

JAPANESE STUDENTS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: EXPLORING DIFFERENCES AND FOSTERING INTIMACY

HANAMI Makiko

〈要 旨〉

本論は、著者が5年余に渡り行ってきた日本人学生の面接調査の結果の一部をまとめたものである。

留学生との交流を目指す日本人学生たちは、課外活動の一環であるサークルに結集する。外国語でのコミュニケーション能力や社会的スキルに自信のない学生たちはまず集団的なアプローチを志向する。しかし、表面的な交際にとどまらず、留学生たちとより親密になることを期待すると、もはや集団的なイベントだけでは目的を達せられないことを知るが、心理的な壁や生活スタイルの違いに阻まれて、個人的な交流の機会をもつことがなかなかできない。

新入留学生の受け入れ時のさまざまなサポート活動は、こうした問題に悩む日本人学生たちに、留学生と密度の濃い時間を共有する機会となり、それをきっかけとして、日本人の友人同士で話し合うような日常的話題や将来の希望をも話せるような関係を築き、互いに友だちであることを認知することができるようになる。

さらに交流が進むに連れて、両集団は、援助する側とされる側という非対称な関係から脱して、より対等な協力関係を求めるようになると同時に、互いの行動パターンや態度に見られる文化的な相違に気付き、日本人学生が当然のこととして依拠する集団活動のパターンに留学生が適応しないことを知る。

日本人学生たちは、留学生との協働の可能性を模索することを通して、自分たちの行動特性とその問題性にも目を向けるようになり、個人的な関係を基盤とした交流活動という新たな指針を得る。本来目指していたものは個人的な関係の確立であったものの、集団的なアプローチを取らざるを得ず、集団活動を維持することを至上とする日本人学生たちは、個人主義的な留学生たちに振り回されながらも、集団活動そのものを否定することはない。むしろ、打開策として、留学生には形式にとらわれない個人的な関係の中での発言機会を確保し、その内容を集団活動に反映することを提起する。しかし、結果として彼らが仲介役を務めることにより、他の日本人学生が留学生との直接的関係から阻害されることは否めない。

Key words: International students, Japanese students, collective actions, intimacy, host-guest relations

Introduction

In 1983, the Japanese government announced a plan to increase the number of international students at educational institutions in the country to 100,000 by the year 2000. The educational institutions accomplished this goal in 2003. Nonetheless, the number of

international students at each university rarely exceeds ten percent of the total student body. Further, nearly half of the international students at Japanese universities are graduate students or so-called research students who are in preparatory studies to enter graduate programs. Thus, the overwhelming majority of undergraduate Japanese students spend the four years of their college life totally among students of the same nationality.

Under the circumstances, only a small number of Japanese students encounter international students and have a unique cross-cultural experience. These students often organize themselves into a club or circle that is officially recognized by the university as an extra-curricular activity in order to mix with (*koryu suru*) international students as a group.

In Mie University, the Student Circle for International Exchange was formed by a group of Japanese students a few years before I joined the Center for International Exchange in 1997. The circle organized welcoming parties, barbecues, tea parties, Christmas events and farewell parties for international students.

This article is based on the results of long-term qualitative research employing the interview method with the Japanese students who participated in the circle. In the following, five students describe respectively their confrontations, achievements and observations on different but commonly shared issues in the processes of interactions with foreign students.

1. Student A: Overcoming the psychological barrier

The communicative ability of average Japanese students in a foreign language must be regrettably admitted as far below the desirable level to live in the global age, in spite of continuous language education for up to eight years at high school and college. Most of them grow up lacking substantial direct contact with foreigners which could have been helpful to make them realize that foreign languages are nothing but a tool of communication. Moreover, they could have developed uninhibited positive interests in interactions with people of different cultures if they were exposed to them since childhood.

In reality, the majority of them are shy and untrained to open up their mind and to engage in candid conversation with foreigners, even if they are Japanese of their generation. Many young Japanese have in their mind an adoration for foreign cultures and interactions with foreigners, yet they cannot take the first step toward getting acquainted with them. Therefore, those who gather in the exchange circle are motivated to explore their limited opportunities to meet foreigners.

Student A, who participated in circle activities since he was a freshman and was going to lead the circle for the coming year, relayed in an interview his thoughts on socializing with foreign students

In the beginning, one is likely to be disappointed talking to foreign students, because we cannot understand each other so well. I also felt awkward to see they were so different from Japanese people, and I did not enjoy it. Yet, the more we meet them, the more we get to know about them, and then, I think we'll find the real pleasure of talking to foreign people.

Student A anticipated a development of friendly relationship after overcoming the awkwardness that he felt in the initial encounters. Nonetheless, he soon realized that the formal circle activities do not provide sufficient opportunities with them to overcome the problem and go on to the next step

I personally happen to see them on campus only occasionally. We can have a circle activity once a month at most. I really don't know how we can see them more often to become friends.

Most of the students including Student A are busy attending classes, working part-time and involved in other club/circle activities. They do their best to organize just one activity /event a month, making plans, allocating roles among the members, and spreading advertisements and invitations in advance. The circle events remain as encounter opportunities for the Japanese students and foreign students. If they are interested in further knowing each other and becoming friends, ideally speaking, they should contact each other on an individual basis. The problem is, according to Student A, that somehow it is not easy to develop such relationships

Well, to tell the truth, I exchange a few words with the foreign students whom I met at circle events whenever I see them on campus, but I haven't become close friends with any of them yet.

Student A says that his feelings are not exceptional in the circle; most of them are stuck at the initial step of the relationship and cannot find a way to move forward. The situation creates anxiousness among the Japanese students

If things stay the way they are, we'll just end up with superficial relationship with them. So, I want to have opportunities to talk to them more often. I have no specific plans yet, but for instance, we might have a language exchange, something like that, any opportunity to have a deeper relationship, that's what we want. Right now, we just meet once a month, talk a little, and that's it. It'd be nice to get to know about each other more.

It seems difficult to create such opportunities, though. I don't know.

When Student A, the new leader of the circle, was searching for a way to develop closer relationships with foreign students, a new group of international students were to arrive at the Center for International Students. They were the Monbusho Scholarship grantees who would receive intensive Japanese language training for the first six months at the Center before going on to graduate degree programs. The Center asked Student A and the members of the circle to help these non-Japanese-speaking foreigners when they arrived. The arriving students needed Japanese-speaking supporters 1) who would pick them up at the train station and settle them in the International Student House where they were going to live for one year, 2) who would guide them on campus where English signs were rare, 3) who would take them to buy daily necessities in order to start a new life, and 4) who would assist them with alien registration, application for national health insurance at the city office, opening a bank account, and admission procedures at the student office, none of which they could possibly complete without some knowledge of Japanese language.

The group of Japanese students who volunteered to support the new foreign students extended their help beyond what the Center had requested. They took them to cafeterias and off-campus restaurants, accompanied them to old and new bike shops, and spent a lot of time with them trying to answer in their limited English the various questions the newly arrived students asked. The relationships continued even after the first few weeks of their arrival. The volunteer students literally became the first Japanese friends of the foreign students. Student A recalls a few months after the support experience

We never got to see international students so frequently before. It was the first time we became truly friendly with them. This is the best relationship I've ever had with them!

Japanese students are also busy enrolling in classes in the beginning of the semester. Nevertheless, they found time for the foreign students and thoroughly enjoyed being with them

It was fun, really, to go shopping with them. They do their shopping from a different point of view compared to us Japanese. Moreover, we still have a language barrier, so we have to guess what they want and what they really care about. I really enjoyed going out with them and trying to guess their feelings.

Thus, the support activities and continuing interactions became an ice-breaking experience for the Japanese students in their relationships with the foreign students. Student A pointed out

When I was a freshman and sophomore, I was always filled with fear-what if I had nothing to speak about with them and so could not continue a conversation? I think I've overcome that kind of feeling. I do not avoid them anymore just because my English is not good enough.

Student A was not confident about his language competence, and admits that he used to avoid opportunities to talk to foreigners due to anxiety about being unable to express himself. He was happy that his attitude to international students changed after the support activities

When I came across a foreign student, more than once I hesitated to stop and talk to him, consciously or unconsciously. I just said 'hello' and passed by. But since I started helping the new students I gradually learned I could manage the relationship even with my inferior English. These days, if we happen to meet with each other at lunch time, it is most likely we will sit and eat together.

Student A positively evaluates the support activities and affirms he would participate in them again in the next semester

I look forward to the support opportunities. I've done it twice, last April and October. I really enjoyed it both times. I can't believe it's already been a year since I did it for the first time! You see, it's a rare chance for a Japanese person to experience something like the 'alien registration' procedure, and you get to see the process of international students adapting to the environment. It's so interesting and rewarding to see them grow from being so helpless in the beginning.

Unlike socializing with foreign students through circle activities, Japanese students do not need to worry about how to continue proper conversation with them during their support activities. Because the foreign students are desperately in need of support, the Japanese students have a clear objective to 'help them' in specific matters, which goes beyond good-willed but ambiguous 'socializing'. The Japanese students began by answering a variety of questions and discussing the schedule. They were often surprised by what perplexed the international students, and what sort of assistance was needed. The Japanese students were satisfied to be able to communicate with them even in their uncertain English, and accumulate confidence slowly by completing each step of the tasks they were trying to accomplish.

For the international students, who had just arrived and knew little about what to expect in a society where they do not know the language, the group of Japanese students offering assistance and good will relieved their anxiety and tension. Through completing tasks including shopping, registration and a campus tour they formed strong bonds. The time they

shared in the first few weeks with each other was, in its length and quality, of no comparison to the once-a-month circle event.

As the result, the Japanese students noticed that they had overcome the awkwardness or even 'fear' that comes from not knowing what to speak about or do together.

2. Student B: How intimate relationships grow

Student B, who took over the leadership of the circle from Student A a year later, explained the meaning of making friends with foreign students and organizing exchange activities for her. She is one of the students who reveal a positive attitude toward the interaction with people of different values and customs

I love speaking with various people, including Japanese. One thing that strikes me about talking to people from different countries is that things quite normal for them could be strange for us, or vice versa. So, when we are talking, sometimes one of us will stop the other and say, 'What the hell is that?' That kind of thing is really interesting to me.

In an interview at the end of April 1998, she first confessed that she had no close friends among the foreign students with whom she could discuss private matters. However when the students she was supporting had arrived a couple of weeks before she had confidently anticipated that she would develop close relationships with them.

At the same time, she pointed out some crucial differences in her interactions with her Japanese friends and international friends

For instance, the frequency I call them; whether I would call them right away whenever I feel like it. I have no hesitation to call Japanese friends, and I see them often on campus, but I have less chance to see foreign students. You see, if we take the same classes, we talk before class starts and after class, we often say, hey, let's go somewhere. I want to talk to foreign students, but because they're not in my classes I don't have as many chances as I do with Japanese friends.

The reasons keeping her from making phone calls to foreign students as freely as she does to Japanese friends seem to be grounded in her lack of linguistic confidence. Obviously, telephone conversation tends to create more tension than in face-to-face conversation, particularly when one must speak in a foreign language. Consequently, she prefers face-to-face opportunities with international students. Nonetheless, these chances are infrequent since international students are mostly tied up in Japanese language classes. Japanese students more often share among themselves the campus life including classes and

club/circle activities. For them, it does not require conscious effort to see each other regularly. However, chances for interaction with foreign students tend to remain outside of the 'natural flow of campus life' for Japanese students.

Two months later, Student B reported despite the problems mentioned above she had developed close friendships with a couple of international students

These days I spend a lot of time with foreign students like M and N. Once I was feeling depressed, so I told them and they gave me encouraging advice. I want to work overseas. Not only that, I want to do something I like doing. I was wondering if this dream would come true. My high school teacher said, "it seems difficult, they may not hire a Japanese." M told me, "I did not expect to be able to come to Japan. It was a dream beyond dreams. My parents said, 'What in the world are you talking about?' Yet, I did what I could and my dream has come true. So, you should continue to try your best." It really struck me, so I decided to keep trying.

Five months later in November, she solved the problem of having few opportunities to meet foreign students by establishing the custom of eating lunch or dinner with them as frequently as possible. This strengthened their friendships further. Sharing meals every now and then, they became accustomed to telling each other about their personal interests, studies and future dreams. She gave an episode through which she felt their intimacy increased.

A friend of Y (a Japanese student) passed away. G and M (both foreign students) listened to us sympathetically when we talked about it yesterday. There are so many things we do not know (about her death). In the morning, I did not feel like doing anything. Later in the afternoon, we started talking about going to the funeral. M suggested we go to one of the teachers to ask about things to do at a funeral. I had a class, so Y and a couple of other Japanese students went with M. G also gave us some good advice. Y was so appreciative, saying, "I was so glad everybody seems to care so much".

In this episode, Japanese students were psychologically shaken by the sudden death of a fellow student and were supported by the international students. The initial supporter vs. supportee relationship between them in April was reversed. As the result, student B felt that positional difference between the Japanese and international students had disappeared

Recently, I feel they are 'good friends' more than foreign students. In fact, they are no longer foreign students to me, but just friends. The boundary is gone. Maybe it's because we've spent a lot of time together. I feel it's great. They encourage us. I don't hear their problems these days, and we can talk over ordinary topics. Before, we discussed things like 'in Japan this is such and such'. Now we talk about things in our daily life; 'today I did this and that, this was good, that wasn't-that kind of thing.

Not everyone may achieve the close friendships that Student B did. Whether two people can achieve intimacy fundamentally depends on their personalities. Student B describes herself as a person who hates to be confined in a small group of friends and prefers a broad network. According to her, this is based on negative experiences at junior high school where girls divided into small groups and antagonized each other. In senior high school, she enjoyed unrestrained broader friendships and came to idealize an environment in which “I can be accepted wherever I go and can talk to anybody about anything.” She hopes to be able to feel at home wherever she goes. Consequently, she has many close friends to the extent that she sometimes forgets whom she told what.

Student B also said she does not mind talking about herself honestly to her friends, including foreign students. For the development of close and intimate relationship it is considered indispensable that the concerned individuals can open up their hearts to each other. By talking about her anxieties and dreams honestly despite her limited English skills, the international students empathized with Student B, and this concern considerably increased the intimacy of their friendships.

3. Student C: Making friends with people with behavioral differences

Student C recalled her process of becoming close friends with foreign students. She concluded that it was not enough to participate in the circle events to make friends with them

In my eyes the foreign students were special, and I strongly felt like making friends with them. But I was just one of the many Japanese for them, so they didn't particularly want to be friends with me. So, unless I pushed myself to make personal contacts, they wouldn't even remember my name. It took almost half a year after joining the circle before I started to talk with them about the ordinary things I talk to Japanese friends about. I hear freshman girls say they want to be friends with foreign students, but it's really not that easy.

In Japanese universities there exists an overwhelming imbalance in the ratio of Japanese and international students. As a minority, international students are in a more favorable position to choose their friends when they are approached by Japanese students. Student C noticed that many Japanese students fail to make friends because of the passiveness and timidity often observable among Japanese students

In my case, I first became friends with one of them and ended up knowing most of them.

But when I would start talking I would sometimes wonder if this person even remembers my name. If you have that kind of anxiety, you hold back from speaking to them, and a foreign student may feel, oh, she doesn't want to be friends with me. It could be a vicious circle.

Student C found that not only becoming friends but also maintaining the relationship was fascinating and at the same time painstaking

Their diverse thoughts make me think a lot; for an example, they sometimes point out my attitude as being very strange, I come to understand what they mean, and I feel I'm having a wonderful experience although it is sometimes troublesome. They don't understand us unless we explain everything to them, because they think in a different way from us. Sometimes they don't understand us at all even after we try to explain. I would try to change myself if somebody pointed out I was behaving strangely. But they seldom want to change themselves. It was always me who was trying to change-I wonder why? Such a fundamental difference of thinking troubles me a little.

She told an episode in which her behavior was criticized by international students

When I was asked to go see a movie I couldn't make it, because I had to work part-time. But I excused myself by saying, "I don't have money, so I'd rather not to go." We often use such an excuse with the intention of not offending anybody. I think it's not just me but any Japanese person would do it. But, a foreign student told me, "It's no good. What if later I find out the true reason? It's a shock to know you are telling me a lie." I never thought about it that way. It was OK with Japanese friends. So I tried hard to explain why I gave a false excuse, and finally I realized it was because I did not want to create ill feeling toward me, which was not so good. So, I decided not to do it again. Probably it was OK just with an acquaintance but one must be honest with friends, that's what it is. They often make me think about my behavior with friends.

Yet, Student C, who was flexible enough to adapt to what her foreigner friends suggested, was sometimes troubled by their attitude

They don't like to make an appointment to see somebody, maybe they are not accustomed to it. If they happen to meet with each other, they would say, "Shall we go eat somewhere?" or "Hey, let's have a drink." Or, they call me abruptly, "We are having a party, today!" Japanese make an appointment a week in advance, set a time, meet at the time and follow the plan. For instance, if we agree on going to Tokyo, we want to make detailed plans about where to go and what to do in Tokyo, but, they are never that way. That's really a problem for us.

She admitted with a sigh that Japanese students always fell into caretaker's role due to their passion for plan making

We always end up taking care of them. We choose destinations for them, and ask them if they are all right. They seldom say no, so we set out. I often don't understand why they wanted to go in the first place. They don't mind going without a hotel reservation and just looking for one when they get there. They are tough, in a sense. So, we probably don't have to take care of them. But, we can't help it. They seem to not mind just walking around without specific purposes. But, I would mind if I simply wandered around without doing anything specific in a foreign city, after I spent money to get there. So, we end up discussing what to do and choosing places of interests that might please them.

As a steering committee member Student C played a major role in organizing the international student speech contest in Japanese. She was confronted with all sorts of opinions, suggestions, complaints and criticisms from the international students

Foreign students say what they please (*katte na koto wo iu*). A number of them do not want to participate as speakers but just talk. I tried to understand them and told myself they have good reasons for their opinions, but it was tough. Some Spanish students had hard feelings towards the Chinese students, whose Japanese (according to Spanish students) was far better than theirs, yet who were insisting on contesting at the lower level, and they said that's not fair. That sort of thing was too much for me. I can't do a thing about it. They have no sympathy (*omoiyari*) for me. I was so busy and stressed out. Why did they have to say things that just made me more tired?

Student C experienced many unexpected responses and reactions from the heterogeneous group of foreign students, and suffered from the difficulty of maintaining good relations with them to some extent. Being asked if she felt she had grown tougher from the experience, she answered

Yes, I think I have. I learned my way of thinking or doing things is not the only one, so I probably do not worry about things (*kuyo-kuyo shinai*) like I did before. I realize there are different ways of thinking, and have adopted some of them as my own. I adopt them partially and mix them with my old ways. By doing so, I feel like I am broadening my horizon.

If I socialize only with Japanese friends, I don't have to be troubled. We share a cultural base, so we understand each other and can predict a response without saying anything. If I say this, they would respond like that for sure-that kind of relationship. With foreign students, my words and behavior are interpreted and reacted to in totally different and unexpected ways. So, I am often surprised by things I took for granted.

4. Student D: Criticisms of international students

The supporting system for new international students by the volunteer students was well

established within a year. A small international community was born based in the International Student House. Japanese students visited the foreign students in the House and offered further assistance whenever needed. For the foreign students, the House became a secure and comfortable base. However, a self-contained closed community may not be an ideal environment for international students if they are to truly gain from their time in Japan. Student D was one of those who detected the risk that international students come to depend on the support system in the small community, and lose the desire to step out into Japanese society.

Student D went to the United States on a language training program for a month during spring recess. She carefully chose a program in order to maximize the effect of the short-term training, avoiding group tours and places where Japanese youth on similar programs might be. She collected the necessary information, made her own decisions and completed all the paper work by herself. She became a 'foreign student' herself, after having experienced supporting the international students for a year.

After she came back from the United States, I asked her perception of the international students at Mie University had changed. Without hesitation she responded

Yes, it has changed. The way I look at them now is a bit more severe than before. Actually, to some extent I felt it that way even before going; the foreign students here are so dependent on us. When I was in the States, I did everything by myself. But here we always help the foreign students. I think they should push themselves further to do things on their own using the Japanese they have learned.

Student D's criticism on international students' lack of self-reliance was based on her faith that Japanese and international students should have an equal relationship. The belief was shared by the international students and other Japanese students who were the members of the circle, and was adopted as the principle of the circle activities.

This principle started with a suggestion by the international students about seven months before Student D went to the United States. International students and Japanese students agreed upon creating lunch-time conversation sessions twice a week as one of the circle activities. International students insisted to have one session only in Japanese to let them practice, and another session in English to help the Japanese students improve. The Japanese students welcomed the idea. Every member of the circle was excited by the prospect that the circle would finally break from the customary host (Japanese students) -guest (international

students) relationship, and start to plan and manage activities together.

However, as Student D stated the international students' participation did not develop as expected. Her criticism extended to their indifference toward circle activities such as revising the bilingual campus area map. The map was made solely to help the international students

Even when I told them we were revising the map, they never offered to help. They think it's our job, not theirs. But, they were given the map when they arrived and if they found it useful, why don't they help revise it this time for the new students who are coming?

It's not just in making the map, it's always the Japanese students who do all the work. Unless we ask them to help, they don't move. This is not something we agreed upon. In the beginning, they were not familiar with the way things were managed. Yet, by now they should be able to do some things at least. It wouldn't hurt if they volunteered to do things with us more.

Student D wonders what happened to their common objective of equal participation and why international students appeared to have withdrawn from the initial agreement. After thinking about it, she realized that they had returned to the old host-guest relations, and that the Japanese students were equally responsible for this.

Probably because we are used to helping them anytime, it almost became our second nature. We are so accustomed to this 'helping' and 'being helped' relationship. We talk 'cooperation' but in reality we soon return to our old ways.

Thus, Student D and others realized that international students still tended to rely on Japanese friends whenever they needed to contact, inquire and negotiate in personal matters outside of their small and comfortable community, which prevented them from fully participating in the circle activities as the co-members with Japanese students.

Student A pointed out the language issue as part of the reasons why international students' participation in the circle remained below their expectations

It's faster if we carry on the meeting in Japanese only. Particularly when we have many topics to discuss we tend to go on in Japanese. International students cannot follow the discussion, fall into silence and just sit at the table. So, they might feel it's of no use to come to the meeting. I realize this now.

The equilibrium between Japanese and international students can be easily shaken unless both groups remembered that the gap in language competence is the most serious issue. When they started to plan the lunch-time conversations together, it was obvious in the eyes

of everybody that their Japanese ability was far below the communicative level required for a discussion. Once both groups sat at the same table, there was no other way but to communicate in English. In a year, the foreign students had made some improvement in Japanese, and the Japanese expressions that they used in daily conversation had increased considerably. The Japanese students gradually started to use simple Japanese without translating. However, it is not easy to judge precisely to what extent foreign students could understand; when they needed translation or when the discussion would be better in English. Unless the foreign students stopped the flow of discussion to remind the Japanese students, it was not uncommon for the meeting to continue in Japanese, leaving the foreign students feeling completely left out.

Japanese students often felt that they should not underestimate foreign students' competence, that they may be able to understand a good deal of Japanese since they have already been in Japan for a year, or that it is in their best interest to communicate in Japanese in order to improve. On the other hand, international students have feelings of pride, accept any failure in communication as their own responsibility, and hesitate to ask for translation in the middle of a discussion. Thus, the discussion tends to lack timely and effective intervention to improve mutual understanding.

The allocation of chores related to organising events is another aspect that international students do not effectively participate in. As Student A and C pointed out, Japanese students hesitate to let foreign students take responsibility. In order to understand their hesitation in letting foreigners go unaccompanied to contact ordinary Japanese people, we probably should take socio-environmental factors that might evoke anxiety among the Japanese students into consideration. The Japanese students who participated in the voluntary support activities for new international students observed that at the city office, post office, bank and university administration offices the staff showed little intention or ability to assist those who lack sufficient Japanese language competence. It could have been imprinted in their mind that the foreign students who spoke no Japanese at the time were totally helpless due to the indifferent response at public facilities.

5. Student E: Perceptions of group commitment is the crucial difference

Student E, who had been participating in circle events and making friends with international students, was also a member of the university volleyball club. It was not easy

for her to spend as much time as she wanted with the foreign students because a lot of her time was taken up by club activities. She complained how it was impossible to make foreign students understand her situation

We have different values. Although it amuses me every time I see differences with them, I also wonder what to do. They question us about things we never even thought about. A question like whether we should put a boyfriend or the club first, 'the individual or the group' type of question seems to never even occur to them. No matter how hard we try to explain, they don't get it.

I belong to a sport club which does not allow me to skip daily practice. I go to practice during circle events, or even if I want to go out with the international students. I tell them I have to go because I'm in an important position. But, they say, "You can practice any time." A Japanese person would understand right away and say, "You have my sympathy (*taihen ne*)." They just don't understand.

Student E did not love her club involvement wholeheartedly. In fact, she confessed she wanted to quit if she could

'Cause my college life is totally occupied by this club activity, I've wanted to quit several times. But I didn't have a chance or the courage to do so. There is an atmosphere making it hard to say, "I want to a day off because I'm sick" or "I have something to do with my family." I was actually afraid to say "I quit". Besides, I like the sport, and if I quit, it means I'll abandon it halfway (*chuuto hanpa*). So, I still do it, always thinking how wonderful it would be if we only practiced three times a week.

The more foreign students hear her negative feeling about the club activity, the less they understand why she prefers it to having fun with them

What does the word 'club' truly mean? I sometimes wonder about the gap between the word 'club' that foreign students say and the one I say. They just don't understand. It's not just the club in which people gather to do a sport, but it is a club with vertical human relations. They don't understand it.

The way the group activities constrain individuals seems to be one of the most peculiar Japanese phenomena in the eyes of international students

They won't do anything they don't want to do. But we Japanese tend to put up with doing something (*gaman shite yaru*) even if we don't really want to do it. Is this a national characteristic? I tried to explain it from the point of 'responsibility.' We do it because we have a responsibility; so we do it even if we don't like it.

Last time we were talking about going on a trip during the spring recess. I have the club, so I can't take two days off in a row. They instantly said, "Say you caught a cold, pretend to be sick!" I can't do such a thing.

Student E was unable to solve the dilemma between what constrained her so tightly and what she really felt like doing. It was difficult for her to change her own situation because of her sense of responsibility toward other club members and her belief that you must finish what you start. It is not just a characteristic of sports clubs, but also of cultural clubs which often maintain an atmosphere to induce similar loyalty from members. Student D described the responsibility and difficulty of being the leader of the English club

Everything must be well planned and arranged in advance. When we have a farewell party for the graduating members, we count the exact number of people coming to the initial party, to the second party at a family restaurant, and finally to the *karaoke* party later that evening, and book the places accordingly. If the person in charge fails to prepare everything to perfection, if for example we have to discuss which restaurant to go on the spot without a reservation, or find that the *karaoke* place is full when we get there, the senior students will certainly blame the organizer for putting the group into a chaotic situation.

She also wanted to drop club activities in which the members seemed to be no longer interested, but was opposed by senior members

I'd rather not to have our lunch time activities five days a week any more because most of the younger members prefer to eat lunch with their friends. But the senior students say it's a tradition. I have no authority to change anything. We decide everything at the members' meeting after reaching a unanimous consensus. So it takes an incredibly long time if we want to change something.

She often complained how time consuming and stressful it was to manage the club to the international students, whose reaction was always simple

Every time I talk to international students, they ask me, "Why do you stay in the club? Isn't a club something you join 'cause you want to do it?" or they say, "You are the president. So, do whatever you want. Change it to be the way you want." I say, well, it's not the kind of 'president' you think.

She admitted that she had contemplated quitting the club a few times

But if I quit, I'd cause trouble (*meiwaku*) for others; somebody has to be chosen to fill the place. I can't help thinking this way. I'd hate to be irresponsible and quit in the middle of my term.

Students D and E found the similar communication gap with international students. The strong sense of commitment in group activities reported by these two students is not unrelated to the Japanese students' devotion to meticulous planning and preparation for activities. Their hope to work together with international students to manage the English

circle seemed to face obstacles due to fundamental cultural differences in approaching group activities. In the final section, the three students revealed their experience and thoughts on the distinctive attitude of international students.

6. Students B, C and D: Exploring alternatives

Student C stated that personal friendship is the base for asking foreign students' participation in circle activities. But, not every member of the circle could successfully persuade them. Thus it was inevitable that the role of mediation between the circle and international students was always given to those who had established close relationships with them

You need to be close enough to eat [maybe "talk" or "meet" would be better] with them often. Otherwise, it's tough to ask them anything. When you speak to them, if you are not sure they really know you, you tend to hold back. I know how it is, 'cause I was once like that. It doesn't give a good impression to them. So when the circle plans an event, I'm the one who relays the information to them.

She was also negative about the prospect of international students participating in planning circle meetings

I can't imagine international students speaking their opinions in a group of many Japanese students. When they are asked, "what do you think of this?" in a small gathering of close friends, they don't hesitate at all to respond. But, in the formal setting of the circle meeting, their attitude totally changes. They won't say anything even if they have something to say.

Student B confirmed Student C's observation

Yes, that's the way they are. They don't like the way we hold the meeting regularly on Wednesday lunch time to discuss the management of the circle. They prefer informal gathering over a drink or meal to exchange ideas leisurely and decide things quickly. Why are they like that? Maybe, the meeting sounds too formal. It requires the sense of duty that one must go, doesn't it? It involves 'responsibility.' Yeah, that might be it!

It reminded her of their similar attitude toward club participation

They say, "Why do you have to go to a club? If it is for you to enjoy, you go there when you feel like going." They must feel the same about our circle activities.

At the same time, she also emphasized that they were willing to help prepare for a circle event if the Japanese students ask them personally

They are really OK whenever we talk to them personally. They will check out the hall

key from the office, decorate the hall, move the furniture, prepare dishes, etc., etc. They help us a lot on the spot.

The Japanese students expected to work with the international students on an equal footing in the formal, collective interaction style that they themselves were accustomed to, without realizing there was any other way. After realizing the experience of this 'Japanese style' did not appeal to the foreign students, the Japanese students learned to explore alternatives. Student D also realized that the gap between the international students and themselves could not be easily overcome by merely continuing with what they thought was best for the international students

We were probably mistaken. It's no good to think, "We are doing this for international students," or "This is best for them." Also, we seem to make it difficult for them to join us by doing everything for them before they are even motivated to do anything. They may be satisfied being a guest because we Japanese do everything for them. I first felt they were so insensitive (*kigatsukanai*). But when I asked them, "Why don't you say anything, you are the member of this circle!" they said, "Are we, really?"

She examined the difference between what group membership meant for Japanese and international students. For the Japanese, membership is very important. They bind themselves to a collective framework when they join a group. Thus, the Japanese cannot leave the group easily once they have become a member. They continue to act within the frame of the group even if they are dissatisfied. She detected the reverse in the case of international students; their sense of membership grows to the extent they find satisfaction in the group. She concluded

I think it's more comfortable (*raku*) to take the substance (*jisshitsu*) rather than the formality (*keishiki*). If one is bound by a role, a gap between 'being the member' and 'wanting to be the member' is born like in the case of Japanese. But for international students, there is no such discrepancy. I'm in favor of their way.

Summary and Conclusion

The Japanese students who desired to make friends with foreign students first organized themselves into a formal organization. They set out on their extra-curricular adventure with international students according to the Japanese university tradition. Lacking self-confidence in their language ability and social skills with foreigners, collective approach to meeting international students was a realistic method for them.

Nonetheless, they soon discovered that one-on-one interaction was required if they wished to achieve ‘intimacy’ beyond the superficial relations attained at encounter parties and other circle events. While they were stuck in the initial stage of forming relationships, the support activities of the newly arrived international students provided Japanese students with ice-breaking opportunities to build personal friendships.

Starting with the support activities, the five students in this article have accomplished their goal and developed personal relationships with the foreign students. Further, they tried to overturn the host-guest relationship between the two groups, establish a more equal relationship between them, and make this the backbone of their group activities. Yet through the unexpected troubles and conflicts arising in the process of interaction, they have made realizations about the fundamental differences in cultural perceptions of collectivity. The Japanese students learned that it was almost impossible for international students to participate in the collective action patterns preferred by the Japanese. The equal relationship had more possibility to develop in individually-based interactions with international students.

The five students in this article are those who have overcome their dependence on the collective approach to accomplish their goal. In other words, they have grown out of the group. Nevertheless, they do not intend to abandon group-based activities. Rather, they seek ways to include international students’ needs and ideas into the group’s events and activities. They do this by maintaining two different types of human relationships; the informal and individual-based relationship with international students, and the formal and group-based relationship mainly with other Japanese members of the circle.

This inevitably leads to them functioning as the mediators between the international students and other Japanese students. Here, the circle has to embrace another peculiar issue that the Japanese students who have successfully established close personal relationships with international students unintentionally keep other Japanese students from achieving the same goal by acting as mediators.

REFERENCES

This article is based on the following articles published by the same author in Japanese:

花見楨子 1999 「国際交流に携わる大学生の質的研究に向けて」『三重大学留学生センター紀要』第1

号 1-14

_____ 2000「日本人学生と留学生との交流：対等な関係の模索（その1）」『三重大学留学生センター紀要』第2号 53-66

_____ 2000「日本人学生と留学生との交流：対等な関係の模索（その2）」『留学生と日本人学生との交流活動推進のための研究』（研究代表者：花見槿子）

平成11年度三重大学教育研究内容等改善経費による研究プロジェクト報告書 15-31