

Chairperson: Ms. Kotoko Ogawa (International Student Adviser)

Participants: Ms. Kazumi Sashida, Mr. Yota Arita, Ms. Ying Wei, Ms. Mo Yang



1. Introductions

Ogawa: Let's begin with self-introductions. My name is Kotoko Ogawa and I am the Study Abroad Officer.

Sashida : Although I have met most of you, I am Kazumi Sashida. I spend the last year as a visiting student at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

Wei : I am Ying Wei. I came to Tokyo University this past April as an exchange student.

Yang: My name is Mo Yang. I arrived in April of this year as part of Beijing University's Double Diploma Program¹.

¹ Through support from the Japan Foundation, Tokyo University hosts Master's level students from Beijing

Arita: I studied at the University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School (LKY) of Public Policy from August of last year to June of this year.

Ogawa: And you are Arita?

Arita : Oh...yes. I'm Yota Arita.

All : (Laughter)

2. About the Study Abroad Exchange System

Ogawa: OK, for starters please tell us how you learned of the exchange programs?

Sashida: Even before entering Tokyo University, I learned of the programs from the university homepage. To learn more, I called and asked about the programs. Additionally, I learned a lot from the write ups of exchange students that were in the school's exchange student information circular last year.

Wei : At SIPA, in September or October a number of faculty members from various graduate schools came to our

University's School of International Relations. At present, students are not yet being sent from Tokyo University to study at Beijing University as part of this program.

campus to give an orientation session on their schools. Although there wasn't anyone from Tokyo University, I received the information I needed at this event.

Ogawa: [Can you describe the selection process?](#)

Sashida: After reviewing my application documents, I was granted an interview. Through the selection process, I got the impression that prominence was given to English

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proficiency and motivation.

3. Motivation and Success Rates

Ogawa: [By the way, what prompted you all to join an exchange program?](#)

Arita: I've studied at the Hongo campus since my undergraduate days. So I felt that I'd like to try and study somewhere else overseas. In the course of deliberating, I became attracted to the prospect of studying in Asia which has experienced remarkable growth in recent years. Singapore, where English is widely used, seemed like the perfect choice.

Yang: As for me, a friend who was studying at LKY as an exchange student encouraged me to consider

studying abroad in order to acquire new knowledge and broaden my understanding by studying with people who hold different values.

Sashida: I was mainly thinking about bolstering my qualifications. As I'll soon be entering the job search market, I felt that this would enhance my value as a job candidate.

Wei: I also thought that I'd like to try and experience studies in a variety of countries if possible. Since graduate school is a two year journey, I felt that becoming an exchange student would be a way to effectively utilise this time and maximise my experience.

Ogawa: [I see. And what attracted you to study public policy at another university?](#)

Wei: SIPA has a specialised area of study that focuses on East Asia. In my undergraduate studies, my focus was on China. So this time, I thought I would like to study about Japan. The 90's was a highly eventful period for Japan's economy so understandably in America the study focus is on that period. Recent developments are somewhat neglected. So naturally, if one doesn't actually come to Japan, there will always be many things that one does not know.

Yang: In my case, I wanted to see and experience Japan firsthand. If possible, I want to take in all the sights of Japan

from the crammed commuter trains to the odd characters in Shibuya (laughter). In China, there are a number of preconceptions about Japan. I am considering applying for a career in China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs or some related career so I wanted to endeavour to understand the true Japan.

Ogawa: [What did you discover during your studies?](#)

Yang: In our textbooks, Japanese are portrayed as diligent and courteous people who function in a state of constant exigency. In reality, this is true but the textbooks don't explain why Japanese are like this. By coming to Japan, I could understand some of the rationale for this. For example, due to a historical dependence on American financial support, it was necessary for Japanese to operate in a state of exigency.

Arita: In my case, I was interested in how Japan was viewed from a foreign perspective and what kinds of opinions foreigners held in the process of studying public policy. I found I could do this at LKY. Of the 65 students in the MPP course that I attended, only 5 were actually from Singapore. I benefitted from various national perspectives. Beyond such perspective, I also learned about differences in how people thought about and framed their discourse. That was extremely

valuable.

Sashida: At SIPA, there are a large number of courses that are not offered at Tokyo University. I was able to attend courses that dealt with topics such as energy and the environment. Also at SIPA there are many famous scholars such as the international politics scholar Kenneth Waltz that I

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had the pleasure of learning from.

Ogawa: [What impact do you think this study abroad experience will have on your future?](#)

Wei: By having the chance to meet many kinds of people, various possibilities have emerged. Even in terms of employment, I've now come to realise that there are many possibilities beyond those that I was thinking about before I came.

Arita: That holds true for me too. In Japan, the words "public sector" and "civil servant" are synonymous. At LKY, very few individuals had aspirations to become civil servants. I learned that there are more facets to employment in the public sector than just governmental employment.

Yang: This study abroad experience

has been the greatest challenge of my life. I have become a stronger person thanks to this experience. I no longer fear new environments. For example, after this experience, I feel I have developed the resilience to succeed in a new work environment. I've developed a fondness for Tokyo and hope to find work here.



Sashida: I've become fairly aggressive in expressing my opinions. At SIPA, even in daily activities, without such a skill one becomes prone to exploitation (laughter). Without clear expressing oneself, documents that you need processed just sit collecting dust. I feel I have developed a much keener wit for dealing with such matters. In terms of future work prospects, I feel quite adamant about trying to work overseas. In this regard, I've been busy tapping into my current network and exploring ways to go about doing so.

4. Comparing Tokyo University with SIPA , LKY and Beijing

University

Ogawa: [Comparatively speaking, what is the biggest difference between Tokyo University and Beijing University?](#)

Yang: I think the biggest difference is the background of the faculty. In Beijing University, the vast majority of professors are academic scholars so their lectures center on theory. In Tokyo University, there are many professors who have vocational experience and so we can benefit by learning from their first-hand experiences and by hearing about the newest developments. Moreover, in my department at Beijing University, case studies are seldom used as part of the study format. I think Tokyo University is also more proficient in this regard.

Ogawa: [How about compared to LKY?](#)

Arita: At LKY, the school facilities are far superior. Also, the students are far better at actively engaging in discussions. On the other hand, I think that Tokyo University's merits include a broader selection of elective courses and faculty that boasts a depth of practical experience.

Ogawa: [How about compared to SIPA?](#)

Wei: At GraSPP there are various study groups such as the Macro Economics and Econometric study groups in the

Economics program. Anyone can assume the role of the teacher and teach the rest of the students. I felt that in SIPA, compared to class work, students seemed more focused on searching for work. While in Tokyo University, students prioritise their studies first.

Sashida: Regarding curriculum differences, in SIPA, TA sessions for select courses are pre-arranged each week. Also, in terms of practical relevance, case studies are the norm regardless of the course. For example, in statistics, the most recent data from actual public opinion surveys are used.

Wei: Also, because SIPA's students come from diverse backgrounds, we can learn a lot from their experiences.

Sashida: True, studying together with such individuals is a real benefit. They are a valuable resource for consulting on things like career issues, improving the effectiveness of group work and making better presentations.

5. Life

Ogawa: Let's examine the life of an exchange student. For starters, what was life like at LKY?

Arita: Since I am not the type that studies in a library, I studied at home. I had my meals at a nearby food court that housed various different food stalls. Meals only cost JPY200-300 but they were quite tasty. And McDonalds

in Singapore also offers 24 hour home delivery. The diet isn't too hard for Japanese to get acclimatised.

Ogawa: McDonald's home delivery... nice! How about life outside of studies and making new friends?

Arita: On the weekends, there were quite a few parties organized by classmates that I attended. At LKY, exchange students from around Asia make up the majority of the students. Without really being conscious of it happening, I soon realized that I was part of a community of exchange students. In terms of extra-curricular activities, every week there were two or three guest lectures that I often attended. LKY has a privileged status in Singapore. Because of this, we also had unique opportunities such as being invited to the Presidential Palace and attending a lecture given by Tony Blair.



Ogawa: How about life at SIPA?

Sashida: It was really enjoyable! Because SIPA students are admitted

free into Manhattan's Museums, I often had the chance to attend events such as the opera. However, during the school term, our schedules were crammed both with studies and

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involvement in group work activities which are frequent at SIPA. In terms of meals, eating out is expensive, so usually I purchased groceries from a nearby supermarket and cooked myself.

Ogawa: I see. And how about life outside of studies?

Sashida: I also got caught up in job search activities there. It seemed as if every day, some company was visiting the school to carry out recruitment activities. There were also a great number of social events and I often participated in events and special sessions for exchange students. Since most of these events were stand and eat mixers, all one needed to do was stand in front of a group of people and say "hi". It was a bit daunting at first, but by giving myself a push and launching in, I soon got used to it.

Ogawa: I see. Did you two find it difficult to connect with Japanese students?

Wei: After class there are quite a few drinking parties but the parties here are usually fixed seating so it is really only possible to speak with the people next to you. Though when Japanese students take the initiative to ask questions, it's easy to converse with... At Tokyo University, the number of Japanese students is overwhelmingly high; however, at SIPA, everyone is a foreigner so it makes for a vibrant environment.

Yang: In my case, at Beijing University I had a number of Japanese friends so when I got here I didn't find it problematic. However, because the group mentality is strong in Japan, it can be quite difficult to break into a group. But it turned out better than expected. I've often been invited along to drinking parties and have made a few Japanese friends that I feel I can share anything with.

Ogawa: Tokyo University students are indeed pretty friendly toward exchange students.

6. Advice to Juniors

Ogawa: Everyone had trials in terms of accommodations, right?

Arita: Yeah, it was a challenge. At the beginning, I booked a room for the

first term in a youth hostel style place but upon entering, I discovered that the environment was not suitable for studying. Luckily, I found a more suitable place that I shared with a classmate.

Yang: I too looked for a place on my own. It was really interesting hunting for a flat on the internet.

Sashida: Fortunately, I got a room in the dorms. A senior from last year told me to start the process as early as possible. So as soon as I received my acceptance notice, I enquired and began the application process. That's how I got in.

Ogawa: What would you suggest doing to make life easier?

Sashida: Because you become consumed in studies, I think you should make the effort to keep your eyes open for other opportunities. For example, until the day of the event, I didn't know that the President of Iran was coming for a visit.

Arita: I think it would have been a good idea for me to learn more about Japan before going.

Ogawa: Is there something you'd like to do while in Japan?

Yang: I'd like to try a home stay. Last summer I'm going back to China but next year, I'm going to try it.

Ogawa: Do you have a message for those who are considering an

exchange program?

Sashida: Go for it! Most overseas students harbour the same feelings of insecurity but there is no shame even if you fail. If you fear failure, you are passing up on a chance for personal growth. I'd hope that you approach your overseas experience in a light-hearted way where you can laugh at your missteps.

Wei: As expected, language ability is not so much of an issue. I think having a bold spirit is essential.

Yang: I'd advice those that come after me to acquire an economic foundation before coming. I don't come from an economics background so I felt that studying economics here was really difficult.

Arita: As a graduate student studying abroad, it is imperative to really apply yourself to your studies.

All: You got that right! (laughter)

Ogawa: Study abroad sounds great...you've sold me on it!