

# 異文化交流が学生の日本の見方へ及ぼす影響の調査報告

キッド ダスティン  
(総合文化学科)

A Survey Report on How Intercultural Exchange  
Affects Students' Perceptions of Japan  
Dustin Kidd

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## Abstract

This survey was conducted by the author to gain a better understanding of how Japanese students at two universities in Matsue who participated in the 2014 summer trip to Central Washington University were affected by their experience, namely in how those experiences changed their outlook on their own country. Twenty-three students participated in this survey, rating their responses to sixteen statements that covered a broad range of ideas about culture and daily lifestyle. The majority of the students expressed at least some degree of change in their perspectives on Japan, and many of their comments provided an interesting insight into their views of both Japan and the USA. This survey will be used in the future to provide useful data which can be analyzed to gain a better understanding of how intercultural exchange affects the way people see their native countries.

## Introduction

This college offers a yearly summer overseas trip to Central Washington University (CWU) in Ellensburg, Washington, USA as part of our curriculum. Students who take part in this trip take English classes and participate in cultural activities over a two- to three-week period. The trip is offered as a way for students to have opportunities to learn and practice English in a variety of settings while learning about and experiencing a new culture. In August of 2014, the author joined this trip as one of two chaperones for the students who participated.

Interacting with a new culture can lead to many instances of culture shock, where the common sense that one has developed from one's own culture and various life experiences does not match up, or in extreme situations, even remotely apply to the common sense of the new culture being experienced. Going through experiences of culture shock gives one new perspective that then reflects back onto one's own culture, and can lead to new discoveries or understanding, or even a greater appreciation, of one's native country. The author's experiences of both culture shock overseas, during travels and as an exchange student, and reverse culture shock upon returning home, provided these opportunities to gain a different viewpoint; these became the inspiration for this survey report.

The author decided that instead of looking at how students' views of the USA changed through their experiences on this trip, it might be more revealing to look at how those experiences changed how the participants viewed their native country of Japan and its culture. As such, the author designed a survey for the participating students to answer, in the hopes that it might provide some insight into the effects of intercultural exchange on how people perceive their native country.

## Method

### *Participants*

Twenty-three students participated in the 2014 overseas trip to CWU; twenty-two first-year students from the University of Shimane Junior College, Matsue Campus, and one first-year student from Shimane University. All of the students were between the ages of eighteen and nineteen. There were twenty-one female students and two male students. Of the twenty-two students from this college, three were majors in the Health and Nutrition Department, four were majors in the Early Childhood Education Department, and fifteen were majors in the Arts and Sciences Department. Of those fifteen students, one was a major in the Japanese Course, two were majors in the Cultural Resources Course, and the other twelve were majors in the English Course. The Shimane University student was a major in the Law and Literature Department, with a focus on Linguistics. Also, of the twenty-three students, sixteen had never been to another country before; of the students who had been overseas previously, the countries they had visited included the USA, China, Indonesia, Australia and South Korea.

### *Trip Content*

This year's trip was over a period of twenty days, from August 6<sup>th</sup> to August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Students stayed in a campus dormitory during their time at CWU. The majority of weekday mornings were taken up by English classes taught by two

instructors, one of whom taught language classes while the other taught culture classes. The students were divided into two separate groups which would switch classes halfway through each morning. Students were challenged to speak as much English as possible, with several tasks or challenges assigned to them outside of class as well. The instructors set up a friendly competition between the two groups which ended up motivating many of the students to actively use their English.

The afternoons and weekends were taken up by a variety of activities, many of which were first-time experiences for the majority of the participants. Activities included horseback riding, attending a Major League Baseball game in Seattle, floating the Yakima River, going to Mt. Rainier, and visiting a variety of museums and cultural centers. A visit to a local hay company with strong business connections to Japan was also organized, along with a visit to the on-campus day care center for infants and small children. Four CWU students were conversation group leaders who interacted with the students during special evening activities as well as many of the afternoon activities. Students also had opportunities to interact with members of the community during home visits or other specially organized events.

During the trip, the students were divided into four smaller groups of five or six members, and each of the four groups (A1, A2, B1, and B2) was given a topic on which to make a presentation. The students had several opportunities to make these presentations, including once to the President of Central Washington University and his wife, as well as to members of the community and ESL students at the university. A1 made a presentation about this college and Shimane University, A2 about Shimane Prefecture and the San-in Area, B1 about Matsue, and B2 about the local mythology, doing a skit performance of the Yamata-no-Orochi myth.

The final full day of the trip was spent in Seattle, with students being given free time to shop and sightsee.

### *Survey Design*

The author designed a simple survey that covered a variety of topics based on the contents of the trip and the observed student reactions, as well as the author's prior personal experiences. This was done in order to gauge the range and degree of the effects, if any, the students' experiences throughout the trip had on their outlook, as well as to see if students had made observations or experienced situations similar to those of the author's own. The survey consisted of the following sixteen statements, with a Japanese translation provided after each one in an attempt to avoid misunderstandings:

Following my return to Japan after the CWU Summer Program:

- 1) My views on how I spend my free time changed.

- 2) My views on how Japanese people in general spend their free time changed.
- 3) My views on family life and family relationships in Japan changed.
- 4) My views on Japanese food changed. (ex.: flavor, serving size, variety, etc)
- 5) My views on English education in Japan changed.
- 6) My views on education in general in Japan changed.
- 7) My views on personal responsibility changed.
- 8) My views on personal freedom changed.
- 9) My views on recreation changed. (ex.: the kinds of activities you can do, etc.)
- 10) My views on what qualifies as a big city, and what qualifies as a rural area, changed.
- 11) My way of thinking about distance changed.
- 12) My image of personal space changed. (ex.: between you and another person, between two other people, what is comfortable/uncomfortable distance)
- 13) My views on television changed. (ex.: programs, commercials, news, etc.)
- 14) My views on group activities changed.
- 15) My views of myself changed.
- 16) My views on gender roles changed. (ex.: men's/women's roles in society, what is expected of men/women, etc.)

Students were then instructed to respond to each statement by rating their degree of agreement on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree), and then to add any specific details regarding the reason they had for each rating, even if their thoughts on a particular statement were not affected by the trip. They were allowed to give their reasons in either English or Japanese. All students chose to respond in Japanese.

## Results

### *Predictions*

Being that most of the survey statements were based upon observed student reactions to aspects of USA culture over the course of the trip, there was a natural expectation to see a high result for each statement. In regards to the statement about television (#13), the author accepted the possibility of a lower score, as there weren't many observed instances of students watching TV, although they had access to a TV in their dormitory and the free time to watch it. The author predicted that the overall average of responses to all sixteen statements would be close to 4.0.

### *Actual Results*

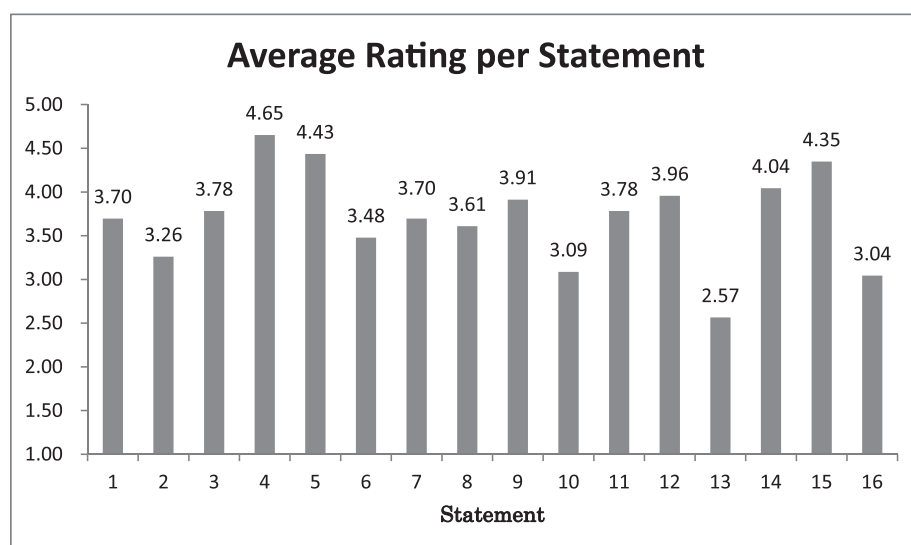
Table 1 shows the number of students who selected a particular rating for

each statement.

**Table 1 : Total Student Ratings per Statement**

		Rating				
		1	2	3	4	5
Statement	S1	0	2	5	14	2
	S2	1	4	7	10	1
	S3	0	4	3	10	6
	S4	0	0	1	6	16
	S5	0	1	0	10	12
	S6	2	1	8	8	4
	S7	0	3	3	15	2
	S8	0	3	9	5	6
	S9	1	0	5	11	6
	S10	1	3	14	3	2
	S11	0	2	7	8	6
	S12	2	0	3	10	8
	S13	3	7	10	3	0
	S14	0	1	3	13	6
	S15	1	0	1	9	12
	S16	3	3	9	6	2

Figure 1 shows the average student rating for each statement.



In addition to collecting the ratings for each student, the author collected the comments provided for each student's reasoning behind selecting a particular ranking for each statement. These comments have provided some interesting insight.

For Statement 1, comments included being able to use a limited time frame more effectively and focusing on doing more activities outside after their return to Japan. Students also mentioned using their free time to study English, and a desire to interact more with other people.

Common observations for Statement 2 included recognizing the importance of direct communication with other people; noticing that many Japanese people spend time alone on SNS or smartphones, or playing video games; and a lack of free time in Japan or a need for Japanese people to better switch between work and free time. One student mentioned feeling that Japanese people don't know what to do with their free time, and another mentioned that Japanese people tend to make very detailed plans, whereas people in the USA tend to make an overall schedule that is more flexible.

Statement 3 had a large number of comments about how students felt they wanted to spend more time with their own families, have more meaningful interactions with them, or simply be more open and candid with them. One student mentioned that husbands should help out more around the house in Japan.

Statement 4 was the highest rated statement out of all sixteen. Many students mentioned gaining a greater appreciation for Japanese food and how healthy and delicious it is, especially after being shocked by the amount and strong flavors of the food in the US. One Health and Nutrition major observed that she once again recognized that the nutritional balance, amount, and method of preparing food in Japan are all done with the body in mind, while another commented on becoming more aware of the importance of umami in meals after eating strong-flavored foods in the USA.

The comments for Statement 5 focused on the strong focus on grammar in English education in Japan. Many students expressed a desire for more practical education, or a focus on more English that has everyday uses. The sole student who ranked this statement with a 2 commented that between experiences of memorizing difficult grammar-related terminology and only having writing practice in classes, it was unsurprising to see that many Japanese people have difficulty speaking English in real-life situations.

For Statement 6, many students commented that a more active and interesting educational environment where students can make comments would be beneficial. An Early Childhood Education major remarked that after seeing how sign language was used by small children at CWU's on-campus day care center to communicate what they wanted, it would be a good idea to apply sign language use at day-care centers in Japan.

Statement 7 was one of the lower rated statements, and some students commented that either they didn't notice a large difference between the two countries, or they had several opportunities already to consider their own personal responsibility and this experience didn't change that. A common thread was the importance of considering the group and avoiding inconveniencing anyone.

Student responses to Statement 8 included many mentions about how people in the USA have more personal freedom than people in Japan, and how Japanese society places more restrictions on people. The lack of prejudiced reactions toward tattoos, piercings, or same-sex couples kissing were surprising to some, and one student mentioned that old notions are also placing restrictions on personal freedom.

Although Statement 9, which addressed recreation, was in a sense similar to Statement 2, student ratings and comments differed. The prevalence of outdoor activities was a frequent comment, and some students felt that the lack of space in Japan is one reason for the difference in recreation activities. One student mentioned that the importance of team building activities was a similarity between Japan and the USA. An Early Childhood Education major commented that some of the games in the USA could also be used effectively in day-care centers in Japan.

Statement 10 was rated quite lowly, with an average near 3. Most students commented that there wasn't much of a difference between conceptions in Japan and the USA on what is considered a big city and what is considered a rural area. A common response was that both urban and rural areas have their unique merits, although some students mentioned gaining a greater appreciation for rural areas.

A frequent response to Statement 11 was that the USA was very large, and while the distances students had to walk were difficult at first, walking became enjoyable. Some students decided to go walking more often after returning to Japan. One student shared that she had gained a greater appreciation for the automobile. Also, distances that seemed quite far before going to the USA now seem much closer to some students.

Statement 12, regarding personal space, received many comments about how Japanese people tend to keep their distance from others, although some students noticed that body contact between friends was more common at times with Japanese people. After spending time in dormitory rooms together, one student mentioned feeling lonely at times upon returning to Japan and being by herself. Another student found it easier to talk to people in Japan after her experience in the USA, and another found it easier to decide when to be more anxious around people and when to be more relaxed.

Statement 13 was the lowest rated statement on the survey. The majority of comments from the students remarked on how they did not watch much, if any, television while in the USA. Those who did mentioned the creativity in commercials in the US, as well as an abundance of commercial<sup>5</sup> for food. One student commented

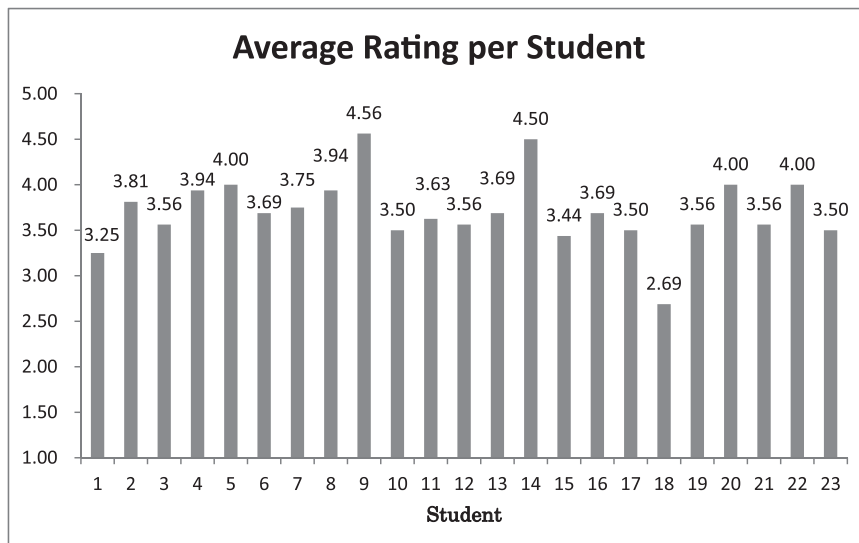
that recent Japanese TV programs seemed much noisier upon returning to Japan, along with a frequent usage of captions that aren't expressing anything that anyone on the screen is saying.

Many of the comments for Statement 14, which dealt with group activities, shared themes with those for Statement 7, which dealt with personal responsibility. Several students realized the importance of avoiding causing the group any inconvenience. Also, it was frequently mentioned that even within a group, students felt that each member should have their own opinions and should share them. An intriguing comment from one student mentioned that she felt that Japanese people, in both a good way and a bad way, are very cooperative.

Statement 15, which dealt with students' views of themselves, had a rich variety of responses. Many students found that they have become more outgoing and are actively participating in classes after their return. They mention having clearer goals, along with the necessity of clearly expressing one's opinions. Some gained more self-confidence, while others realized how little they knew about themselves. Overall, this trip seems to have been an eye-opening experience from the perspective of personal identity.

The final statement, Statement 16, was about gender roles. It was the second-lowest rated statement on the survey. Many students mentioned that either they did not notice any significant differences, or they didn't have an opportunity to think about such roles. Other students noted that men and women seemed much more equal in the USA, and it emphasized the disparity they felt between men and women in Japan. Several of the female students commented on men in the USA being gentlemanly.

Figure 2 shows each student's average rating for all 16 statements.





## Analysis and Conclusions

The total average response to the statements was 3.71, which is slightly lower than the predicted result, but it still shows that generally, students' perspectives on their native country did change somewhat after returning to Japan. Student responses generally fell along the author's predictions, although the total number of ratings of 3 ("neither agree nor disagree") given for Statements 8, 10, 13 and 16 were unexpected. Average ratings for Statements 2, 10, and 16 were also lower than expected, although student comments provide understanding into the reasons for this. For these three statements, students who gave lower ratings commented that either their way of thinking about those topics didn't change at all, or they didn't have an opportunity to consider that topic while they were in the USA. The low rating for Statement 13, regarding views about television, was unsurprising, especially since many students commented that they did not watch much TV at all while in the USA.

The highest ratings were for Statements 4, 5, and 15. Statement 4 dealt with student views on Japanese food, Statement 5 with English education in Japan, and Statement 15 with students' views of themselves. The necessity of eating meant that students would come into contact with a variety of foods, giving them a breadth and depth of experience that they may have not had with other facets of culture in the USA. This would naturally leave a strong impression. As for Statement 5, this was the first time for many of the students to put their English education to practical use within a natural setting, and their comments illustrate the initial frustration that many of them experienced. This would give them a different perspective on the education they received in Japan. As for Statement 15, an overseas experience is likely to change a person, and given that each student had responded with high rankings to one or more of the other statements, the collective effect of their changed views on other topics would naturally lead many of them to feel that they saw themselves in a different light upon their return to Japan.

While many of the student comments provided interesting insight into how their perspectives changed after the trip, a second common theme was of how their experiences in the USA reaffirmed their perspectives on Japan. Overseas experiences not only open your eyes to new ideas and ways of looking at the world, but they also can reaffirm your perspectives on your home country and help you gain a new appreciation for certain aspects of life there.

Upon analysis of the student responses, it seems that there may have been some misunderstandings of the author's intent with regards to ranking the statements. There were several instances where students ranked a statement lowly, but the reasoning expressed in their comments suggested that a higher ranking would have been appropriate.

### Future Studies

The author hopes to focus more on how student perceptions change through overseas trips and other intercultural exchange activities. In future studies, a pre-trip survey should be conducted along with a post-trip survey to gather more reliable data, as well as to gain a better grasp of student perceptions of Japan through comments gathered prior to the trip. Further refinement of the survey questions, along with a deeper analysis of what kind of statements should be presented for students to rank, is also necessary.

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