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The Formation of Social Networks by International Students from Europe and America at a Japanese University

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Abstract

This paper considers the growth of international students as a world-wide phenomenon over recent years and then hones in specifically to the intake of students to Oita University, Japan. It focuses especially on the interactions among the international students themselves, both on and off campus, and between these students on the one hand and their Japanese counterparts/university staff and the broader community on the other. It finds that the international students, in general, fit in well with their new environment and are very satisfied with the outcomes. Initial language barriers between Americans/Europeans and Koreans/Japanese remained but it was considered that some improvements would be made if the period of stay were to be extended, especially in the case of the Europeans who usually stay for only a five-month semester.

Keywords: social networks, international students, interaction, cross-cultural communication, language barriers

1 Introduction

The growth of world-wide international education over the past quarter of a century has been nothing short of remarkable. Countries have increasingly realized that there are multiple benefits to be gained from a two-way movement of students – especially in the higher-education category. On the one hand, from the sending-country's point of view, overseas education in full (or, more usually, partial) satisfaction of the country's degree requirements, enable the country to tap into the

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culture, language and technology of the recipient-country. From the recipient country's point of view, a channel of communication is opened up between it and various foreign countries which can result in benefits on the international relations stage. Moreover, an influx of students from overseas countries can have a positive effect on the population of the recipient country in as much as it is made aware of the idiosyncrasies and similarities existing among all peoples of the world. It is a moot point as to who gains most from an international exchange of students – the sending-country or the host country. There are socio-political benefits to both parties but also, in many cases, immediate financial gains to the host country.

That there *are* benefits to be derived by the host country is evidenced by the growing competition among countries to welcome students to their shores and in the growth of incoming student numbers. In Japan, for instance, whilst the number of international students studying in the country in 1983 was only about 10,000, by 2007 the number had expanded some 12 fold to almost 120,000. Over all the 24 years, around 90% of these students have been privately funded (providing, in effect, an invisible export for Japan), about 8.5% have received Japanese government scholarships and the remainder, about 1.5%, have been foreign government-sponsored. (Australia and Japan, p.40) It is the intention of the Japanese Ministry of Education and Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT) that the number of international students should expand to 300,000 by 2020.

Australia is another country whose intake of international students has expanded remarkably over recent years. Whilst the total number of international students in Australia in 2002 was around 258,000, by 2008 the number had grown to some 495,000. About 39% of these students were enrolled in New South Wales' institutions, and some 30% in Victorian institutions, in 2008. "Students from 187 countries studied in Victoria in 2007 (whilst) 50 per cent of the total overseas student body is from China and India." (Overseas Student Education Experience Task Force, p.7) The proportion of international students studying in Victoria coming from Japan is c. 2 %. As for Victoria's immediate financial benefit from in-coming students, we might note that international education is the State's largest services export (www.study Melbourne, www.study Victoria.com.au and Department of Education website). (The author has previously considered Australian experience – Kumamoto-Healey 2009).

Whilst we might concede that current world economic conditions militate against a continuation of the dramatic upsurges of student demand for overseas education, and whilst it is clear that host countries will probably be witnessing in the short-term a diminution of foreign exchange earnings from “selling” education, we can nonetheless expect a sustained interest in the whole process of international education.

We have sketched above the socio-political and the financial rewards from international education. What of the benefits *to the student*? It is in this area that problems are beginning to emerge — and some of these were tackled by the Victorian Task Force alluded to above. In theory, the process of student transmigration *should* lead to greater international understanding. But, on the evidence so far available, it has proved difficult in practice to make the campus of the host institution “international”. It is the aim of this paper to (a) depict some of the experience of international students in the host environment of Japan and of Oita specifically and (b) to examine some of the problems that arose in practice and to suggest ways of overcoming them.

2 Results of Questionnaire of Inquiries No. 1 and No. 2 at Oita University

It was thought desirable by the Centre for International Education and Research (thereafter, CIER) of Oita University to give serious attention to the question of interaction and social networking between international students and the local students of the University and the broader community. As an integral aspect of the reception for and the on-going study programme of the international student, the CIER makes an arrangement to provide each international student with a Japanese student “tutor”. [At Japanese National Universities the so-called “Tutor System” has been operating to assist international students to smooth out the transition to campus life. Each international student is allocated a Japanese student as a “buddy”.] For this reason two Inquiries, so far, have been conducted; the first of these, involving students who studied at the University between October 2007 and July 2008, was based primarily on American students. The second, involving students who studied between October 2008 and February 2009, consisted of European students. Some interesting similarities and contrasts between these two nationality-based student-groups have emerged.

The method of conducting Inquiries was by a Questionnaire in English. The first Inquiry was conducted in July 2008 and the second, utilizing an identical Questionnaire, in February 2009. Both Inquiries involved CIER students. For the first Inquiry the Questionnaire was completed by a sample of 9 students from the USA and 2 students from Europe. The second Inquiry was conducted with 7 European students. Subsequent follow-up interviews with both sets of students were conducted for clarification and elaboration of some of the crucial questions/statements of the Questionnaire.

The Questionnaire (a full copy of which is available from the author) was divided into two sections: the initial part, Part A (not provided in this paper), completed by each student, consisted of six questions designed to elicit information on the student's background and experience; Part B consisted of twenty "statements" relating to their attitudes towards various intercultural aspects of life in Japan and Oita — statements with which the student indicated a certain degree of agreement or disagreement.

We give initial consideration to Part A of the first Inquiry.

2.1 Inquiry No. 1: Questionnaire Part A.

The age-range of the 11 students was from 21 years to 50 years and there were 8 males and 3 females. The sample students came into contact with other international students either in their shared accommodation or in classes, etc; the Questionnaire asked respondents to indicate which language/s they used when speaking to fellow international students of the following nationalities: American, British, European, Korean, Chinese and "other". A summary of the results is as follows:

- When speaking to Americans: 7 used English, 3 used English/Japanese 1 used English/Spanish.
- When speaking to British: 2 used English (the only two recorded).
- When speaking to Europeans: 6 used English, 2 used English/Japanese, 2 used English/German, 1 used Japanese.
- When speaking to Koreans: 10 used Japanese, 1 used Japanese/English.
- When speaking to Chinese: 2 used English, 6 used English/Japanese, 2 used Japanese, 1 used English/Japanese/Chinese.

- When speaking to other nationalities: 2 used English solely, 2 used English/Japanese (only four of the eleven spoke to “other nationalities” which consisted of Africans, Thais, Malaysians and Indonesians).

Two analogous questions referred to the language/s the sample of students spoke to (a) Japanese students (including their tutors) and to (b) university staff. The responses indicated that when speaking to Japanese students, 7 used English/Japanese (one of the seven used, additionally, German) and 4 used Japanese. When speaking to university staff, 6 used English/Japanese, 2 used English only and 3 used Japanese only.

A concise depiction of the main aspects of language interaction is shown in Table 1. Source: Questionnaire.

To \ Language	English	English/ Japanese	Japanese	English and languages other than English	Total
Americans	7	3	0	1 (Spanish)	11
Europeans	6	2	1	1 (German)	11
Chinese	2	6	2	1 (Japanese & Chinese)	11
Koreans	0	1	10	0	11
Japanese students (incl. tutors)	0	6	4	1 (German)	11
Japanese staff	2	6	3	0	11

Table 1: Inquiry No.1 - Language/s used by number of Sample Students when Conversing with Various Categories

It is clear, therefore, that main languages used by international students for all communications was English. Primarily this follows from the fact that nine students were Americans and that seven of them were at the intermediate level of Japanese; only 2 Americans were advanced learners. We conclude, therefore, that the intermediate level American students were not sufficiently competent in Japanese to conduct their communications entirely in Japanese when they spoke to Asian students, particularly to Korean students (who spoke fluent Japanese but not English). On the other hand, when American and European students spoke to Chinese students (who generally spoke English much better than did the Koreans), English was mainly used. The question as to why American and European students

consider it easier to communicate with Chinese rather than with Korean students is interesting in its own right – it will be considered again in the next section.

Part A’s section of the Questionnaire went on to consider the students’ rather extensive range of experience of living in Japan and other countries. It appears from their responses that most students had been exposed to some experience of Japanese living before coming to Oita; one might assume, therefore, that they had some preconception of what they might face whilst studying in Japan.

The last section of Part A of the Questionnaire raised the question of friendships made by students after arrival in Oita. All the 11 sample students stated that they *had* made friends since their arrival. Nine of them indicated that they had made friends with Japanese and other international students; two indicated that their friendship had been only with other international students.

When we came to inquire how friendships were made, we found a very wide range of replies, a complete rendering of which is given below in Table 2. Source: Questionnaires.

Student	Method of friendship-making
A	Fellow international students.
B	English conversation; parties; meeting on campus; friends.
C	International House; joined a student circle/club of the University.
D	Through school (university).
E	Tutoring; friends of tutors; helping students adjust.
F	Classes; common activities; shared interests; living in same building.
G	Same class; parties.
H	Through tutors; or a circle.
I	Around school; International Centre.
J	We felt isolated so began doing things together.
K	Cooking party; basketball.

Table 2: Inquiry No.1. – How Friendships were made in Oita
by the Sample Group of Students

It appears that there are few common factors in the above list — except for parties! However, as expected, the lives of the students mostly revolved around the university community. In other words, either out of lack of desire or lack of opportunity they had not, in general, made friends outside the University.

2.2 Inquiry No. 1: Questionnaire Part B.

We now turn our attention to Part B of the Questionnaire in Inquiry No.1 and comment on the results shown in Table 3. To assist the reader to interpret these tabular results, the following list of the statements in the Questionnaire is provided:¹

1. If I were visiting a foreign country I would like to be able to speak the language of the people.
2. If I planned to stay in another country, I would make a great effort to learn the language even though I could get along in English.
3. Studying Japanese is important for me because it enables me to better understand and appreciate Japanese culture.
4. Studying Japanese is important for me because it enables me to participate more freely in the activities of Japanese groups.
5. Studying Japanese is important for me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job.
6. Studying Japanese is important for me only because I'll need it for my future career.
7. Studying Japanese is important for me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and a variety of people.
8. When I leave university, I will continue to study Japanese because I am interested in it.
9. I try out the Japanese I know whenever I have a chance to use it.
10. I am not embarrassed when I first meet Japanese people speaking in Japanese.
11. I really enjoy living in Oita.
12. Japanese people are considerate of the feelings of others.
13. I have always admired the Japanese people.
14. Japanese people are very kind and generous.
15. Japanese people are trustworthy and dependable.
16. Living in Japan is really a good experience for me.
17. I have a favourable attitude towards Japanese people and their culture.

¹ In the original version of the Questionnaire and in the author's paper based on it, "Statements" Nos.8 and 19 inadvertently appeared in a manner contrary to the others. They now read correctly and in conformity with the remainder. In consequence, the figures appearing in Table 3 have been adjusted to take account of the intended meaning of the two "Statements"

18. I would like to get to know Japanese people better.
19. The more I learn about Japanese people, the easier it is to understand them.
20. The more I learn about Japanese people and their culture, the more I like them.

Each of the statements listed above could be answered by the student as 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (neutral), 4 (disagree), or 5 (strongly disagree); respondents were asked to select only one of the five numbers. Source: Questionnaires.

“Statement” Number	Response					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
1	9	2	-	-	-	11
2	8	2	1	-	-	11
3	7	3	-	1	-	11
4	8	2	-	1	-	11
5	4	6	1	-	-	11
6	2	1	1	3	4	11
7	8	2	1	-	-	11
8	1	9	1	-	-	11
9	4	2	4	1	-	11
10	2	4	3	1	1	11
11	6	4	1	-	-	11
12	2	4	5	-	-	11
13	1	6	4	-	-	11
14	4	3	4	-	-	11
15	4	2	5	-	-	11
16	11	-	-	-	-	11
17	5	4	2	-	-	11
18	6	3	2	-	-	11
19	4	2	4	1	-	11
20	2	5	3	1	-	11
Totals	98	66	42	9	5	220

Table 3: Inquiry No.1 - Summary of Students’ Responses to each statements in Part B of Questionnaire.

2.3 Inquiry No.1: Results of Questionnaire Part B.

In designing the Questionnaire the intention was that “positive” statements, indicative of a broadly “integrative “ approach to study in Oita, would elicit the response of 1 (“strongly agree”) or 2 (“agree”). The total number of possible responses is 220 (11 students x 20 statements per questionnaire). As Table 3 shows, 164 (98 + 66), or 74.5 % of the responses, were in the “strongly agree” or “agree” category. Only 14 (9 + 5) or 6.4 % were in the negative categories of “strongly disagree” or “disagree”. Of the total responses, 42, or 19.1 % could be regarded as ambivalent. We conclude that the students in Inquiry No.1 were overwhelmingly favourably disposed to their experience of Oita.

2.4 Inquiry No. 1: Results of Follow-up Interviews

As a follow-up to the Questionnaire an interview was conducted with each of the students in the two Inquiries. The questions posed in the follow-up interviews were as follows:

1. What do you think the role of the tutor should be? Have you ever felt a barrier between you and your tutor?
2. Have you ever made a Japanese friend(s) or acquaintance(s) outside the University?
3. In what way have you interacted with international students?
4. In what way have you interacted with Japanese within the University? In what way have you interacted with Japanese outside the University?
5. Has the International Programme at Oita University (IPOU) met your expectations? What did you expect from the University prior to coming here?

With a view to summarizing the views of the students at the interviews the following points may be made:

1. American and European students tend to hold the view that it was easier to get on well with Chinese than with Korean students. American students somehow perceived that Chinese students expressed their views and emotions more directly, like Americans. The most frequently cited reason for this was that most Korean students were not so friendly and open with American and European students, but

that they got on well with Japanese students. The standard of Japanese language ability displayed by Koreans was vastly superior to that of other nationalities and, therefore, Korean students felt more comfortable with Japanese than with any other students. American and European students felt excluded or isolated when Koreans were with Japanese. The view was that there existed not only language but also cultural barriers between Koreans on the one hand and Americans/Europeans on the other. However, there were exceptions — some American and European students who spoke Japanese could and did make Korean friends.

Further investigation into the issue discussed in the previous paragraph involved the interviewing of a few Korean students. This revealed some intercultural misunderstandings. Korean students *did* want to mix with American and European students, but they did not know how to approach them, particularly when there was *no* common language to communicate with effectively. Koreans had not realized the effect of their actions when they told Americans that Korean parties were for Koreans and Japanese; they did not intentionally intend to exclude Americans and Europeans.

The following Tables 4 and 5 show the composition of nationalities in International House — the university-provided accommodation for international students. Both tables show that Koreans were the largest single-language group in the House. The author believes that this factor greatly contributed to the fact that Koreans had isolated themselves from other international students.

Countries /Areas	Mainland China	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Korea	USA	Europe	Total
Number	10	2	1	17	7	2	39

Table 4. Number of International Students in International House by Countries and Areas of Origin (Spring 2008)

Countries /Areas	Mainland China	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Korea	USA	Europe	Total
Number	5	0	0	14	11	11	41

Table 5. Number of International Students in International House by Countries and Areas of Origin (Autumn 2008)

The predominance of Koreans in the House is especially marked in the Spring 2008 statistics. However, since the arrival of new students from America and Europe in October 2008, the demography of international students in the House has drastically changed (see Table 5). It is reported that some Korean students have been trying to interact socially with German students (5 from Germany) with aid of dictionaries. Further research into the issue of the effects of one language-group's predominance in International House is required.

2. American and European students generally appreciated the fact that the majority of the Japanese tutors were helpful, particularly when they arrived in Oita at the beginning of the semester. But they were critical of other tutors who were unwilling to assist their international students in understanding Japanese social customs. Some tutors did not seem to know what they were expected to do as tutors for international students; some tutors did the minimum duty (e.g, a weekly-hourly-meeting with the student) which they were obliged to do by the CIER. Tutors were expected by American and European students to expand their social network and help them with the more social aspects of life in Japan; this expectation was not always met.

It was also pointed out by some interviewees that Japanese tutors lacked the ability or experience to understand other cultures; students felt and experienced cultural barriers between themselves and their tutors.

3. On the whole, American and European students did not develop "deep" social networks with Japanese people outside the University. They did not usually have the opportunity during the week. They tended to meet Japanese people outside of campus when they frequented eating and drinking places or had part-time jobs. In the relatively few cases when American and European male students had Japanese girlfriends their networks easily expanded beyond their university community; they were introduced to their friends' family and friends and they were readily accepted as "in-group" members. They enjoyed being accepted by Japanese people in the local community in this way. This shows that international students need local students who are willing to assist overseas students to integrate into the Japanese community.

3 Inquiry No. 2

Some six months after the departure from Oita of the students involved in Inquiry No.1, a second Inquiry, conducted in a manner similar to the first, was undertaken on a new cohort of student arrivals. We should note when comparing the results of the two Inquiries that (a) the group of students investigated in Inquiry No.1 were intermediate-level-in-Japanese students, were primarily from USA and stayed in Oita for two semesters i.e. approximately 10-11 months, and (b) the students in Inquiry No.2 were at the Beginners'-level-in-Japanese, were entirely from Europe and stayed in Oita for only one semester i.e. approximately 4-5 months.

3.1 Inquiry No. 2: Questionnaire Part A

The age-range of the 7 students in the second Inquiry was 19 years to 27 years and there were 4 males and 3 females. All of the students came from Europe (5 from Germany, 1 from Sweden, 1 from Great Britain). Six of the seven arrived in Oita September 2008; one arrived in October 2008.

As was the case in Inquiry No.1, the students came into contact with other international students either in their shared accommodation (the University's International House) or in classes etc.

When asked to indicate which language/s each student used to communicate with persons of other language-groups the responses were as tabulated in Table 6 below. Source: Questionnaires.

To \ Language	English	English/ Japanese	Japanese	English and languages other than English	Total
Americans	7	0	0	0	7
Europeans (including British)	0	0	0	7 (German)	7
Chinese	5	0	0	2 (Japanese)	7
Koreans	4	0	1	1 (Japanese)	6 ²
Japanese students (incl.tutors)	2	0	0	5 (Japanese/German)	7
Japanese staff	6	0	0	1 (Japanese)	7

Table 6. Inquiry No.2: Language/s used by Number of Sample Students
when Conversing with Various Categories

It is clear that, to an even greater extent than was apparent with the group of students in Inquiry No.1, English is the primary language of communication among all nationalities. And since all seven students in Inquiry No.2 were at the level of “Beginners’ Japanese”, it should be noted that even where “Japanese” is mentioned in the Table as being used in the “English and languages other than English” column, it is Japanese at a very low level of proficiency.

With respect to the questions asked about the students’ previous experience of foreign travel/foreign living and of visiting/ living in Japan, we find, with some surprise, that this European group of students has had negligible experience of living out of the student’s country of origin. Only two have lived abroad – one in USA (this student had also been born abroad) and one in Ireland – and *none* had ever visited Japan previously. In this regard, the students of Inquiry No.1, primarily from the United States, were considerably more adventurous and “footloose” than their European counterparts. We might expect, therefore, that the European students in Inquiry No.2 experienced a much greater degree of “cultural shock” when coming to Japan than the students of Inquiry No.1. Perhaps the European students, then, were less prepared to “merge” their identities with the host country than those from USA...?

The final section of Part A of the Questionnaire was designed to elicit information on whether and how the students made friendships whilst in Oita. All had, in fact, made new friendships. Four had made friends with both Japanese and

² One student had no conversational contact with Koreans at all.

other international students and three had made friends with international students only. The ways by which friendship were made are detailed in Table 7 below. No consistent pattern of friendship-making emerges, except that we must conclude that all the students save one made their friendships exclusively within the context of the University. To this extent, Inquiry No. 2 students are on a par with students of Inquiry No.1.

As with Inquiry No.1, follow-up questions were conducted with the students of Inquiry No.2. A summary of the views presented follows. Source: Questionnaires.

Student	Method of friendship-making
A	At school (university); at the bar.
B	At school (university); participating in activities and field trips.
C	International friendships through daily life; Japanese friendships through field trips and festivities and by joining a public sports club.
D	Regular contact.
E	Living together.
F	During classes.
G	Japanese friendships through school (university) leading to friendship with tutors of other international students; international friendships through classes and the Kaikan (International House, the student dormitory)

Table 7: Inquiry No.2 - How Friendships were made in Oita
by the Sample Group of Students

3.2 Inquiry No. 2: Questionnaire Part B

We now turn our attention to Part B of the Questionnaire and comment on the results shown in Table 8 below.

To remind the reader of the meaning of the figures from 1 to 5 in the body of the Table: 1 = strongly agree with the Questionnaire statement, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree.

The total number of possible responses is 140 (7 students x 20 statements per questionnaire). The Table shows that 102 (58 + 44) or 72.9% of the responses were in the “strongly agree” or “agree” positive categories. Only 19 (10 +9) or 13.6% were in the negative categories of “strongly disagree” or “disagree”. Of the total responses, 19, or 13.6% could be regarded as ambivalent. The results are broadly similar to those in Inquiry No.1. Source: Questionnaires.

"Statement" Number	Response					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
1	5	1	1	-	-	7
2	4	1	2	-	-	7
3	2	3	2	-	-	7
4	3	4	-	-	-	7
5	1	-	2	3	1	7
6	-	-	-	1	6	7
7	1	3	2	1	-	7
8	1	1	2	3	-	7
9	1	4	2	-	-	7
10	2	1	2	2	-	7
11	5	2	-	-	-	7
12	5	1	1	-	-	7
13	1	2	3	-	1	7
14	6	1	-	-	-	7
15	4	3	-	-	-	7
16	6	1	-	-	-	7
17	4	3	-	-	-	7
18	2	4	1	-	-	7
19	5	2	-	-	-	7
20	3	3	1	-	-	7
Totals	58	44	19	10	9	140

Table 8: Inquiry No. 2 - Summary of Students' Responses to each "Statement" in Part B of Questionnaire

3.3 Inquiry No. 2: Results of Follow-up Interviews

As was the case with Inquiry No.1, follow-up interviews to the Questionnaire were conducted with the 7 students of Inquiry No.2. The same questions (those listed in Section 2.4.) were posed.

A summarization of the views of the students is as follows:

All the students agreed that the appointment of a tutor to each of them was not only a good idea but *essential*. None had experienced any barrier between student and tutor but two students indicated that there had been "communication difficulties" initially (e.g. "silences" occurred when neither party could formulate appropriate expressions).

Six out of the seven students had *not* make friends or acquaintances outside the University. The exception, one with above-average language ability and possessing a more “outgoing” attitude joined a public sports club. The six who had had no contacts outside the University gave as their reasons the fact that they had had no time to do so and/or that they could not speak Japanese well enough to mix freely with Japanese people. One of the six joined the Kendo club at the University; this student attended it half a dozen times. (The student had been welcomed and enjoyed the experience. It is obvious that language had presented no barrier to communication). The impression left from this part of the Interview was that students considered that they enjoyed adequate facilities at the University and that, therefore, there was no need to seek them out externally.

All the students had regular contact with American students and other European students at International House (the student dormitory) and at university activities. Contact with Korean and Chinese students was negligible; interaction *did* occur but, especially in the case of the Koreans, was rather limited on account of the lack of English language proficiency on the part of the Koreans. (There was the one exception again of the “outgoing” student mentioned above who, in his club, spoke to Chinese and Koreans using Japanese acquired during the winter break, i.e. after having been in Oita for three months).

Within the University, students interacted with the International Office Administrative Staff in English and the students considered that all the university staff had been helpful. By the end of the course students had come to consider their tutors, with whom they conversed mainly in English, as friends. As commented on above, none of the students – except the one who had joined the public sports club – had no interaction with Japanese outside the University. (“No interaction” means that students did not continue the relationship; it excludes the probability that students chatted over drinks and restaurant meals, etc.)

It appeared from the Interviews that no student had had a firm set of “expectations” prior to coming to Oita! Nevertheless, all indicated that whatever expectations they might have had were exceeded by their actual interesting experience of Oita. All said that they would recommend the International Programme at Oita University (IPOU) to fellow students in their home institutions. (IPOU is designed to provide a range of Japanese subject studies from language to culture over one or two semesters).

4 Comparison Between Inquiries No.1 and No.2 in Respect of Interaction Among Student Language Group

Charts 1 and 2 below present a succinct interpretation of the interactions which occurred among students from America, Europe, China and Korea during the two time-period covered by Inquiry No.1. and Inquiry No.2. The degree of interaction depicted in the set-diagrams was deduced from information revealed during the post-questionnaire interviews and also from a special, separate inquiry made of Korean students by the author.

Chart 1 shows the interactions during Spring of 2008 and depicts the following:

- Chinese students interacted with all language-groups (American/European, Korean and Japanese)
- American/European students interacted with Chinese and Japanese, but not with Koreans.
- Japanese students interacted with all language groups.
- Korean students interacted with Japanese and Chinese students.

Chart 2 shows the interactions during Autumn 2008; it allows us to conclude that over the intervening period there has been some shift in the degree of interactions among the groups, the obvious change being the existence now of *some* interaction between the Korean students and the American/European Group. One of the reasons for this may be due to the fact that in Spring, the Korean students dominated to a major extent other students in numbers in International House (18 Koreans, 7 Americans, 2 Europeans) and consequently a “Korean-group” emerged which tended to be inward-looking. The dominance of the Korean group was, however, modified by the Autumn when a reduced number of Koreans (14) shared accommodation with an increased number of Americans (11) and Europeans (11). This change probably “opened up” interaction possibilities and encouraged Korean involvement with other nationalities.

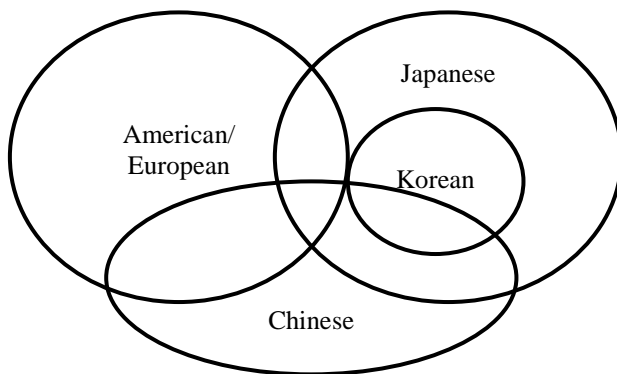


Chart 1: Inquiry No.1 – Schematic Depiction of Interactions among Students of Various Language Groups at Oita University, Spring 2008

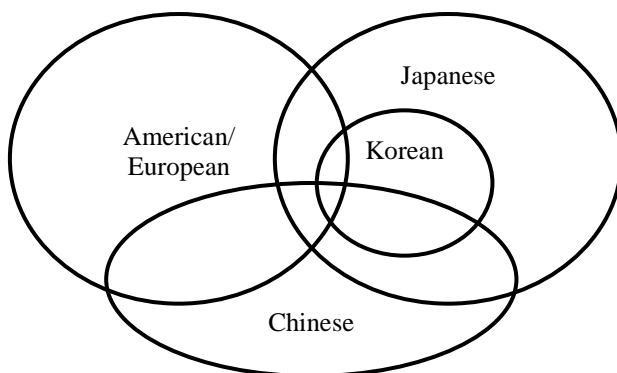


Chart 2: Inquiry No.2 – Schematic Depiction of Interactions among Students of Various Language Groups at Oita University, Autumn 2008

5 Conclusions

There is ample evidence that the trend towards increasingly important international education is growing. The paper has indicated that whilst national benefits are relatively easy to estimate, there are indeed problems for the host country in ensuring that in-coming students benefit fully from their experience. The issue of interaction among the incoming students themselves and those students on the one hand and local students/residents on the other was one which led to the two Inquiries discussed in the paper. Some interesting conclusions

emerged from a comparison between Inquiry No.1 conducted on the Spring 2008 intake (the primarily American students of this intake studied from Autumn 2007 for two semesters), and Inquiry No.2 conducted on the Autumn 2008 intake, involving European students. Both Inquiries were made through the medium of Questionnaires and follow-up interviews. In general, it might be said that students of different language-groups interacted well among themselves but that there was relatively little interaction between the overseas students and Japanese students/local population. However, such interactions as did take place were friendly and productive. Part of the explanation for the lack of communication with the local population was that the University environment, both on campus and in the student accommodation, appeared to meet most of the students' interaction requirements.

An interesting point emerged regarding the *composition* of the whole international student-body. Both on campus and in International House, the student dormitory, it appears that when one language-group was predominant in numbers (as happened in Spring 2008 when Koreans were the major group) there was no interaction between them and Americans/Europeans. In effect, the Koreans formed a "clique" and interacted only among themselves or with Japanese and *some* Chinese. It appears that they saw no need to interact socially with *all* other international students or that their English language skills proved inadequate for communication. The predominance of one language-group of students in International House was modified in Autumn 2008; in consequence, interaction among all groups was more pronounced (see Tables 4 and 5 and Charts 1 and 2).

As for some recommendations for future action flowing from the Inquiries, it can be stated with confidence that the tutor-system, whereby a Japanese student "bonds" with a nominated incoming student is invaluable and should be continued. However, it is possible that the effectiveness of this system could be enhanced if intercultural training sessions were to be introduced for both Japanese tutors and international students. *Secondly*, attention should be paid to the composition of the student-body of International House and the desirable total numbers of students in any *one* unit of accommodation (in the event that the provision of additional recommendation becomes necessary consequent upon the Japanese Government's grandiloquent proposal to expand incoming international student numbers to 300,000 by 2020 from the c. 120,000 of the present). Our experience from the Inquiries is that the predominance of one language group in one accommodation-

unit should be avoided. *Thirdly*, an effort should be made to expand international student interaction with the local community. Visits to schools and to community groups are helpful in this regard but it would be desirable for international students to gain a greater awareness of Japanese life by *participating* to some extent in the normal household activities of a Japanese family. The aim should be, therefore, to establish the current Home Visits/Home Stays Programme on a firmer footing so as to make Visits/Stays more regular and more organised. If possible, the Visits/Stays should be more integrated with the student's whole study programme. We conclude, finally, that further studies should be undertaken to construct an Interaction Enhancement Programme.

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