

# An Attempt at Cross-Cultural Exchange Activity: Collaborative Field Study with International Students

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## An Attempt at Cross-Cultural Exchange Activity : Collaborative Field Study with International Students

Yumie MURATA\*

### 1. Introduction

The faculty of Regional Development Studies has the largest number of international students among all the faculties at Toyo University. The faculty offers various cross-cultural exchange activities every year. For instance, the International Student Symposium and field studies are offered, which are attended by foreign visitors, and Japanese speech contests and excursions are held for international students of the faculty. It is a meaningful experience for both international students and Japanese students to exchange opinions based on their perspectives from their various cultural backgrounds.

In general, it is expected that cross-cultural contact with people of a host country will foster the visitor's adaptation to that country. This idea is called "contact hypothesis," and Tanaka (2000) explained that it can be applied to various aspects of adaptation, such as avoiding potential health problems and developing interculturality. International students especially prefer to have contact with their hosts for academic help (Bochner, McLeod, and Lin, 1977 ; Furnham and Alibhai, 1985). To encourage international students to have more contact with Japanese students, the faculty's Japanese language teachers have tried to offer opportunities for international students to meet with Japanese students. For instance, the teachers invited Japanese students to Japanese language classes attended by international students for discussions or cultural presentations. However, those events tend to result in only temporary contacts. Therefore, the teachers decided to launch a new program to improve this situation.

### 2. Background of Planning a New Program

The teachers sought to discover why previous cross-cultural activities did not help to sustain students' long-term intercultural contacts. Common cultural exchange activities offered in the past include :

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(1) Presentations

Introducing the lifestyle and customs of their home countries

Introducing tourist spots in participants' hometowns

Inviting Japanese students to Japanese speech contests in which international students compete

(2) Discussion meetings

Discussions about various themes such as campus life and hobbies

Although these activities were interesting, they did not help students to sustain contact with those of the host country. For example, in activity (1), students on both sides tend to be passive while listening to presentations. Though there is time for discussion or comments, the students' remarks do not go beyond the superficial. As for Japanese speech contests, it is rare to have a Japanese audience, and there is no time for Japanese students to offer comments. In activity (2), the students do enjoy the sessions, but they do not continue to meet with each other after the activities are over. This may be because they do not remember the names of the participants, or because they do not have a good reason to begin conversing with each other outside the classroom.

Other than the past examples noted above, teachers could plan other activities such as

(3) Cultural experiences

Making Chinese dumplings together (taught by Chinese students)

This would be fun for all participants, but it might not encourage the students to talk very much. Participants would follow the instructions given by the volunteer instructors, but there would not be enough time for them to enhance their exchange of opinions with more than superficial comments. Also, again, students may not find a good reason to talk outside the classroom.

Given these circumstances, two Japanese language teachers planned a new approach to encouraging cultural exchange and long-term connections between the Japanese and international students. The teachers set up a program intended especially for first-year students to participate in a cultural exchange.

The author, who is one of those Japanese language teachers, determined that the students needed to have some exercises in which they could practice friendly communication and then continue a conversation with someone whom they met for the first time. International students in Japan are experiencing life in a different culture. All of them have stayed in Japan for more than two years and experienced Japanese language schools or common high schools. However, international students from Japanese language schools have not had Japanese classmates before they entered the university. Moreover, most Japanese students have not had the experience of studying with international classmates in their earlier years of school. The author decided to devise a plan that included activities such as breaking the ice, pair-work conversations, and tips for continuing friendly conversations outside the classroom after this activity.

The teachers also decided to have a main activity that took place after those communication activities. To avoid allowing some students to remain passive, a collaborative learning activity seemed to be desirable for those first-year students who are motivated to start a new life on campus. Since the faculty is characterized by active learning through field studies, the teachers tried to come up with a learning plan based on a short field study, a small survey, and presentations.

### **3. Contents of the Program**

The teachers chose the theme “Chinese Cuisine in Japan : Its Uniqueness.” Chinese food is quite common in Japan, and there are many “traditional” Chinese restaurants. However, most of these restaurants are local, and they serve foods considerably different from those in China. For example, everyone would agree that Ramen is originally a Chinese noodle, but highly arranged by Japanese people. Another good example is dumplings. Dumplings are usually served boiled in China, but in Japan boiled dumplings are rare : they are usually pan fried. The flavoring of foods is also different between China and Japan. Chinese students often point out that Chinese food served in Japan tastes sweet.

These cultural features are obvious for Chinese students, but most Japanese students would be unaware of these aspects of Chinese food because traditional Chinese restaurants are too familiar to them. Furthermore, few Japanese students have the chance to compare authentic Chinese restaurants with the local traditional Chinese restaurants in Japan. On the other hand, although Chinese students think there is a big difference between Chinese food in China and Japan, they usually do not have the opportunity to tell this to anyone. Since they are trying hard to get accustomed to living in Japan, they soon forget their initial impressions and become unaware of them. The opportunity offered by the teachers for them to tell about the uniqueness of Chinese food in Japan would be a good chance for them to express the cultural differences between China and Japan.

Though our faculty has international students from other countries, the teachers conceived that this theme would also be valuable to those students from other countries. Chinese food is common all over the world. The students could compare Chinese restaurants in their countries with those in Japan.

Beside food, there are other unique features of Chinese restaurants in Japan. The teachers expected the students to collaborate and identify the various unique features.

#### **3-1. Objectives**

The objectives of the program are as follows :

- (1) To motivate the first-year students to pursue a new academic challenge
- (2) To encourage a cultural exchange between Japanese and international students through building communication skills and collaborative learning
- (3) To do a field study of Chinese restaurants in the Jimbocho area, near our campus, in the spirit of the fac-

ulty's motto, "Think Globally, Act Locally"

- (4) To try to take another look at familiar things through the experience of a simple field study of Chinese restaurants

### 3-2. Participants

The total number of students was 28 : (1) 17 Japanese students from the Department of Tourism, Introductory *Zemi* (Seminar), (2) 11 international students from a Japanese language class (a compulsory subject) for the first-year students. All the international students were from China, except for one student who was from the Philippines. Two Japanese language teachers ran the program and gave the instructions. One of the teachers was also in charge of the Introductory *Zemi*.

### 3-3. Schedule of Program

The program took four periods. The teachers outlined the schedule as below (every Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> period). On day 2, students might use their lunchtime as well. A rough schedule is shown below in Table 1.

### 3-4. Budget and Expense

The budget for every student is 800 yen excluding tax. The total expense is supposed to be 25,200 yen for 28 students and 2 teachers. The university can partially cover the expense.

## 4. Details of each Session

Details of aims and outcomes of each session of the program are as follows.

### 4-1. Session 1

#### (1) Aims

Session 1 is for communication activities. The students need to break the ice and receive tips for friendly communication. To make their collaborative survey successful, they should become close to each other in this session. Since the activity takes place in April, the beginning of the new academic year, even Japanese students are anxious to make new friends. The students are expected to make friends, including with the international students. In general, international students are more experienced at engaging in conversations with people they first meet than Japanese students, because by coming to Japan, they have experienced living in another country. The teachers arranged as many communication pairs as possible consisting of Japanese students and international students. Of course, there are a greater number of Japanese students, and therefore some pairs consist of only Japanese students. However, since these activities were aimed at building communication skills, the teachers decided this would not be a big problem. The pairs will be broken up, and new pairs will be made several times.

Table 1. Schedule of the Program

Session#	Date	Activities	Notes
1	23 <sup>rd</sup> Apr.	<p><b>Introductory session (conversation and group setting)</b></p> <p>The first half of the session : Students try to be frank and open through (1) Tips for friendly conversation, (2) Ice-breaking, and (3) pair-conversations.</p> <p>The second half of the session : Students are divided into 5 groups for the field study and survey. One target restaurant is assigned to each group and a worksheet (see appendix 1.) is handed to every student. Students make sure of the meeting place and their target restaurants. They also decide tasks and roles of each member.</p>	<p>(1) Students are divided into 5 groups containing 8 members with both international and Japanese students.</p> <p>(2) Since the activities are many, teachers should manage the limited time given</p> <p>(3) Prepare the maps and worksheets for the field study beforehand</p>
2	30 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	<p><b>Field study (at Jimbocho)</b></p> <p>Students observe the target restaurants and survey items in the worksheet. They actually order foods, eat them, and write notes.</p>	<p>(1) Students pursue the survey following the worksheet. They should take photos of the assigned numbers</p> <p>(2) Make sure they are not late for classes in the afternoon</p>
3	7 <sup>th</sup> May	<p><b>Preparation for the Presentation (Power point)</b></p> <p>Students get together at the computer lab and make power point slides for the presentation based on the worksheet, notes and photos they have taken. They also practice for the presentation.</p>	Teachers keep time to make sure the students can complete their work within the class period
4	14 <sup>th</sup> May	<p><b>Presentation Day</b></p> <p>All the groups give presentations. The teachers give comments and feedbacks.</p>	Prepare a work sheet for the audience and a further task for after class

## (2) Effects

The results showed that students enjoyed the communication activities and became close enough to pursue their collaborative survey in the next session. After listening to the explanation of the survey worksheet (see Appendix 1), they discussed the survey in their groups.

## 4-2. Session 2

### (1) Aims

Session 2 is for the collaborative survey. The pairs of participants are divided into 5 groups, and each group visits an assigned restaurant. Following the guidelines on the worksheet handed out in the previous session, they order foods, take notes, and photographs. The international students are expected to give their opinions about the differences between Chinese food in their countries and in Japan. For Japanese students, it is a good chance to listen to “live” opinions : they can actually eat the foods. In other typical shared cross-cultural activities, foods

are sometimes offered, but participants have to try hard to find mutual conversation topics. However, since the students have a shared mission this time, they can talk to each other enthusiastically.

(2) Effects

The result was that the students discussed enough during lunchtime and completed their survey.

#### 4-3. Session 3

(1) Aims

Session 3 is for the planning the presentation. First, based on the data they collected, the students decide what to talk about, which photos to show, and so on. Second, they cooperate to make slides for presentation in the computer lab. Because the students are freshmen, the teachers need to suggest some tips for how to manage effective discussions and engage in brainstorming.

The teachers did not assign this planning as homework because most of the international students do not have time to get together again due to their part-time jobs. Therefore, everything should be done in one period (90 minutes).

(2) Effects

One of the teachers acted as a timekeeper to manage the limited time. Students discussed well and most of the groups completed their planning in time. The groups that could not complete it managed to divide their work among the members without having additional meetings.

#### 4-4. Session 4

(1) Aims

In 90 minutes, each of the 5 groups gives a presentation for 15 minutes. Students are expected to take notes so that they can ask questions. They need to vote for the best presentation as well.

As an established rule, all the members should be given a chance to talk in public, i.e., it is not acceptable for a student to choose a representative to give the presentation. This is a good opportunity for the international students to give presentations in front of native Japanese speakers. For the Japanese students, it is stimulating to see good presentations in Japanese by the international students.

(2) Effects

All of the students were given a chance to make a presentation in public. The good presenters became models for the other students. Some international students gave good presentations in Japanese, and they astonished the Japanese students.

Students' findings included many different points of view. Examples of what they pointed out are as follows :

-Difference in the ingredients of dumplings (e.g., less meat and more vegetables in Japan)

- Difference in what the restaurants served (e.g., *Ebichili*, chili-peppered prawn, is not originally from China)
- Difference in tastes (e.g., Sichuan cuisine such as *Ma po tofu* and *tantan men* is much hotter in China)
- Difference in the interior design of the restaurants (e.g., Japanese style or a luxury western style in Japan)
- Difference in customs (e.g., the Chinese do not eat noodles with rice)
- Difference in the service (e.g., *Oshibori* is not common in China ; waiters in black suits are rare in China ; hall staff are very kind in Japan, and so on)

## 5. Results

Both the Japanese and the international students viewed the program favorably. Most of them commented that they would like to have another opportunity to participate in similar events. The students' comments are basically positive.

The Japanese students commented that it was almost their first experience of meeting international students, especially Chinese students, and they confessed that they had changed their image of Chinese people : they became more interested in China. Two students commented that they usually get information about China through TV or the Internet, and this program presented them a good opportunity to actually listen to Chinese students. Some students commented that they discovered different points of view about culture through conversations with the international students. A student pointed out that having lunch at a Chinese restaurant with the international students had not only led them to expand their comments beyond "delicious" or so on, but also that this program made her look at Chinese cuisine from other points of view.

The international students commented that this activity was very good for a cultural exchange with Japanese students. Some students suggested that talking about Chinese food based on actually eating them was a genuinely good experience. This activity taught the Japanese students about foods in China, which made them more confident. A student from the Philippines also enjoyed the activity, and she discovered cultural differences among the Philippines, China, and Japan. The international students talked about their countries to the Japanese students, but they also found new points of view through the conversations with the Japanese students. It was also an opportunity for them to look at their own countries and at Japan from different perspectives.

Both the Japanese and international students shared one mission while pursuing this field study, which was to make their communication meaningful. According to a research study by Tsuboi (1991), the major reasons why Japanese students did not have friends who were international students and why international students did not have Japanese friends were (1) they did not have opportunities to get to know each other and (2) they could not find mutual interests to talk about. He compared the lifestyle and interests of both Japanese and international students and found that there was a big gap between them. However, because this program offered the students an opportunity not only to meet each other but also to collaborate on a field study, they were able to identify



mutual interests.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall the program could be regarded as successful. In session 1, the students learned communication skills, as the teachers had expected. This session built a good foundation for all the students to collaborate with each other in the succeeding sessions. In session 2, the students enjoyed conversations and pursued their survey as had been planned. They discovered many cultural differences, according to the worksheet. Their common mission helped them make their communication meaningful. In session 3, they could complete their task within the time allotted, although for some of them, making presentation slides on a computer was a new experience. Students also learned that they could go beyond their cultural differences to collaborate with each other. In session 4, they learned how to give an effective presentation through an actual opportunity to make a presentation and listen to the other presentations. In all the sessions, the students' remarks were completely autonomous and much more than superficial. The discussions were real and meaningful. It is possible to conclude that this program genuinely improved the previous situation described.

Because the students who participated in this program are still freshmen, many things looked new to them. The program motivated them for their new campus life. But it might have been different if they had been upperclassmen. The author would like to emphasize that this program helped the students learn how to be open to new relationships. It helped them not only to communicate on friendly terms with people from different countries but also to make new friends from their own countries. Before they entered the university, most of them had limited relationships in their small communities. The Japanese students were confined within their own high schools, and most of the international students were attending language schools. The author is convinced that this program offered an opportunity for them to learn communication skills that will be useful for them to make new relationships and to challenge new things.

After two months had passed, the author asked the international students whether they still maintained contact with those Japanese students. Some students answered that they sometimes talked with those Japanese friends on campus, but that they did not go beyond that. The author hopes that all the students who took part in this program will take full advantage of this experience to enhance their cross-cultural understanding.

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Appendix 1. The Worksheet

Restaurant's name \_\_\_\_\_

Uniqueness compared with Chinese restaurants abroad

1	Architecture/layouts
2	Service
3	Menu
4	Tastes/cookery
5	Price
6	Other

Chinese cuisine in Japan and its uniqueness :

Comparison with China and overseas

[You must...]

- Get together at the A 7 exit of Jimbocho Station. Take a roll call and receive the money from the teachers.
- Take pictures of the restaurant's external appearance, food, and so on.
- Take notes of what you eat (name and price).
- Conduct a survey according to the worksheet.
- Receive a receipt addressed to Toyo University when you settle the bills.
- After completing the survey, send a student representative to the meeting point with the teachers to hand in the receipt and change.

[Suggestions]

When you take pictures

- Be careful to traffic when you take pictures of the restaurant's exterior.
- Avoid taking pictures of other customers.
- Ask permission to take pictures (when the meals are served is desirable).
- Avoid talking aloud about survey contents (show consideration and courtesy for the restaurant staff and customers).

• Take notes in moderation.

Make sure to take the receipt (if not, you have to cover your own expenses).

Budget is 800 yen per person (excluding tax). Do not exceed it.

After eating

- Exchange your opinions outside the restaurants (do not disturb the restaurant staff and customers).
- Make sure you have enough data for your presentation and depart from each other.

[Meeting point with teachers]

Saint-Marc Cafe

Teacher's mobile phone : XXX-XXXX-XXXX (Softbank)

[Presentation]

Time : 10 minutes per group, 4 slides

Contents :

- Slide 1 ... Name of restaurant, exterior picture
- Slide 2 ... Food ordered (Max.4 items), price, and pictures
- Slide 3 ... Difference from China or the Philippines (more than 3 items)
- Slide 4 ... Comments (from both Japanese and international students)

Evaluation

	Name and price of food ordered	Evaluation ★★★★★	(comments)
1			
2			
3			
4			
	Overall judgment		

Other

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## 【Abstract】

## 異文化交流の試み—留学生との協働フィールドスタディー—

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異文化交流のためのアクティビティは、学生の異文化理解を促進するため、また留学生の適応を促すために有効であると考えられる。しかし、これまで学内で催してきた異文化交流行事は、交流が一過性で長続きしない、発言が表面的に終わるなどの難点があった。本稿は、この状況を改善するために企画された新しい試みについて報告するものである。すなわち、日本人学生と留学生が、ともに日本の中華料理店で実際に試食し、日本における中華料理の独自性や、本場中国を含む他の国の中華料理との相違を調査するというフィールドスタディーを核に、コミュニケーションスキルの向上や異文化理解を促進するプログラムを企画した。その結果、有意義なディスカッションが行われ、学生たちの相互交流が促進された。今後も交流が続き、異文化理解が深められることを期待したい。

キーワード：異文化交流、異文化理解、フィールドスタディー、留学生、中華料理

The aim of cross-cultural activities is to foster cross-cultural understanding in all students and facilitate adaptation to the host country by international students. However, the success of previous activities planned by teachers, including the author, was limited by factors such as events tending to create only temporary interaction, and students failing to go beyond superficial commentary. This paper discusses a new approach designed to improve the situation. A program was designed to enhance communication skills and foster cross-cultural understanding, centered on a field study in which Japanese and international students together visited Chinese restaurants in Japan and sampled the food, exploring the unique features of Chinese restaurants in Japan and their differences with Chinese restaurants in other countries, including China. To ensure the success of the field study, activities for developing communication skills were also held beforehand. As a result, meaningful discussions were expanded, and the experiences enhanced students' cross-cultural understanding. It is expected that efforts such as this program will encourage cross-cultural exchange among students in the future.

**Key words** : cross-cultural exchange, cross-cultural understanding, field study, international students, Chinese cuisine

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