speakers and the other 4 of whom are non-native Chinese speakers. The other method is the remote lecture, in which the lecturers deliver their lecture from Beijing, Shanghai and Taipei through a screen. Students from all the divisions in the university including Liberal Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematical and Physical Sciences are able to take this course. Since this course is delivered in Chinese, the students in this class are either international students from Chinese speaking countries or local students who have lived or studied in those countries.

The majority of the international students in the class are from divided nations or countries where freedom of speech is not ensured. In the classroom, most students sit next to their friends who share the same cultural and educational background, which leads to their sitting separately into groups of where they are from. Also the result of the questionnaire conducted in the class showed that the media which students use as information sources are very different between international students and local students, and even between the international students depending on the country of origin.

The existence of the public space where students are free to argue about international iniquity or injustice is unmistakably significant and this course provides that. The lecturers are multi-national and the themes are set from the international standpoint. Therefore, it happens that the lecture themes are the points which some students have never imagined to discuss or do not have to discuss or are unable to discuss in their own culture.

In the question-and-answer session, which often develops into heated arguments, there are topics over which many students take sides firmly depending on where they are from. The themes of literature or culture, on the other hand, often evoke in the students a feeling of unity as people of Chinese heritage. Being involved in the heated argument during the session helps the local students become vividly aware of the dynamism and issues of the economy, politics, and culture in the region.

## 2.4 Course in Regional-Cultural Studies

“East Asian Studies” is an omnibus lecture series set in the School of Political Science and Economics which covers politics, religion, and culture in East Asia. The lectures are provided by 3 lectures in shifts. I am one of the 3 lecturers and I provide 5 lectures in total. The number of the students who take this course is 80 to 100 every year, approximately 10 percent of which are international students. In the year 2015, we had international students from South Korea, North Korea, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Also some local students have their cultural background in these countries. The course is provided in Japanese and students do not need to understand the Chinese language.

The form of the lecture used to be an oral presentation given by an instructor. However, many of the assignment reports in the past included conjecture and biases shaped by stereotypes and did not meet the teaching staff’s expectation. It clearly showed the limitation of one-way communication.

Therefore, group debates and BBS posting after class were newly implemented so that students were able to share their thoughts with one another. The allocated time for a group debate session is 20 minutes and one group consists of local students and international students, 10 in total. The topic of the debate is decided by the instructor. But usually the first half of the session is to follow up on the last week’s BBS posts and the latter half is to discuss the topic of the day. Students are allowed to make posts in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean. The text to be posted in Chinese is translated by me and the text in Korean is translated by the software before posting. All the posts can be viewed by all the students who take this course. The number of characters in the posts on BBS now amounts to 140,000 characters which is more than sufficient to help us benchmark the effects of the implementation of the debate sessions between international and local students.

There are a few minor problems such as that students feel the time for debate is too short or that students sometimes misunderstand the topic. According to the feedback from the students, nevertheless, most of them feel this new method is far more effective than just listening to the instructor and the discussion with the students from different countries in the region was a valuable opportunity to exchange views and enrich their understanding of the lecture theme.

Local students are able to obtain unfiltered information about different countries and different viewpoints from international students. Unlike learning it from hearsay, face-to-face communication promotes deep and instinctive understanding in the students. The BBS communication also ensures that both local students and international students learn something that they would never be able to learn in one-way lecturing.

Statements of international students often vividly mirror the ethnic problems and the political systems of their countries of origin. Local students are overwhelmed by the enthusiasm that international students show in these topics and are compelled to compare the differences in social structures and political systems. Some students even try to seek a universal political logic beyond the concept of nation-state.

There have been some problems too. There is a tendency for local students to generalize from few statements from international students while some international students have difficulty in overcoming the biases which they have acquired through the mass media of their countries and relativizing the ideas. Moreover, some local students treat the international classmates as guests in their country and avoid confronting them. These local students need to

realize that international students are the classmates with whom they can engage in candid discussion. The countermeasure to these problems would be to raise the proportion of international students in the class and to provide the courses in which local students could discuss issues with international students from more diverse backgrounds.

### **3. The Role of the Lecturers**

Through the observation of these case examples, I am convinced that there are many things that the lecturers could do, even with their limited authority, to make the classroom a good place for mutual understanding and academic interests shared between faculty, international students, and local students.

In the communication in the international academic space, a clash of values based on their social and political backgrounds frequently occurs. The role of lecturers is to find suitable themes depending on the composition of the class and to set questions which deepen their understanding of the themes. The problem is that the creative thinking training to sort out the statements in the class, to reflect on themselves in the principles of tolerance and common good, and to strive for solutions that create new values for the students is still insufficient in the curriculum.

The trend that Japan is becoming more deeply integrated into the global society is unmistakable and the student mobility in Asia will grow even faster. Japan should take advantage of this opportunity to build international friendships and international problem-solving environments. The faculty should collaborate across divisions and be more actively involved in creating an academic framework in which they could leverage their expertise to improve the quality of the international higher education.

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