

International Exchange Activities Report 2025

Introduction

Vice Chairman of Association of Private Universities of Japan

Director in Charge and Chairperson of International Exchange Committee



Ichiro Tanioka

President

Osaka University of Commerce

The depreciation of yen has increased the travel expenses, leading to the decline of the condition for studying abroad from Japan. In addition, as the result of the US President Trump cutting the budget for universities and tightening the visa issuance, a degree of confusion seems to be spreading among the students hoping to study in the United States. Furthermore, regarding China, due to the change of the international atmosphere, both sending and receiving of the students showed the declining trend. On the other hand, some other countries such as Myanmar and Bangladesh, showed the similar increased number along with Nepal and Vietnam in recent years, as the result, the total number of international students is progressing steadily for the time being.

On December 1st this year, Association of Private Universities of Japan will be holding its 80th anniversary celebration, and on the following day, December 2nd, there will be a related international exchange event, so please mark these dates on your schedule. In particular, with Thailand, Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia, Mongol, Vietnam, and other countries in Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, we are scheduled to exchange documents regarding the extension and continuation of comprehensive agreement established on our 70th anniversary. The representatives of those countries are expected to participate, so if you are interested in participating, please contact us.

It seems that students these days are showing less motivation to go abroad. The changes of the learning environment may be the possible reason, including the fact that Japan is safe and easy to live, and with the development of AI and online learning system, the students do not need to go abroad to achieve education at certain level. Nevertheless, as the saying goes, 「百聞は一見にしかず」 'Seeing is Believing', the insights that can only be gained through direct communication with the locals, are invaluable experiences and students will undoubtedly feel that it was worthwhile to go. Some might assume that other countries have similar cultures and customs, but in fact, there is nothing that is exactly the same. Recognizing these differences fosters a

relative sense of values, and ultimately serves as excellent training for becoming a successful global citizen.

As the person in charge of this international exchange event, I believe that we have to consider several factors in choosing destinations for students, such as ‘guarantee a certain level of physical safety’, and ‘maintain a certain standard of hygiene’.

Moreover, the place should ensure ‘the free and independent learning’. I do not, of course, oppose studying abroad in countries where someone may be arrested for criticizing certain subjects, I believe that such courage is important, however, it is not something I would recommend (especially as the first study abroad destination).

Various policies will be implemented this fiscal year, and we may face some challenges in responding to them. Nevertheless, we kindly ask for your continued support and cooperation.

Mongolian State University of Arts and Culture Affiliated High School Visited Japan Experiencing Music Exchange and Student Life at Tokyo College of Music

The affiliated high school of the Mongolian State University of Arts and Culture, a core education institution of Mongolian Private Universities Association, which our association has a comprehensive agreement with, visited Japan on a school trip in April 2025. At Mongolian State University of Arts and Culture and the affiliated high school, Japanese language is a compulsory subject, and the students, who have a strong interest in Japanese culture on daily basis, were said to have been looking forward to this visit.

On April 22nd, the group visited Tokyo College of Music. First, they visited Daikanyama campus and enjoyed the special performance of the collaboration of Eastern and Western music instruments, performed by Tokyo College of Music students.



(Collaboration Performance featuring violin and koto)

Next, the Mongolian students performed the song from their home country, creating a warm cultural exchange through music.



(Students singing Mongolian song)

Afterward, the students split into groups, and with the support of interpreter teachers they actively engaged in opinion exchange, discussing about their own cultures and student life. It proved to be a valuable moment that deepening their understanding of one another.



(Japan and Mongolian students, cultural exchange)

In the afternoon, the groups moved to Ikebukuro campus, and observed the Japanese student clubs activities. By engaging in the actual student life, the Mongolian students were able to deepen their understanding of Japanese school culture, and felt a great joy and inspiration.

We hope that the students who came to Japan this time will grow up while cherishing experiences and wonderful memories in Japan in their heart as they go on to become university students and part of the society one day in the future.

VYSA JOB FAIR 2025

The 18th VYSA JOB FAIR 2025 was held on Saturday, April 19th.

In the opening speech, the VYSA Chairperson Ngo Thi Anh Tuyet stated, " VYSA conducts various activities aimed at supporting international students and young people, job employment support is one of the important pillars. Through this event, I sincerely hope that the participants can find the work style that suits them, and a place where they can utilize their abilities, and the companies can develop new connections with outstanding students. "



(VYSA Chairperson Ngo Thi Anh Tuyet Delivering a Speech)

Moreover, the first secretary of Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Japan, Vu Thi Lien Phong stated, " The community of Vietnamese students in Japan is expanding year by year, growing significantly not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of quality. The VYSA JOB FAIR is not only a place for employment activities, but also a great opportunity to learn, interact, and promote personal growth. I hope it can be also a good opportunity for participating companies and students. "

A total of 11 companies gave presentations, including major corporations such as Obayashi Corporation and Mitani Sangyo Co.,Ltd., conveying their importance on the fair. The diversity of occupations, ranging from system engineering, consulting, civil engineering, to staff outsourcing agencies, highlighted the excellence of Vietnamese students. With nearly 50 participants attending on-site and additional participants

online, it was clear that this was a large-scale event.



(Company Presentation at Booth in the Venue)

Visitation to the Mongolian Association of Private Universities

This spring, the Mongolian Association of Private Universities contacted us, stating they wanted to visit to introduce themselves due to a change in their chairman, but our schedules did not align. Therefore, our association's secretariat decided to visit them this time to discuss establishing and strengthening future cooperation.

On July 9th, we visited a suburban facility of the Mongolian University of Culture and Education, a core member university of the Mongolian Association of Private Universities. The university has departments of Japanese Language, Economics, Computer Programming, and Tourism, and Japanese language classes are mandatory even in departments other than Japanese Language. During the summer break, students work at the suburban facility, improving their Japanese language skills through interaction with Japanese people who use the facility. Students who had completed long-term internships in Japan had acquired Japanese manners and their polite demeanor left a positive impression.



(The suburban facility of the Mongolian State University of Arts and Culture)

On July 10, we visited the university's new campus building in Ulaanbaatar. It is conveniently located near the city center and offers excellent accessibility. Although the former campus building is situated across from the new one, some classes for the affiliated high school and certain university courses will continue to be held there. The new building is 17 stories high, of which three floors are used by the university. With

more spacious student lounges and individual consultation rooms than in the previous building, students expressed positive feedback, noting that it would make campus life more comfortable.



(Chairperson Soichi Makihara giving a tour of the new school building)

Afterwards, we held discussions with Mr. Nemehbaatar, Chairperson of the Mongolian Association of Private Universities and Chairman of the Mongolian University of Science and Technology, along with other members of the executive board. Mr. Nemehbaatar explained that the Mongolian Ministry of Education had attempted to evaluate all universities in the country and publish a ranking; however, because the evaluation method favored national universities, the results were biased, with national universities occupying all the top positions, followed by private universities. As a result, the association lodged a formal protest, and the publication was subsequently suspended. He emphasized that private universities are also institutions of higher education and should be accorded greater respect, and that they are continuing to appeal to the government on this matter. This was followed by a question-and-answer session regarding our association's activities and Japan's higher education policies.

Hidefumi Koide, Director of the Association of Private Universities of Japan, stated, "Private universities are the ideal institutions of higher education. Their role in the development of the country is no less than that of national universities. Eliminating the disparity between national and private universities will lead to strengthening higher education as a nation." Both Japan and Mongolia agreed to cooperate with each other to

promote private education.

On July 11, we held an exchange of opinions with individuals who had studied in Japan as well as Japanese language instructors. In recent years, among Asian countries, South Korea has been more frequently chosen than Japan as a destination for work and study by Mongolian students; however, it was noted that many young people still have a strong interest in and admiration for Japanese culture. In order to enhance Japan's presence in the international community, it may be necessary to review the government's policies toward Mongolia, including the structure of the Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students (EJU) and the dispatch of Japanese language teachers to private universities in Mongolia.



(Secretary General of Association of Private Universities in of Japan, Hidemasa Koide, offering a prayer at the memorial for Japanese internees)

Reconstructing Higher Education in the Age of AI: Insights from the IAUP 60th Anniversary Conference

From October 13 to 15, 2025, the IAUP (International Association of University Presidents) 60th Anniversary Conference and Semi-Annual Meeting were held in Seoul, South Korea. Hosted by Seoul Cyber University, the conference brought together over 130 higher education leaders from around the world. Under the theme 'Reconstructing Higher Education: Innovation, Inclusion, and Global Collaboration in the Age of AI,' a variety of sessions were conducted.

IAUP's Historic Milestone and the Call for Reconstruction

At the opening of the conference, Tatsuro Tanioka, Secretary General of IAUP and Vice Chairman of Osaka University of Commerce, positioned the 60th anniversary as "a year of rebirth in the East" and emphasized that higher education should be restructured for a new era. This call was made in light of the current situation where the rapid advancement of AI technology is bringing about fundamental changes in the way education is conducted, and it served as a reminder of the need for international collaboration. Next, an achievement award was presented to the late Toyoshi Sato, former President of J.F. Oberlin University and former Chairperson of the Association of Private Universities of Japan, receiving warm applause from the audience.



(Achievement Award to Former President Toyoshi Sato)



(Vice Chairman Tatsuro Tanioka of Osaka University of Commerce in the Dialogue)

Prospects for Comprehensive Innovation and Multilingual Education

In the session titled ‘Promoting Comprehensive Innovation in Global Education,’ President Hiroaki Hatayama of J.F. Oberlin University talked about the university’s establishment of English and Chinese language degree programs and its plans for future expansion. This initiative demonstrates the university’s commitment to meeting contemporary demands through the internationalization of education via linguistic diversity and institutional measures, including reforms to the admissions system



(President of J.F. Oberlin University, Hiroaki Hatayama, Participating in the Session)

The Direction of AI and Human Resource Development

Multiple speakers engaged in lively discussions on how AI is affecting the structure of education. Just as there was once a demand for engineering professionals, followed later by a rise in demand for information technology specialists, the types of talent society seeks change over time. Based on these changes, some have suggested that highly versatile humanities and social science education will become increasingly important in the future. While the introduction of AI technology will improve the efficiency of education, the cultivation of human qualities beyond the transmission of knowledge remains the domain of human-led education.

The Value of Face-to-face Education and the Role of Universities

In the final session of the conference, Ichiro Tanioka, Chairman and President of Osaka University of Commerce, acknowledged the development of online education while emphasizing the value of face-to-face education in terms of the amount of information it provides and the human interaction it fosters. He stressed the importance of education that cultivates humanity as the essence of education that cannot be replaced by AI, and suggested an expansion of the role that university faculty and staff should fulfill.



(Chairman/President of Osaka University of Commerce, Ichiro Tanioka, Participating in Panel Discussion)

The Mission of Universities in the Age of AI

In a society coexisting with AI, universities will not merely be institutions for supplying knowledge, but will also have the mission of nurturing the intellect and humanity of young people. The development of AI is a catalyst for the restructuring of university education, and each university is being asked what kind of human resources it will cultivate for the future. The IAUP 60th Anniversary Conference was extremely significant as a forum for international dialogue on these questions.

Semi-Annual Meeting with Malaysian Educational Institutions

The OISCA International informed us that, in conjunction with a visit to Japan by a Malaysian educational institution, they wished to pay a courtesy visit to the Association of Private Universities of Japan. Accordingly, a meeting has been scheduled for October 16.



(Meeting with MARA Corporation)

In his opening remarks, Hidebumi Koide, Executive Director and Secretary-General of the Association, stated, "We have a long-standing relationship with OISCA, and we hope to continue building friendly relations between Malaysia and Japan."

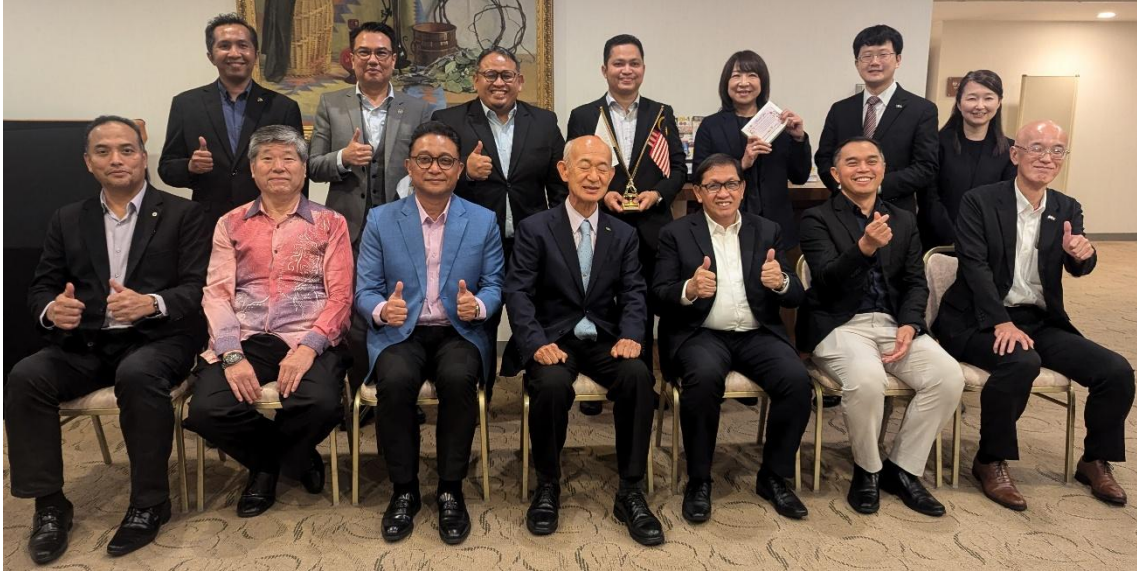
Next, YBhg Datuk Muhd Khair Razman bin Mohamed Annuar, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, spoke about the organization and roles of the Malaysia's Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, the current conditions in rural areas and the education system in Malaysia, and expressed his wish to learn about Japanese ethics and discipline.

YBhg Dato Zulfikri bin Osman, Director-General of the MARA Corporation, stated that the MARA Corporation plays a crucial role in developing human resources, which are essential for nation-building, and that it owns many educational facilities with approximately 260,000 students.

Nik Hisyamudin Muhd Nor, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), stated that the most important thing to learn from Japan is not just

knowledge and technology, but to gain and bring back a "spiritual foundation," as well. He added that while rankings are important, they are secondary, and the top priority should be "how to contribute to society."

Finally, the discussion concluded with a reaffirmation of the friendship between Malaysia and Japan.



(Meeting and Commemorative Photo)

Private Universities in Japan and South Korea: Overcome the Challenge of Declining Birth Rates

Private Universities Association in Japan and Research Institute for Independent Higher Education: Open Research Seminar Marking the 60th Anniversary of the Japan and South Korea Diplomatic Normalization.

On September 1st, the Research Institute for Independent Higher Education, affiliated with the Association of Private Universities of Japan, held an open research seminar in a hybrid format, combining in-person and online participation, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea. The aim was to discuss the future of private universities from multiple perspectives, as both countries face common challenges in higher education, such as declining birth rates and over-concentration in urban areas, with 190 stakeholders participating in the event.

Ro Chanyong, President of the Korean Association of University Foundations, stated in his opening remarks that Japan and South Korea share common structural challenges, a declining birthrate and a crisis for local private universities. Based on the comprehensive agreement concluded with the Association of Private Universities of Japan in 2015, the two sides have continued substantive exchanges, including responses to the declining school-age population, university specialization strategies, and the acceptance of international students. The two countries emphasized their intention to continue promoting cooperative projects toward the future of human resource development and education, with both countries serving as partners that learn from each other.

Kim Sangyu, Executive Director of Headquarter, The Taejae University Foundation, gave a lecture on the current situation and future challenges facing private universities in South Korea. Mr. Kim pointed out that, in addition to the declining birthrate and shrinking school-age population, the systems and policies of higher education, finance, and governance are major variables that will determine the future of private universities. In particular, he emphasized the current situation where disparities are widening due to policies that favor national universities, such as tuition fees at private universities being 1.9 times higher than at national universities, while government financial support per student is only 0.6 times higher. He also warned that strong political intervention in higher education policy and a system that prevents private school stakeholders from participating in policy-making are hindering the expression of the unique characteristics of private schools. In particular, he stated that the cap on

university tuition fee increases is putting pressure on the finances of private universities, and that past university closures have been more due to financial penalties resulting from management scandals than to a decline in the student population.



(Kim Sangyu, Executive Director of Headquarter, The Taejae University Foundation)

Professor Asato Matsumoto of Nagoya University Graduate School delivered a lecture titled "The Current State and Challenges of Higher Education in Japan and South Korea as 'Divided Societies'." Professor Matsumoto pointed out that both Japan and South Korea exhibit the characteristics of a "divided society," marked by economic disparity, the gap between urban and rural areas, and inequality with minorities arising from increasing multiculturalization.

As scholarship programs are being expanded to address inequality, South Korea has been quick to introduce grant-based scholarships, offering a rich variety of programs aimed at securing opportunities for higher education. In both countries, the concentration of students in the greater capital area is pronounced and leaving regional universities in serious distress; however, South Korea has legally establishing reserved quotas for socially vulnerable groups and children from multicultural families — where one or both parents are foreign nationals —, marking a notable and fundamental shift in policy. Professor Matsumoto remarked that this raises questions about how consensus is formed between the government and private universities. He further proposed that revitalizing regional universities requires not only attracting international students, but ensuring their integration into the local community, including securing employment after graduation.



(Professor Asato Matsumoto, Graduate School of Nagoya University)

In the panel discussion, Professor Rie Mori of the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education served as moderator. Professor Mori quoted the observation that the Japanese and Korean higher education systems are "very similar, yet nothing is more dangerous than this very similarity," and set as the goal of the discussion finding solutions to the common challenges facing both countries.



(Panel Discussion)

Yang Hoseok, Chief Education Officer at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Japan, expressed agreement with the governance issues at private universities raised by Kim, as well as with the points made by Professor Matsumoto regarding the impact of expanded scholarship programs. Mr. Yang noted that the relationship between private universities and the government — long characterized by tension — has recently been shifting toward one of cooperation. As examples, he cited the "Act on Support for Structural Reform," which allows a portion (15%) of the remaining assets of closed universities to be returned to their founders, and the "RISE Policy," a new platform through which local governments collaborate with universities to drive regional development. He also introduced the region-specific visa system established under this policy, designed to encourage international students to settle in regional areas.

Meanwhile, Yasuhiko Nishii, Senior Researcher at the same institute, explained that while private universities in Japan enjoy relatively flexible tuition fee notification procedures, private sector involvement in policy decision-making has weakened in recent years. He also raised the structural challenge that local governments face significant difficulty in providing direct support to higher education.

When Professor Mori raised the topic of the abolition of enrollment fees at Korean universities, Mr. Kim explained that while university finances have been on a declining trend since the abolition, the issue has faded from public attention over time. In response, Mr. Yang pointed out that in Korea, enrollment fees had amounted to roughly one-third to one-quarter of tuition fees, and that private universities took a significant financial hit as a result.

In response to questions from participants, Mr. Yang explained that the RISE Policy is a new platform aimed at regional revitalization, with the expectation that universities will function as engines of growth for their local communities. Mr. Nishii remarked that supporting private universities through local governments remains a difficult challenge, and that there is a need for local governments and universities to work in close collaboration, building a framework for cooperation that includes personnel exchanges. Mr. Kim stressed that, ahead of the sharp decline in the 18-year-old population projected from 2035 onward, it is necessary to redefine the mission and role of the state and private universities, and to strengthen ties between local communities and universities. He also suggested that while the RISE Policy aims to revitalize regional areas, it carries the risk of widening disparities among universities.

Finally, Professor Mori referred to a survey result cited in Mr. Kim's presentation materials showing that "68.3% of Japanese people hold prejudices against foreigners,"

and remarked that she was shocked by the finding that younger people and those with higher levels of education tend to show stronger prejudicial attitudes. She then emphasized the importance of higher education continuing to strive, even amid such difficulties, to eliminate this kind of prejudice..

The research seminar served as an occasion that once again highlighted the importance of collaboration among diverse stakeholders and of policy-making that can respond flexibly to change, all in the service of a shared vision for the future of higher education in both Japan and Korea.

Discussing Trends in International Student Policy

The Association of Private Universities of Japan Holds Session on Theme of "Current Trends in International Exchange Initiatives"

On September 24, the Japan Association of Private Universities (Chairman: Yoshiaki Ohara) held its 23rd International Exchange Promotion Council meeting for fiscal year 2025, using a hybrid format of in-person and online participation. The association's International Exchange Committee (chaired by Director and Chairman Ichiro Tanioka, President and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Osaka University of Commerce) planned the meeting with the main theme of "Current Trends in International Exchange Initiatives." Discussions were held with government officials regarding various national policies concerning international students, and reports were also given on initiatives at various universities. A total of 309 people from 198 universities participated (including those who viewed the recorded session).

In his opening remarks, Director and Chairman Tanioka expressed his gratitude for the participation of the council and stated, "Regarding the future direction of international exchange, we need to closely monitor the policy developments and program details set out in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) budget request for the coming fiscal year. "

Fumio Takada, Vice President and Director of International Affairs at Kitasato University and a member of the committee, served as moderator as the discussion began.

First, Tomohiro Furihata, Director of the Japanese Language Education Division within the Comprehensive Education Policy Bureau of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), gave a lecture entitled "The Current State of Japanese Language Education." He showed that the number of foreign residents and Japanese language learners in Japan has been increasing in recent years and explained new measures being implemented under the Act on Promotion of Japanese Language Education, which was enacted with the aim of improving the quality of Japanese language education. He explained the impact on universities from the accredited Japanese language education institution system and the registered Japanese language teacher system. He noted even at universities, special courses that mainly provide Japanese language education to international students who have not yet passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Test N2 are required to obtain certification as Japanese language education institutions.



(Tomohiro Furihata, Director, Japanese Language Education Division, Education Policy Bureau, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT))

Next, Haruka Urata, Director of the International Student Exchange Office under the Counselor for International Affairs, Higher Education Bureau, MEXT, delivered a presentation titled "Trends in International Student Policy in Higher Education." She explained that the number of international students, which had declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, has recovered rapidly and has now reached a record high, but Japan's proportion of international students remains low compared to other countries. For this reason, she stated that it is necessary to advance a "trinity" of measures: "strategic acceptance of international students," "promotion of Japanese students studying abroad," and "internationalization of universities." Based on these policy directions, numerical targets have been set for fiscal year 2033: "accepting 400,000 foreign students" and "sending 500,000 Japanese students abroad." In line with this, she noted that MEXT's budget request for the coming fiscal year includes an increased funding request specifically for supporting Japanese students studying abroad. She also explained that in order to accept a greater number of high-caliber international students a new certification system has been established that permits approved undergraduate programs meeting certain standards to exceed their enrollment capacity.



(Haruka Urata, Director, International Student Exchange Office, Counselor
(International Affairs), Higher Education Bureau, MEXT)

Naoki Yoshida, Legal Affairs Specialist in the Residence Management Division of the Residence Management Support Department at the Immigration Services Agency of Japan, delivered a presentation titled "Current State and Initiatives in Immigration and Residence Management Administration," covering statistics related to the "Student" residence status, the strengthening of residence management, amendments to the ministerial ordinance on landing criteria, and related matters. He noted that the number of foreign students residing in Japan has exceeded 400,000, a record high, and while the number of illegal overstayers has remained at low levels in recent years, he indicated that authorities are keeping close watch on the possibility of this trend reversing and increasing going forward, and called for thorough and rigorous residence management.

In the explanation of the amendment to the Ministerial Ordinance on Landing Criteria, it was stated that, in response to the enforcement of the Act on Accreditation of Japanese Language Education Institutions, the new requirement for granting residence status has been explicitly stated in the Ministerial Ordinance on Landing Criteria that educational institutions accepting international students to receive Japanese language education must be "accredited Japanese language education institutions" certified by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Furthermore, entry under the "Family Stay" visa category for the spouses and children of international students who are exclusively receiving Japanese language education, which was previously permitted for special courses at universities, is no

longer allowed, just like for general Japanese language schools.



(Naoki Yoshida, Legal Affairs Specialist, Residence Management Division, Residence Management Support Department, Immigration Services Agency of Japan)

In the case study presentation, Atsushi Hamana, Chairman and President of Kansai University of International Studies, spoke on the topic of "Network-Type, Experiential Learning-Focused Global Programs: International Exchange Initiatives at Kansai University of International Studies." He introduced the university's outbound programs and also touched upon the current state of inbound tourism and international student policies following the "Sum of Knowledge" report. The university emphasizes "experiential learning over classroom learning" and develops exchange programs that include pre- and post-learning activities utilizing its network with partner universities overseas. Building on these efforts, they established a new Faculty of Global Studies, where international and Japanese students learn together. On the other hand, Mr. Hamana warned about the current state of international student policies in Japan, noting that while neighboring countries such as South Korea and Taiwan are actively attracting international students, the number of Japanese students aspiring to study abroad is on the decline. He emphasized the need for strategies that go beyond simply increasing the number of international students, such as each university identifying its unique strengths and deepening cooperation with overseas universities.



(Atsushi Hamana, Chairman of the Board & President, Kansai University of International Studies)

Next, Professor Yoon Kaeunghun, Director of the International Exchange Center at Ryutsu Keizai University, gave a presentation titled "Engaging with International Students: Reflections from International Exchange Work at Ryutsu Keizai University," reporting on the challenges faced by the university's International Exchange Center, drawing on specific real-world examples. He explained that many international students have insufficient Japanese language skills, making even administrative communication difficult. He mentioned that they tried introducing a translation device (Pocketalk), but it failed to convey emotions and nuances, limiting its effectiveness in student guidance. Regarding the role of international students in university management, he raised the issue that an increase in international students is leading to an excessive burden on staff. Professor Yoon argued that there is a significant gap between the national policy to increase the number of international students and the reality on the ground, and appealed for the creation of a system that prioritizes reducing the burden on frontline staff and improving the education quality, rather than simply increasing the number of international students.



(Yoon Kaeunghun, Professor & Director, Center for International Exchange, Ryutsu Keizai University)

Finally, Hidebumi Koide, Executive Director and Secretary-General of the association, concluded the meeting by stating that "the core of international student education in private universities lies in education of the heart and soul, and it is important to build lifelong bonds as part of international exchange initiative."

International Student Interview

What leads international students to study in Japan? Asri Novita Yasmin graduated from Darma Persada University, which is run by the Association of Indonesian Alumni from Japan, an organization with which our association has a comprehensive partnership agreement, and is currently studying at a graduate school in Japan. We interviewed Asri about what motivated her to learn Japanese and her life as an international student.



(Ms. Asri Novita Yasmin, Universitas Darma Persada)

What was your first connection with Japan?

Japan was familiar to my family. When I was in fifth grade of elementary school, my uncle studied in Japan. He taught me a lot about Japan, and Hatsune Miku made a particularly strong impression on me; I listened to her music often when I was in Indonesia. After returning to Indonesia, my uncle works for a Japanese company. I have other relatives who also studied in Japan and are now working there. I also have relatives who went to United States and the UK, and many people around me have studied abroad.

What was your high school life like?

I attended a national high school that had an international program. A certain level of English proficiency was required upon admission. Classes, presentations, and reports

were all conducted in English. There was even one day a week where we had to speak English all day. All the teachers could speak English, but how much English was actually used in each class was up to the individual teacher. In Indonesia, there aren't many dubbed versions of foreign films and dramas, so I think I became quite accustomed to English.

Did you study Japanese in high school?

Aside from English, Japanese was the only second foreign language offered as an elective. In that class, we learned basic Japanese, hiragana, and katakana. I think about 50 out of 300 students chose Japanese. During high school, I studied Japanese more as a hobby than as a serious academic pursuit. Some of my friends were attending Japanese language schools, hoping to go to Japan for further education after graduation.

What did you major in at university in Indonesia?

I was in the science track in high school, but I thought that languages would suit me better. However, I wasn't interested in Shakespeare or English literature. I also considered Chinese, but I had the impression that the pronunciation was difficult. So, I decided to study Japanese. My parents agreed, but when it came to choosing which university to apply to, they told me it had to be one in Jakarta. They said if I failed, then it had to be at least a university in Java Island. It seems they wanted me to go to a university close to home. But in the end, I came all the way to Japan (laughs).

What is the situation regarding Japanese language studies among Indonesian university students?

Many universities in Indonesia have Japanese language departments. Even high-ranking national universities offer them; at the University of Indonesia, for example, the level of the Medical program and the Japanese Language program are considered to be about equally high.

Some say it's better to learn Chinese than Japanese, but to me, Chinese characters seem difficult. However, speaking Chinese leads to higher salaries, so it's popular. The Japanese language department is popular because of the popularity of Japanese pop culture. Korean language departments are not very common.

Are there any languages you'd like to learn?

I can speak English and Japanese, so I'd like to try learning Korean or Chinese. I want to be able to understand Korean and Chinese animation as it is.

How is your university Japanese class progressing?

We started with hiragana, katakana, and greetings. After that, we learned about verb endings like "desu" and "masu." Because I had studied Japanese in high school, I think I was able to read faster than other students during reading comprehension.

Course registration was first-come, first-served, and good teachers as well as good classes are popular. Anyone could register, but I've seen students who weren't very good academically register for high-level classes, only to find them too difficult and change to other classes.

Japanese grammar is difficult, especially the tenses. English grammar wasn't a problem for me, though... Grammar classes made me sleepy (laughs). As you move from beginner to intermediate level, it gets more difficult when you have to replace the "masu" at the end of sentences with "ru." Anyone can take advanced classes, but fewer people enroll. Those who drop out tend to take classes like "Japanese Society" or "Japanese History."

In the second year, linguistics, literature, sociology, and history become compulsory, and in the second half, you choose a specialization from those. I found literature classes, especially modern and contemporary poetry, interesting; the differences in culture and language use were fascinating. I read Sayaka Murata's "Convenience Store Woman" in Indonesian and found it so interesting that I strongly wanted to read it in Japanese. Before that, I had read "Botchan" in English. The first novel I read in Japanese during university classes was Junichiro Tanizaki's "The Tattooer."

Since I've been exposed to Japanese pop culture like anime and music since I was little, when I learned new words, I had usually already heard them as sound before, so it was easier to grasp the nuances. Language learning might be difficult if you don't enjoy it. It might have been difficult if you weren't interested in pop culture.

What led you to study abroad?

In the second half of my third year, there are classes focused on career paths. Students had to choose from three options: interpretation, teaching methodology, and research. I

chose interpretation and teaching methodology. I was invited to work as a faculty member at Darma Persada right after finishing my oral thesis defense. After that, I was nominated by Darma Persada to apply to a graduate school in Japan, and I waited for the result while doing internships and other things. If I hadn't been accepted, I had thought about working as an interpreter, or as a teacher at a Japanese language school, or even at a trading company — something not necessarily related to Japan. But since I was accepted, I came to Japan.

What was your reason for choosing your current graduate school?

I decided I wanted to study modern and contemporary Japanese literature. Since pre-modern literature is quite difficult, I searched for professors working on the same themes within contemporary literature using JASSO's STUDY JAPAN platform. In the case of Darma Persada nominations, we were advised to look for universities in the Kanto region as much as possible, so that was also one of my criteria when searching. I was also told it would be preferable to choose a university that has a partnership agreement with Darma Persada, so I applied to several universities. Some did not get back to me, but I was able to enroll at Meiji University, which agreed to accept me.

What's your daily routine like?

When I have classes, I wake up in the morning, cook and clean, pray, and go to school. I usually get home at 5 PM after classes, but sometimes I pray at 8 PM before going home. When I get home, I eat dinner and take a shower. When I was busy with my master's thesis, I stayed at school until 11 PM.

On weekends, I take naginata (Japanese halberd) lessons. During my first year, I often went to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building observation deck to watch the sunset. There were piano recitals, and sometimes I could see Mount Fuji, it was fun.

What places have left a lasting impression on you?

Hiroshima. The atmosphere there is a little different from other cities. I was in Nagano for an internship at one point, and it was the first time I ever saw snow accumulate. That was also when I was taught to walk like a penguin on frozen ground so you don't slip. During my university life I also went on food tours. Halal food can be a challenge, but bakeries are generally fine, so I went all over the place. I also visited a lot of planetariums.

There are so many planetariums in Tokyo! I took physics in high school, so I have always had an interest in stars.

What were you worried about when starting life in Japan?

My language ability was passable, but I was worried about having to earn my own living expenses. I knew the scholarship would not be enough to cover everything. I was relieved when I managed to secure a part-time job. I receive zero financial support from my parents. My high school friends get money from home, but since it is not enough, they work part-time at fast food restaurants too.

Right after arriving in Japan, I stayed in a JASSO Japanese language school dormitory in Okubo, but since I could only stay for six months, finding an apartment was quite a challenge. I exchanged information with friends from the dormitory and searched together. For my guarantor, I asked one of my university professor. I have also been a guarantor for friends myself. The international students around me asked their Japanese language school teachers, academic supervisors, or senior students to act as guarantors.

Do you notice differences in customs?

Food hasn't been too much of a problem. Both Japan and Indonesia have rice as a staple, eaten with side dishes. Though I do find miso soup unique — in Indonesia we just drink water with meals. As for food, I'm not good with natto. I love bread though. Japanese pâtisseries put a lot of care into what they make, and it's delicious.. There are so many different flavors and varieties.

One cultural difference is that you can't tell whether a food product is safe to eat without reading the label. For religious reasons, I also have to watch out for things like gelatin, lard, and shortening. These days there are apps where you can scan a barcode to find out whether something is halal or not. When these apps first came out they didn't work very well, but they've gotten much better recently.

For prayer spaces, when I was in the dormitory we would share information with each other. When traveling and on the move, I pray while seated on the bus. For longer journeys, I manage by making up for it the following day with extra prayers — so it works out fine.

One thing that surprised me when I came to Japan is that Japanese people don't greet strangers. In Indonesia, if you make eye contact with someone you give a small nod or

some kind of greeting. If I walk past a construction site, for example, I normally said something to the workers, but in Japan people stay silent. At first it felt a little lonely.

Is there anything you wish you had done before coming to Japan

I wish I had researched more information beforehand — things like which mobile phone carrier to go with, and how to go about finding an apartment. Since you can't receive support from the university before you've enrolled, you're largely on your own.

What are your plans after returning home?

I will become a faculty member at Darma Persada University. I am scheduled to teach N2 level classes. The beginner levels are difficult to explain, so those are handled by more experienced teachers. Someday I would like to try teaching a Japanese literature class. At Darma Persada University, there is currently only one faculty member teaching Japanese literature, so there aren't many. For linguistics, there are as many as ten teachers.

This is what she said at the time of the interview, but it turned out that in practice, she ended up being assigned to teach N3 and N5-level classes instead.

Do you have any tips for Japanese universities that want to attract international students?

For undergraduate enrollment, since many students go straight from high school, it might be worth partnering with Indonesian influencers to spread the word. Waseda University became well known through that kind of approach. Since tuition at Japanese universities is expensive, having scholarships available would help a lot. It would also be a strong selling point if universities could introduce affordable housing options, since dormitories are often on the expensive side too.

For Indonesians specifically, going back to do an undergraduate degree in Japan after already completing one in Indonesia takes a long time, so those who study abroad after graduating tend to prefer graduate school for specialized study or vocational school for skills development. As for exchange programs, a large portion of the costs falls on the student themselves, so that was difficult for me personally. Since accommodation and flights may be covered, but I still have to arranged living expenses on my own.



(Working part-time at the Research Institute for Private Higher Education)

Mr. Soichi Makihara, Chairperson, Soyol Erdem University , a central university of the Mongolian Association of Private Universities, with which our association has a comprehensive agreement, has studied in Japan and has been involved in educational exchange between Japan and Mongolia for many years. On this occasion, we have invited him to contribute an article offering his perspective on present-day Japan from the perspective of a former international student.



(Soichi Makihara, Chairperson, Soyol Erdem University)

A Modern Society in Which Japanese Identity is Being Lost and Japanese Culture is Gradually Disappearing

"Japan's culture of etiquette is wonderful. The manners of following the rules are wonderful. The culture of being considerate and thoughtful of others is wonderful"—any foreigner who has visited Japan has probably felt this way.

I came to Japan from Inner Mongolia in the 1980s, and obtained Japanese citizenship a few years later. The moment I first set foot on Japanese soil, I felt from the bottom of my heart, "What a wonderful country this is." The ideal nation that we had painted in our imagination actually existed here in reality.

At that time, China had no highways, no privately owned cars, and no supermarket parking lots. It was an era when the streets were wrapped in a single shade of navy blue Mao suits, with a cold and impersonal atmosphere hanging in the air.

Japan, on the other hand, from the big cities all the way to the corners of the countryside, had smiling greetings, politeness, and good manners naturally ingrained in its people, and one could feel the richness of that culture firsthand. I even thought that Japan was an ideal model for human society.

The services at hotels, ryokans, and hot springs were also filled with the spirit of "omotenashi" (wholehearted hospitality), with cleaning carried out thoroughly down

to every corner of the rooms, with such meticulousness that not even a single piece of trash could be found. It truly was a "wonderful country."

However, just yesterday, I reunited with friends and former students — some visiting Japan for the first time in 15 years, others in 10 or 8 years (all of whom had previously studied or worked in Japan) — and as we chatted over a meal, they all, without exception, expressed surprise and sighed, saying that "Japan has changed."

What surprised them was not Japan's development or the advancement of technology. Rather, it was things like: "Japanese people's smiles have disappeared. Etiquette is fading. Manners are in disarray. Hotels, ryokans, and hot spring rooms are not being cleaned properly anymore. Previous guests' trash was left as-is in the trash cans. Garbage was scattered under tables and in the corners of rooms. Staff at the front desk or in restaurants can't understand Japanese. The number of foreigners has increased, and Chinese can be heard from all directions. The image of Japan that we admired when we first came — that polite and full of genuine service spirit — is no longer to be found anywhere."

In fact, I myself had a bad experience when I ate with my family at a Japanese restaurant inside the Tobu Department Store at Ikebukuro Station. The waitress, dressed in a yukata, could barely speak Japanese and her explanation of the dishes was inadequate. I was disappointed, thinking, "At least a Japanese restaurant should be able to do that...", but honestly, that's the reality of Japan these days.

Japan is the homeland of my family and my own homeland as well. I sincerely hope that Japan will continue to be for people all over the world, an "admired nation": a country full of courtesy, manners, and morality.

In today's society, where respect for other cultures is lost, materialism is on the rise, and morality and ethics are fading, isn't it precisely at this time that Japanese etiquette and culture are most needed? From an educational perspective, I believe that now more than ever, Japanese etiquette and culture should be given greater importance.

In modern society, where humanity is gradually being lost, perhaps Japanese etiquette and culture are what are most needed.

I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels a sense of crisis that if Japan were to lose its Japanese identity and Japanese culture, the meaning of "Japan" as a whole will disappear, and eventually vanish altogether.

Chairperson, Soyol Erdem University
Soichi Makihara