



What Is True Internationalization? – Nurturing Creative Leaders –

YAMAGIWA Juichi, President of Kyoto University

How do we nurture people who can act internationally?

What do we mean when we talk about the internationalization of universities? In my view, education and research are two separate problem areas.

From the perspective of education, the current focus is on educating global human resources, but what is the ideal image of people who are able to act internationally? To start with, they have the fundamentals of education. They are also able to use the languages of international communication. Another important point is whether they are able to form unique ideas and to express themselves. This is a very difficult point because no matter how much knowledge you cram into your head, it does not follow that you acquire the ability to think and make your own decisions. How to nurture this ability is a major issue.

We live in the IT age. Young people these days, especially the kinds of students who enter Kyoto University, do not see the need to consult other people when they want some information. Knowledge is no longer something that is communicated from one person to another. A quick look on the Internet will get you all the knowledge you need. Therefore, universities must do more than dispense knowledge. How to combine knowledge to come up with original ideas, how to communicate ideas to other people, how to work together to improve the ideas – these are the skills that can be honed at universities. What we need are places where students can learn how to apply knowledge, nurture creativity, and acquire the skills to make their own decisions.

Fieldwork is a selling point at Kyoto University. We have many scholars and students who go out into the world, work as a team on all kinds of research, or develop their own ideas to open up new fields. Since Kyoto University does not have a clearly established college of liberal arts, students come into contact with the settings for advanced research immediately after entering the university. It is a tenet of the university that students study directly with people who are actually doing research.



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At the same time, we want students who enter the university to acquire the broad-based academic grounding of a general university education. Since there is a broad range of study options, students can change paths even after entering the university, so there is no need to fear failure. We are not interested in educating high-achievers alone, but we want to educate students with a variety of skills. Since students are taught a wide range of skills in different fields, interesting ideas emerge from the synergy effect. I believe this is the reason why Kyoto University produces such imaginative scholars. Since there are interesting people in every field, students are also encouraged to do something interesting.

The lecture hall is not the only place where students and faculty members come into contact. They meet up after the lectures and participate in many interdisciplinary seminars and study groups. We tell them to start as many conversations as they want with the faculty members. In the Faculty of Science where I worked, we force the students to stop calling the professors “sensei” [laughs]. My students still address me as Yamagiwa-san.

Professors and students are on an equal footing in the world of research. Superiority and inferiority do not apply to the ability to discover new things. The only difference is knowledge, but you do not come up with new ideas because you know things. That is why we talk as equals. I think there are several other faculties that share the same ethos.

The spirit of creativity thrives in an environment of academic freedom founded on dialog. This is the approach to education at Kyoto University, and it certainly nurtures students who can act on the global arena.

The university has many “windows” that are open to the world and society. The faculty members are the pilots who, together with the students, open the windows and give them a supportive push. Students who have taken the first step use the knowledge they have within themselves to demonstrate their creativity, interact with people, and make their own decisions. This ability to decide for themselves is actually extremely important.

Students today are always online and always connected to their friends through their mobile phones. If someone calls them, they cannot refrain from answering, and if they are faced with a problem, they immediately ask someone else for advice. Nobody decides anything on their own, but someone else makes their decisions for them. Moreover, the scope of these connections is, in actual fact, very narrow. This is why they cannot make their own decisions and are confined to a closed world.

When students get to their destinations after stepping through that window, we want them to have dialogs with the people in the settings where they find themselves, including the international settings, and to train themselves to become independent and to make their own decisions.

Whether it is a matter of Japanese students going overseas, or foreign exchange students coming to Japan, we want them to associate with local residents and corporations, not only other students, and to have a range of experiences. In Kyoto, there are opportunities to talk



with expert artisans as well as lots of places for coming into contact with the arts and culture. Students should be able to refine their own ideas while experiencing things that are unique to a particular community. We want to nurture global students by increasing such diverse exchanges. I believe this is internationalization in the true sense.

Use Research Assets to Create Connections Overseas

In terms of research, the university has produced some research at the international level that we can be proud of, so we should do more with these links.

To start with, the strategy is to use the overseas centers. Kyoto University has three overseas centers in London, Heidelberg and Bangkok. The locations are as of yet undecided, but we also plan to open another two centers in the United States. We will use these centers to deepen collaboration with local universities. We would also like to work more closely with the Kyoto University alumni associations. Since foreign students at Kyoto University and Japanese graduates working overseas have set up alumni associations all over the world, we would like to work with these alumni to create links between Kyoto University and overseas universities, as well as overseas corporations. Kyoto being Kyoto, there are also a lot of international companies here and we would like to deepen links with these companies. Advanced research outcomes are part of the assets of the university and we need to make proper use of these assets.

The Abilities of Internationally Minded People Fall Outside Numerical Targets

In 2013, Kyoto University put together the 2x by 2020 initiative (to double the international indices by 2020) as a concrete strategy where internationalization is concerned. The initiative establishes numerical targets for the international indices including the number of foreign faculty members, the number of foreign students at the university, the number of Japanese students studying abroad, the ratio of lectures in English, and so on. When universities establish targets, numbers are the only yardstick available to them, so the fact that there are numerical targets is no bad thing in itself.

Another more important factor is the content. Of course, many things can only be measured in terms of numerical targets and universities need to establish a format where plans such as these are continuous.

Kyoto University has educated cosmopolitan people who are able to act on the international stage. What you should study differs depending on the discipline, but, for example, the Graduate School of Global Economic Studies has a very interesting policy. They teach the Japanese language to Asian students from Vietnam, Thailand and elsewhere,



and they teach Japanese students the local language at their internship destination. Of course, both groups of students study English, but by learning the local language, students can engage with local people and learn to understand the situation in the country. The initiative educates people who can argue with local people on an equal footing.

There is also the leading graduate program in primatology and the wildlife sciences where I made my contribution as a researcher. This is an initiative to educate people who can work at international institutions or international NGOs to save wildlife on the verge of extinction, or to consider coexistence between nature and human beings through the prism of animals. Here, students also learn the international languages of English and French, as well as the local languages. I learnt English, French and Swahili so when I go to Africa, I can negotiate with local people in one of those three languages. Outside of Japan, many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are bilingual. In Europe, many students have a good command of English, French and German. We live in a time when we need to associate on many levels, understand the situation in many places, and communicate our own thoughts. English is a given, but we also need to combine English with other languages to hone the skills of internationally minded persons.

These stories do not show up in the numbers. It is a matter for celebration if you deliver proper results and reach the numerical target, or to put it the other way around, even if you reach the numerical targets, it is all meaningless if the content is hollow. No matter how many students are dispatched on short-term overseas study, it serves no purpose in itself, but whether or not they can pass for internationally minded people is important.

Accepting Exchange Students and Educating World Leaders

In terms of accepting exchange students, we want to emphasize the content, not only the number of students. We want to approach it from the concept of educating global leaders.

The Super Global University framework gave us the idea to cooperate with international leading universities to offer joint degrees (a single degree conferred by several universities offering a jointly established program of education) and double degrees (a degree conferred by each university involved in an educational program in cooperation with several universities). Generally speaking, when people talk about internationally leading universities, they mean the ones that rank high in the international league tables, but there are many top class universities in Asia, Africa and Latin America that do not necessarily make the top of the rankings. We would like to collaborate with these places and to educate the leaders who will contribute to nation-building in each country. Kyoto University does high-level research in the science and technology disciplines, and we also have a long history in the humanities and social science disciplines. It matters not whether students make a proper study of these subjects and then work for a Japanese corporation, or work



for the government or a corporation in their home country and act as a pipeline to Japan. In either case, we want to educate the leaders who will create the new trends that will transcend national borders.

This is the same story as the questions about internationalization and global human resources that I posed at the outset, but we look at all students in the same way whether they are Japanese or exchange students from other countries. This is why I would like to stress the importance of educating cosmopolitan human resources who can act on behalf of the world, not only Japan, rather than simply increasing the number of exchange students.

On the other hand, overseas students also consider employment in Japan, so the university must carefully consider the choice of courses. We are always beset by issues around the options after studying at Kyoto University, and whether students will be accepted by Japanese corporations. This means that Kyoto University must collaborate with a range of corporations when educating foreign exchange students. We need to tell the students about their progress and what the options are if they do well, and point out the future career paths. To what degree is foreign graduate employment expected to increase and how many vacancies will there be in ten years, or twenty years time? The question of how many foreign students to accept is, in itself, not a matter for speculation, but a matter of doing the math and accepting the number of students we can bear the responsibility for.

Today, Kyoto University is setting up a center where the university and corporations can collaborate on research and development, or operate joint businesses through a Center of Innovation (CIO) program. It is a center for university-industry-government collaboration involving more than forty corporations, Kyoto Prefecture, the city of Kyoto, and Kyoto Institute of Technology. The buildings was completed this spring and the corporations have moved in one by one. Since foreign universities and research institutes also plan to move in, we are thinking about channeling collaboration with Europe through the Center as well. This is one of the big drawing cards for overseas students. Now we can attract excellent students from abroad via this route.

Universities Create International Trends and Influence Society

As a university coming to grips with internationalization, we would like the faculty members to make efforts to share information and to value lateral connections. At Kyoto University, we have researchers in every possible field, but as of yet, nobody has ventured to broaden their horizons.

Just after taking up my post as president, I have come to realize that universities are jungles. I have spent my career researching gorillas in the jungles of Africa, but there are also many wild animals among researchers and students. The jungles, tropical rain forests,



are characterized by the highest biodiversity on land. Universities have also diverse scholars living together. Both systems create new species and way of life leading to innovations. To maintain these systems, the jungles need enough water and sunshine, while universities need enough budget and public support. It was Professor Oike Kazuo, the 24th president of the university, who compared the office of the president to a wild animal tamer, but it is the duty of the president to draw out the abilities of the wild animals and to get them to live together.

There used to be a salon culture at Kyoto University, and a tradition of debating where the purpose was not to defeat the other party, but to stimulate each other. It was a tradition that facilitated interdisciplinary discussions and much was generated from these discussions.

I think people know very little about each other. The university will organize research exchanges in the form of, for example, joint symposiums while sharing more information. If we can do this, we can also offer more information. I would like to get to work to set up the structures for such a system for the future.

We still have many researchers who hold important positions in international academic societies, and many people have taken on heavy responsibilities in international projects. As a university, I believe we could broaden these relationships between individuals and other countries. Depending on the situation, we could also involve Japanese industry and the government to create international trends. One of the roles of a university as large as Kyoto University is to influence society, not only to respond to the demands of society. We are a university that keeps its distance from politics, so there ought to be things we can do. I also believe that there will be more demand for such activities in the near future.

However, such international activities are not properly assessed in the university ranking exercise. The 2x by 2020 initiative challenges us to break into the top ten in the Times Higher Education league table, but the rankings merely assess the number of theses and the ratio of international co-authored papers. The assessments do not look at what types of exchanges took place, what kinds of organizations were set up, or what contributions were made. But among the backseat players, there are many professors who are launching new trends and developing new disciplines, which I believe is connected to the international awards conferred on them. In 2014, Professor Mori Kazutoshi of the Graduate School of Science was awarded the Lasker Award and the Shaw Prize, Professor Tanaka Motomu at the Institute for Integrated Cell-Material Sciences won the Philipp Franz von Siebold award, while Executive Vice-President Professor Inaba Kayo at the Graduate School of Biostudies was presented with the L’Oreal UNESCO Award for Women in Science. Of course, the focus is on the discoveries, but I think their activities as individuals were assessed.

Meanwhile, I think we will have to take the initiative in the future and provide indicators



that evaluate the degree of international contributions and the degree of social contributions. Many of the top fifty universities in the Times Higher Education rankings are in the English-speaking world, or in countries where English is an official language, and I'm sure this is the reason for the bias.

The Importance of Studying in Japanese and the Japanese Culture

Whenever internationalization is mentioned, there is a tendency for the discussion to turn to English language education, but I believe it is not a good thing to attach too much importance to the English language. The great thing about the Japanese language is that no matter how difficult a foreign concept might be, we do our best to develop an understanding of it in the Japanese language. I have spent a long time doing research in Africa, so I know very well that people in Africa are bilingual from the start. But they have no words for complicated scientific terminology in their own languages. If someone wants to study at a high level, they have no choice but to use English or French. But with Japanese, it does not matter what the subject is, you can still think about it in Japanese. This is a great culture and it must not be allowed to disappear.

At Kyoto University, we view the Nishida Philosophy as something that Japan can be proud of. Take the idea of “*mu no shisō*” (the idea of nothingness), which you can only understand if you think about it in Japanese. I suppose you can translate the end result, but the process of thoroughly thinking through the concept will not generate the same end result if you think about it in English. So, unless we are acutely aware of the importance of the Japanese language, I think Japanese culture will become obsolete. As a matter of fact, in African culture many concepts have vanished and only the objects remain. There is no guarantee this will not happen in Japan.

It is not just a question of now, but we have to consider what Japan will be like in thirty years time. Starting from the level of high school, an increasing number of students want to study in the United States or Britain due to the tendency to overrate English. Parents have also started to think that it would be advantageous to study at university in the United States or Britain. I think differently. I would like Japanese students to develop an affection for Japanese culture and to acquire an identity as Japanese. Even universities must have the backbone to provide a broad-based education in Japanese culture.

The Kyoto University Campus Plan

There are many things I would like to tackle in the future, but to give one example, there is the Kyoto University Campus Plan. I imagine the campus as the whole of Kyoto, not only the university, and I would like to work with local residents and the industrial sector to



increase the venues for mutual exchange. I would also like to get the city and the prefecture involved in the problems around the residential environment for foreign faculty members.

The difference in salaries and the problems with the residential arrangements are the main reasons we have so few foreign academics at Japanese universities. There is not so much we can do about the difference in salaries because academic salaries at Japanese universities, particularly at the national universities, are very low when compared to foreign universities, and the American ones in particular. If someone wants to come despite the low salaries, we have to convince them they want to live in Japan. Since Kyoto is a historical city with a lot of shrines and temples and a profound culture, many foreigners tell me that every day is a pleasure, but there is the problem of housing. Many European or American researchers would like to live in a traditional house and many local residents would like to have exchanges with foreigners. This is not something the university can do anything about on its own, but the city as a whole must find a solution.

Would it not be a good thing if we had many foreign teachers living here with their families and lots of children in ten years time? But first I would like to make it a pleasant place to live.

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