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How internationalized GraSPP has become!

Nobue Nachi Senior Program Manager, International Affairs Office

When I started to work at the then two-year-old GraSPP, there was no student exchange program at all. "Japan cannot survive into the next era without more students going out to see the world; the Todai cannot survive without going global." Thanks to such a sense of impending doom and enthusiasm of the faculty, GraSPP has quickly become internationalized over the last seven years. We have developed student exchange programs (with 7 schools), introduced double degree programs (with 5 schools), which were the first for Todai, created the MPP/IP (the Master of Public Policy, International Program), hosted exchange events for Japanese, Chinese and Korean students at the Campus Asia, and finally gained the long-awaited formal membership in the GPPN (the Global Public Policy Network, a network of the world's top-level graduate schools of public policy). Before I knew it, 83 out of 265 students enrolled in the GraSPP had come from 30 different countries and regions around the world, and one-third of classes are conducted in English. Conversations of students walking through the hallway were not just in Chinese and English any more, but have become multilingual quickly over last few years. GraSPP is likely to be the most active school in international exchanges among the graduate schools of social sciences and humanities at the University of Tokyo. We, the staff members, had to inconvenience many people in the beginning because we had to do everything from scratch. We, however, persevered head on to achieve "hand-made GraSPP style internationalization" with the spirit of pioneers who are opening up wilderness.

In spite of the fact I work in such an international environment, I am a genuine stay-at-home Japanese who has never left Japan for more than 3 weeks. Yet, I have been mistaken for a person of non-Japanese origin since I was in my twenties. During the past several years, I often travelled to various countries in Asia with the professors of GraSPP and visited their central banks and finance ministries in order to increase the awareness of the MPP/IP course and provide briefing on scholarship programs. This might have contributed to my becoming a person of even more uncertain ethnicity. In Hanoi, I was asked if I was a Vietnamese. I was spoken to in Tagalog in Manila. After more than 30 minutes of conversation with the

driver at the Japanese consulate in Mumbai, I found out that I had been mistaken for a local Indian employee. In Yangon, a person who exchanged business cards with me said, "Oh, you're not Burmese." Even on a JAL flight, a Japanese cabin attendant, who had been speaking Japanese to passengers in the seats behind me, switched to English when she came to my seat. There are many more such episodes.

September 27, 2012 was the day when the first ceremony for MPP/IP degree conferment was held. It did not rain as forecast on that day, and graduating students received their degree certificates. I hugged one of the foreign students and congratulated her. To my surprise, she, a woman in a beautiful hakama, flashed her certificate at me, and said, "This belongs to you! I could not have come this far without help from all of you at the office!!" It was a particularly tender moment since they were the first graduates of the program.

People often talk about developing global human resources. Persons with a little international experience, however, are ubiquitous. I will do what little I can together with my team to help ensure that GraSPP will keep education people with a global vision and the ability to make contributions to the future world, and that we can create the best environment possible for our students.



Murmurs and Musings

No. 5



Eiichi Hasegawa Professor

My struggles with English

Even though I conduct my classes in English and assess students in English now, my English-speaking life did not start until I was 30. I have decided to make this confession in the hope that the GraSPP students might gain confidence (or get appalled?) to know that “someone like this man could master English!”

After graduating from university, I entered the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). I was “working like a dog” (It’s from the Beatles song. Do you know the Beatles?) In my 6th year at the MITI, I asked for a chance to study overseas. The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in the US was generous enough to accept me. In the beginning, however, people could not understand my poorly-pronounced English, and I could not understand their English. All other students were younger than me. How embarrassed I was. How mortified I was. Nevertheless, I had no excuse since it was nobody but myself who had chosen the path. So I drove myself into a corner, and read books after books with the help of a dictionary.

I was lucky that I was assigned to a post that required English after I returned to Japan. I travelled to the Pentagon every month during the SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative) negotiations in which President Reagan was pressuring the Soviet Union with a challenging defense plan (I will discuss the details of the negotiations in my class!). Later, I was posted to the United States and lived there for three years. Trade friction was a hot-button issue back then, and my English was much better than it is now as I lived in English every day. I used to exchange views and opinions or have a dinner with Mr. Timothy Geithner, who is the Secretary of Treasury now, and Ms. Condoleezza Rice, who was the Secretary of State in the previous administration. United States is such an open country.

After my return to Japan, I was assigned to a post in charge of Chinese, Korean and Indian affairs. I realized that English was the preferred language in Asia as well. If you do your business in English during negotiations, the other party will treat you in a respectful manner. Coming into this century, I attended the Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) of the APEC, and found out that the importance of English education was emphasized not only in Asian but also in South American countries.

My most memorable English-related experience was a direct conversation I was allowed to have with then British Prime Minister Tony Blair in my capacity as the Cabinet Public Relations Secretary during the UK visit by then Prime Minister of Japan about the handling of press conference after the summit talks. I was struggling with drowsiness caused by the nine-hour time difference, and I knew I was talking to the prime minister of the country where English was born. Prime Minister Blair, however, saved the scene by asking casually, “Which one of you is the Japanese press secretary?” That was when I decided to “take the situation as it comes.” In the end, I managed to fulfill my duties. To honor your guest at a press conference – I was impressed by Mr. Blair’s style of hospitality.

Be it in industrialized countries or in developing countries, English is the common knowledge of the world. Japan is one of the few exceptions when it comes to English. If you cannot communicate in English, you are a minor league player in the international game. At work and socially as well, you will get ten times more friends if you can speak one foreign language; 100 times more if you can speak two. I say this to the students: You bear the destiny of future Japan on your shoulders. Do not shy away from the struggle in front of you now. The road to success lies ahead of you.



When West Meets East

Shaun Ketch (2nd Year, MPP/IP)



I first studied in Japan as an undergraduate exchange student, and even though I took a few Japanese language courses at my home school in the United States, I was certainly not prepared for life in Japan (I’m sure some of my classmates at GraSPP can relate!). After many funny and distressing experiences trying to adapt culturally to an exciting and new place, I finally struck a smart balance between stubbornly maintaining all parts of my own cultural identity and doing things the Japanese way. It was then that I started to feel at home in Japan (I hope my classmates can relate to this, too!). After graduation, I went on to work for a Japanese law firm.

I always knew that I wanted to go to graduate school. I quickly determined that after living and working in Japan, my personal and academic interests were now mostly Japan-centered. I then started looking for US-based schools that would allow me to study in Japan, and found out about GraSPP after sending an email to Columbia University about graduate exchange opportunities in Japan.

While there are many schools in Japan that are international student friendly, GraSPP, to quote Dean Ito, “is the most cosmopolitan Japanese campus, and provides both Japanese and non-Japanese equal footing in competing and cooperating on group projects.” I wholeheartedly agree.

My most cherished experience at GraSPP was the 2012 Study Trip to the Tohoku region. Although a year and a half had passed since the tsunami devastated northern Japan, reconstruction had yet to begin in many areas. We were allowed access to local mayors, hospital directors, NPOs, local business owners and residents, graduate students, and temporary housing leaders throughout the region. After identifying which policy challenges remained in the region, our group—a cohesive mix of both Japanese and international students—were able to apply skills acquired in the classroom to a real and sensitive event, and make informed recommendations to our alumni and colleagues.

As a second-year student at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), I continue to study US-East Asia relations and East Asian security under highly regarded specialists on the region. This dual program has provided me with an understanding of economics, diplomacy, and security from both Eastern and Western perspectives, and I hope that this understanding will allow me to help strengthen ties between the US and Asia in meaningful ways after school. Though the dual degree is an amazing opportunity, I could have easily stayed at Todai for year two. I already miss being on the Hongo campus. I’m sure the Gingko trees look amazing now! I also miss studying with the brightest and kindest the world has to offer. Best of luck to all of my amazing colleagues at Todai!

Interview

— I heard both of you speak Japanese better I do.

Ilya ("I"): In Saint Petersburg, where I have lived since I was four, I have always been in touch with the Japanese language and culture. I watched movies like the *Snakes and the Earrings* and animes such as *Ghost in the Shell* on the internet with Japanese subtitles. I also had some friends among Japanese expatriates working for trading companies. The Japanese Consulate General in Saint Petersburg is very active in cultural exchanges. They organize various events, such as a Japanese Film Festival and Japanese speech contests.

Jongwon ("J"): When I enrolled in the School of International Liberal Studies of Waseda University, the foreign students were required to take 6-credit Japanese language course. Because of that, speaking in Japanese for hours does not tire me out any more. I watched *Ghost in the Shell* too. The Wachowski brothers who directed the Hollywood film *The Matrix* declared that they were influenced by this anime.

— Is there any culture or custom of Japan that you think is unique to this country?

J: I want to go to a maid café just once, but can't muster enough courage yet to do so. ("Me too!" says Ilya.) Other than that, I'd say, "cosplays" and Shibuya gals.

I: Drunks who sleep on the train on a Friday night. That's impossible in other countries at any rate. Of course, we have drunks sleeping outside in Russia too. Some even fall once they get out of bars. Russians drink far more than Japanese people, although the number of non-drinkers is on the rise recently, even in Russia. I quit drinking too.

Student



Jongwon Lee

(Republic of Korea)

MPP/IP course (2nd year)



Ilya Vasilenko

(Russia)

MPP/IP course (2nd year)

International

— What did you think of the classes?

I: I really enjoyed *Transportation Policy* (Professors Katsuya Hihara, Masako Okano and Yuichiro Yoshida) with a lot of guest speakers and field trips. As far as the student presentation is concerned, student-teacher discussions could have gone deeper to make them better had there been an opportunity to do a presentation sometime during the course. It is my only regret because the subject matter was very interesting.

J: The MPP/IP course emphasizes economic subjects. This is what I have wished for, and I find it stimulating. However, GraSPP might be able to draw more on its strong points if the students acquired a basic knowledge of economics beforehand.

— Is there anything about Japanese people and the society that has surprised you?

I: What surprised me the most was that extreme competitiveness of the Japanese people and society. Although the country has few natural resources and (both government and corporate) management is conservative and rigid, the nation hasn't collapsed. Is it because fairness and honesty are the fundamental code of behavior in Japan?

Job hunting looks very difficult in Japan. Students in Russia are not as much oriented toward big companies as in Japan. Many think they can showcase their capabilities more in small companies that liked them enough to hire. So they take a job in small or medium-size companies.

J: Personally, I think competition is a lot more intense in Korea. Everyone makes desperate efforts in Korea because you'll never know when you might be fired even if you are an executive in a big company like Samsung. The father of a friend of mine is a Samsung executive. I hear he routinely arrives at work at six o'clock in the morning. Because relative evaluation is everything there, students regard their performance at school in terms of competition with others. Job hunting is fiercely competitive too. Many students want to work for big companies just like in Japan, but competition is more intense than in Japan because the rate of advancement to university is extremely high and there are not enough big companies and middle-scale companies in Korea. This fiercely competitive society may be a cause that is making Koreans less considerate or empathetic to others than Japanese.

— What is your plan for getting a job?

I: I'm going to look for a job in Japan. I have a consulting firm run by Russians on mind. This firm operates as a conduit for attracting Japanese technologies and companies to Russia.

J: I have been very fortunate and blessed to be able to study at Waseda University and GraSPP. Lately I have been pondering what my mission might be. I think I'd like to serve at a high level for regional cooperation in Asia in return for all the support I have received. It doesn't matter whether it is a government or an international agency. My choice will be an organization where I can work to promote economic cooperation in Asia and to contribute to the growth of the Southeast Asia. There will be a wide range of choices. Whichever path (organization) I may take, I will be happy if I can ultimately accomplish my objectives.

(Interview and text by editor)



Pre-Graduation Ceremony and Reception
 @ Kojima Hall and Capo PELLICANO Hongo
 July 31, 2012



Editor's Postscript

The word "internationalization" reminds me of my mother. Long time ago, a Pakistani family with a baby moved in near my parents' home. The baby was so adorable that my mother talked to the family everyday saying (in Japanese) "Good morning. Isn't the baby cute?" When she went to New York, she put all coins on her palm and extended her hand to a young man at the deli counter as if to say "take what I owe you from here" as she could not speak English. The young man laughed and picked out what she owed out of her hand. To deal with people with an open mind without preconceived ideas — it may sound easy, but not always so. (Editor)

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