

3. Impressions by Japanese Counterparts

A Starting Point for International Exchange

Isao Fukagawa
Company Employee

Until I took part in this In-house Seminar I had been a typical Japanese who had been bewildered and had put on an ingratiating smile whenever I was spoken to by foreigners.

Even though two nights and three days were a rather short time, I tried to speak to my counterparts positively and achieve mutual understanding them for the first time. The participants from Singapore were really friendly and associated with us without making us feel the difference in language. They showed Singapore to me, as I've never been there, with a map and photographs for three hours.

As the local programme happened to be conducted in Osaka, my hometown, I guided them around Osaka City to return the favor and enjoyed taking them on an eating tour.

I am thankful to have had an unforgettable time with new friends. This seminar gave me an incentive to take part in international exchange activities there after.

The Potential Power of Grass-roots

Yoshie Sakai
Student

I can imagine how the participants' faces must look when they proudly show their names written in Kanji (Chinese characters) on the calligraphy paper to their families and friends and say, "This is my name in Kanji." We saw Mt. Fuji, cooked at the In-house

Seminar, and went to Tokyo Disneyland with them. The Japanese youths had social exchanges with the Indonesian youths, who told us that the Japanese don't seem to have a religion, etc. Perhaps that was a true grass-roots exchange. Efficiency and goals, which are needed for studying abroad and on business, were not established in advance; yet the seeds for lasting exchange were steadily sewn.

Although our countries are both located in Asia, the social situation is different in our respective nations. Inviting them to Japan and having them see this nation for one month must be very hard work—this is what I deeply thought when seeing with my own eyes the organizing abilities and active power of the staff who strove completely behind the scenes while respecting the participants' autonomy.

Continuation definitely makes for power. The accumulation of these modest efforts to create venues for international exchanges will bear fruit in globalization.

Three Years Have Passed Since Then

Fumiaki Sano
Government Employee

I took part in this programme three years ago and thereby met some Vietnamese youths, had discussions with them, and made all-out efforts to socialize with them. At that time Viet Nam was quite wrapped up in economic liberalization, so these youths were also excited about seeing the economic development in Japan. I couldn't help talking with them about our respective families, work, and sweethearts with various gestures, even though I was nervous about meeting Vietnamese people for the first time ever.

Three years have passed since then. I got the job in the field of overseas technical cooperation, for which I had desired. My work has kept me busy, so the tie with them started to get remote. I wanted to join the excitement, which I enjoyed three years ago, once

more. That is why I decided to participate in this programme again.

The three years have passed since our first encounter, and the Vietnamese youths have become a bit calmer. I, too, have changed a little with time passing.

I wonder in what way they and I will be living another three years from now.

The Things That Japan Lost

Keiko Okubo
Company Employee

The In-house Seminar made me feel that Japan has lost something since the end of World War II. Like Japan, Thailand is now suffering from an economic crisis after its bubble economy burst. But even under these circumstances, the Thai participants, who have not given up hope and behave cheerfully, are full of enthusiasm that the Japanese have lost. And I saw that the Thais faced to others directly and made efforts to understand each other. Thus, I sensed the differences between the Thais living hand-in-hand with their neighbors, and us Japanese having only remote relationships with others.

Even though Japan has enjoyed high economic growth after World War II, we Japanese have lost harmony with others and peace of mind. By contrast, I thought that the Thais have a warmth at heart, that can't be measured only through economic affluence. I learned from them the courage of never-giving-up before starting something. The In-house Seminar ended in three days. However, I want to cherish this newly born friendship and hope that we mutually influence each other in a beneficial way.

A Precious Experience

Mihoko Muto
Teacher

"I will go to the sea when morning comes and it gets light," said the Nepalese youth who was about to see the sea for the first time in his life. His inward emotions then were fully transmitted, even though my English was not so good. But the Nepalese youths

hesitated to approach the water's edge. We were at the white sands where the song entitled the "Desert of the Moon" was composed. I wonder in what way the surf shining in the pale moonlight reflected in their eyes. In any case, it was very fantastic to us who had become used to the artificial lights of a city.

One of them said, "I want a bottle. I will bring the sea water back home." They said they would have Nepalese children taste the sea water to make them know how salty it is, although there were still two weeks left before they finished their study trip of Japan.

Our common feelings as teachers were that we somehow want to transmit things to children. This meeting was a precious experience, which reminded me of the importance of our wishes to our students to have many experiences and sensitive souls.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Nepalese youths and all the other people who gave me this wonderful opportunity.

The Modernizing Pacific Islands

Junichi Koibuchi
Teacher

As only month remained in the second term of school, the In-house Seminar was a golden opportunity for me to have a change of mood.

Spending two nights with people who were positive, friendly and international gave me the energy to take an active part in international cooperation once I returned to my hometown. Through the participation in people from Aichi Prefecture and eleven Pacific countries, my days became full, fruitful in a way that can't be experienced in daily life.

Our three discussions on education in English, the sports exchange of playing volleyball, and the socializing on the Friendship Night were all carried out without thinking of how narrow the sites were. And the temperature was warm for November.

My roommates, an art teacher from the Republic of Kiribati and a social studies teacher from the Solomon Islands, and I had many common topics to discuss. I really felt that the field of trying to educate children better is an idea shared around the world, even though we may have differences in language and culture.

The thing that especially surprised me was that the

islanders have common educational problems like what we face now in Japan and also that their awareness is just like ours. I learned about their situation in which the influx of movies and commodities from the U.S. and the rapid decline of traditional values have had considerable influence over the minds of children.

Participating in In-house Seminar

Takahiko Toyoda
Teacher

Uneasy feeling preceded after deciding to participate in two nights three days In-house Seminar with youth engaged in education from Myanmar which was very new to me. I really worried about many things such as whether we could discuss about education problems since I don't know about their language nor situation and how I could get away from our counterpart without making him angry when he spoke to me, etc.

But on that day such uneasy feeling was disappeared. Soon after the bus departed, I realized myself trying to communicate with my counterparts with gesture naturally. I thought that the most important thing was my desire to communicate with the others.

In-house Seminar was forward step to have positive image of international exchange.

4. Impressions by Host Families

The Youth from Singapore

Mutsuko Noguchi
Hokkaido Prefecture

As my family had traveled to Singapore four years ago, my children, who are respectively in the first and third years of junior high school, were looking forward to meeting the youth who was going to visit us from that country. My children played badminton with him making bets with hamburgers, and they went cycling together. Thus, they socialized beyond our expectations.

However, we also arranged mutually to have some private time so that we might not get tired.

I interpreted our conversations at home as possible. I felt relieved when he said he was able to enjoy the stay without any sense of isolation. Now my children are saying they will write a letter to Singapore.

Since this was our second time to host a homestay, we could welcome him at ease without feeling pressured, and that seems to have been most beneficial. He kindly helped us wash dishes. We frankly pointed out a mistake or improper behavior, if any. In any case, of course, it was an enjoyable three days.

The Polygamy System

Umeko Matsumura
Iwate Prefecture

What shocked us most this time as a host family was that the polygamy system still exists.

Our conversation started when I asked what the Japanese lady, who had been one of the wives of a

former president of Indonesia, was doing now. The youth from Indonesia, who was our homestay guest, then cheerfully explained that having more than one wife is common in his country and that his grandfather had done that, too. "Unbelievable," I said unintentionally. He added that even men who are not so rich sometimes have two or three wives and have them live, with their consent, apart from each other. Once I expressed how impressed I was with the earnestness of an Indonesian man, our young homestay guest told us that his father was a civil servant—a group no longer able to practice polygamy.

I can imagine that Japanese men hearing about this would probably feel envious. At that time, I was struck hard by the realization that each country has its own customs.

The First Experience as Host Family

Naoko Saito
Niigata Prefecture

As I took responsibility for host family first time I wondered what color of skin, hair and pupils she had and I was full of uneasiness and expectation. When I met with Miris at the first time, she also looked lonely and looked at me with her big eyes feeling a little relieved.

I felt that two nights and three days homestay passed in an instant. Besides the sightseeing which I wanted Miris to experience was harvesting rice. I heard that even though their staple food is rice in Papua New Guinea, they depend it fully on import. I don't wanted show her "rice" itself but its the beautiful natural figure as a plant growing with a favor of Mother Earth. Miris seemed deeply moved when she experienced harvesting rice that rarely can be seen in nowadays's Japan.

The communication with Miris who has no common language with us reminded me of the day when I raised my children ten years ago. Having dealt

with a child who can't understand language, I wonder what could make him happy and how to make him comfortable and ease.

When I polished her nails I really realized to have pleased her who seldom expresses her feeling. She smiled sweetly and said, "Going back to the country with wearing this polish." with using gesture. And she blew on her nails not yet dried.

Since language barrier was thick I am afraid whether Miris really enjoyed her stay and also felt comfortable. But Miris's tears made me feel everything was all right. And I was filled with touch of nature involuntarily.

Papua New Guinea became a country with special meaning to me and. I am happy if Japan remains in her heart and becomes the same to her.

With Ibrahim-san

Shogo Tomonaga
Saga Prefecture

The people from the Maldives blended in with us naturally, and that made me feel that we are all the same Asian people. I wonder why this was so even though we are actually people who are completely different in terms of religion, language, and customs. My English, as a common language between us, was not enough to create mutual understanding. Nevertheless, I felt we managed to understand each other without experiencing any special cultural shock.

I had known of the country, the Maldives, by name. But once I heard Ibrahim-san's explanations and feelings, I developed a picture of the nation called the Maldives. I realized that Japan is not the only small country in the world and that there are many other such nations.

My family showed him our life just as it is. When we went to a junior high school, where he talked and played tennis with the students, his facial expression indeed looked like that of a teacher.

Ibrahim-san showed us how to pray to his sacred god, Allah. And that taught us the depth of his religious piety.

Thank you, Ibrahim-san, for letting us taste the clear breezes of the Maldives.

I Made a Friend in Nepal!

Yoshie Kohsaka
Nagano Prefecture

After my husband went to the hotel to pick up our homestay guest, I became terribly ill-at-ease and tense wondering what kind of person would be coming to our home. The scene when my husband returned an hour and a half later with Sabitri-san still remains fresh in my memory today.

Almost all my worries disappeared the moment I saw her entering our home and saying with a smile, "Okaasan, konbanwa (Good evening, Mother)."

Sabitri-san, who was cheerful with a lovely smile, removed the language barrier between us quite well. Through talks with Sabitri-san and eating the Nepalese food she prepared for us, etc., we were able to learn a little bit about the nation known as Nepal, the way its people live, and so on. We, moreover, came to feel we would like to do something for the Nepalese people, if possible.

Thanks to Sabitri-san, we were able to spend two heartwarming days.

Thank you.

Being Borderless Starts with a Meal

Kimi Chihara
Osaka Prefecture

This time we had the good fortune to have accepted Terry, a youth from Malawi, for a homestay. Terry and my family really talked together about a lot of things. Although we had only heard the name of his country, Malawi, for the first time then, now an image of his native land comes to our minds when we close our eyes. There is no denying that differences exist in the economy, education, science, culture, living standards, and so on between two countries, we didn't feel any differences between Terry and ourselves as human beings.

At mealtimes, he said with a smile, "There's no reason why I should dislike anything that you are eating when we are dining together." And he ate everything without showing any likes or dislikes. He was a wonderful and very flexible young man. If we

have the chance, we would like to visit Terry in Malawi, meet his family, and also see him working as an educator.

We are very grateful to have had the opportunity for this encounter.

Having a Communication is Possible?

Takashi Hirono
Kyoto Prefecture

When I first talked to her, I really felt difficulty in communication.

For example when I offered something she often nodded without saying anything. I thought she was thinking and waited for her answer. But she was not thinking, she was expressing her disapproval. She said "Yes." when she agreed with me, but she also said "Yes." when she was not able to catch my words. At the beginning I couldn't understand the difference. But while talking with her I realized that when she said "yes" in latter meaning, the end of the word rose.

This time I learnt how difficult to have communication, however this communication gap was gradually reduced. And I was able to talk about interesting things. I had a great experience.

You Are My Family

Minako Nishidate
Aomiro Prefecture

"You are my family."

I forgot to give this word to Maria-san. But this word was given to me from her.

Maria-san took twenty hours flight and came to Japan from Cape Verde which has about one hundredth land area of Japan.

She loves cooking. And the second night I cooked Cape Verde dish with her. To look for ingredients we went to supermarket. She looked curiously at pear and Japanese persimmon which she can't find in her country. When we were eating a pear she took its seed. As her husband likes gardening she asked "May I have this?" I learnt from her that the real enjoyment of gardening can be started from familiar places, not necessary to start with buying seeds.

I got to think that family was a party who could communicate with their hearts regardless of blood relations.

Wishing the world becomes one big family, also from now I would like to watch at the world.

We'd Like to do It Again

Miyoko Yachi
Fukushima Prefecture

"Let's go to Viet Nam and meet Hon-san again," was a startling comment made by my husband, who had avoided overseas travel for many years. Having accepted the role of host family and inviting Hon-san to our home, my husband must certainly have been very happy.

We used every means for communication: "Nihongo 21," picture cards, gestures, drawing pictures, bringing thing out real. We talked about everyday living and about economy. We even talked about adopting one of Hon-san's two sons and Hon-san having another girl, to the point that we could not tell whether it was said jokingly or seriously.

The lack of English made communication funny and enjoyable.

My husband said, "We'd like to do it again."

I agree wholeheartedly and wish to accept someone again.

Oh, Saudi Arabia

Masayoshi Anzai
Fukushima Prefecture

Having accepted the role of host family, the only knowledge we had of Saudi Arabia is that it is a nation of petroleum, desert, and Islam and was certainly anxious with apprehension and expectations. However, I was determined to accept it anyway, since I decided "we are all human beings, and I have experience of homestay in Denmark."

The entire approach to consideration is based on religions in Moslems. Let alone whether it is good or bad, Muhammad-san from Saudi Arabia was unable to accept Japanese lifestyle and culture. I never pressed things on him, but I feel that he was not able to

experience our lifestyle and culture as it is. Personally, however, I was able to understand Saudi Arabia and Islam and found that the exchange was not necessarily futile.

Still, I wish he could get to know a little more about Japan.

Kai-san

Hiroko Mochizuki
Yamanashi Prefecture

Kai-san stayed with us only for three days. But the experience taught us a lot of things. He demonstrated Sepak Takraw (a kind of sport which is alike volleyball and soccer) and Muai Thai (Thai boxing) in front of us. He even let us try them as well.

What impressed me most was his perspective towards family, rather than Thai culture. According to him, grandparents, parents and other elder members should be respected and taken good care of, and they also expected to take it for granted. Kai-san always treated our parents well and showed his respect towards them. It let me consider how a family should be.

We mostly stayed at home for three days. I found it nice to be relaxed around table with family members, chatting together in KOTATSU.

Both Kai-san and we were in tears on the day he said good-bye to us. We realized that hearts could communicate well beyond the language barrier. It was memorable and enjoyable three days.

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