

# Inward-Looking Japanese Young People: A Case on the Second Year Engineering Students of a Rural National University

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**Abstract**—Many mass-media has already discussed the inward tendency of young people in Japan. This research explores the effect of this phenomenon in the second year engineering students of a state university near Tokyo. This research consists of two different parts: examining traveling abroad experiences and the future possibilities of working for Japanese companies and non-Japanese companies, as well as living in Japan and outside of Japan through questionnaires; a qualitative text analysis on the descriptive impressions on the special lecture about the cases of a Korean companies and university. This article revealed that the students were heavily inward in comparison to Korean university students. However, some evidences indicated that few of them were already aware of the issue, and started breaking their own barriers to be outward.

**Keywords**- *inward-looking; Japanese young people; university students; global human resources*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The second author of this article has been involved in university education in Japan over 10 years. This research began to be developed as he asked the first author who had been away from Japan and taught at a Korean university for the last 8 years to give a special lecture at a national university in Japan. People said that Japanese young people had been rapidly insure after the modernity of Japan saturated in the end of the 1980's, because the economy stopped growing and the young people struggled to find a hope in their future. The special lecture aimed to make the rural Japanese students to be more outward, and encouraged them to go out of their own country.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though the issue on young people has been widely discussed in the media, the topic relatively has not been researched academically, especially in the field of Education and Sociology. One of few academic works found is Tanaka (2010). He examined the Japanese students in the UK, referring the British Council's assessments and their approach to the decrease of the Japanese students. In relation to this issue, Suwa (2010) did not only include the Japanese students abroad, but also the workforces living in Japan, and concluded that the notion had been reached to the labor forces. In the enterprises, many of young work forces refuse to be posted overseas and work with non-Japanese people.

Japan Times (2013) also pointed out that the tendency is already found at high school level, and many of them think it is too late to be globally active people.

NHK, Nippon Hoso Kyokai (Japan Broadcasting Cooperation), produced and broadcasted a program in the series of "Close UP Gendai" (Today's Close Up), which

## III. METHODOLOGY

The sample of this research is 41 Second Year Technology Students at the national university and 37 of them are male and there are only 4 female students. The student group had a male student outside of Japan and he is Vietnamese. His data was excluded because the purpose of this research is to illuminate how much the Japanese students had been affected by this notion.

This research consists of three different phases: questionnaire survey before the special lecture, which would be examined quantitatively; the lecture about the cases in Korea; written descriptions of their impression after the lecture which contains many different experiments of changing students more globally outward by the Korean university where the first author worked. The descriptions would be examined qualitatively.

### A. Questionnaire Survey (10 mins.)

In order to avoid any type of biases, two different pieces papers were delivered for each student after frankly informing that these were also regarded as attendance sheets. The first page of the papers were questionnaires, and the students were required to answer them anonymously. There are four different sections in the questionnaire.

The first section asked their sex, which has been extremely common for any academic researches these days. However, the problem is the sample size of female students on this study. There were only 4 students out of 41 in total. Probably, it can not be said anything clearly with the sample size of the female students. However, it followed the custom of the disciplines.

The second part of the questionnaires asked the countries where the students had been to. In this research, the word "inward" has been frequently appeared. But it does not only mean the characteristics of the students mentally, but also the actual movements of their geographical boundaries. This

research attempted to illuminate how the students desire to be active outside of their hometown or home country. For instance, the decrease of the number of students studying abroad indicates one of the aspects of the inward-looking tendency, because it must increase if more people want to work globally. Therefore, this section asked the countries they visited, the reason, the year, and the length of the stay.

The third section goes more specific. It directory asked if they had ever thought about studying abroad. In comparison to the answers of the second section, it can categorize the students into three different groups: the ones who never thought about it, the ones who tried to go abroad but could not make it; the ones who actually made it.

The last section asked the possibility in the students' futures. There are four different cases and asked them to answer them in four different grades. The cases were working for a Japanese company and living in Japan, working for a Japanese company and living outside of Japan, working for a non-Japanese company and living in Japan, and working for a non-Japanese company and living outside of Japan. The students were required to answer those possibility in one of the four different grades: Very probable, Probable, Improbable, and Never think about it.

#### *B. Special Lectures (50 mins.)*

After the first page of the questionnaires were collected, the results were instantly examined. It clearly showed the tendency and the first author decided to maximize the impact of the cases in Korea. However, he started talking about his relationship to the second author, and tried to make a relaxing atmosphere in the class room. This is the summary of the lecture.

Referring the results of the questionnaires were shared with the students, some reports on the tendency were introduced, such as an article of The Washington Post (2010). It says that there was only one freshman from Japan at Harvard University in 2009 while many of them came from China and Korea. In addition to that, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), an agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan officially announced that their youth volunteer program it the highest number of the attendance in 2001 and it has been gradually decreasing since then.

There are two attempts by the private enterprises explained. Asahi Beer introduced a new training program for young workforces. The company sends young employees to the South East Asian countries and provides a training session in the market. YKK requires all the employees at 20's to work outside of Japan. In fact, a former student of the first author in Korea recently married a Japanese man from YKK, and he out stationed to Bangladesh. Many extraordinary stories of the former student in the country were shared with the Japanese students.

The lecture went to explaining the background of outward-looking Korean students. The Korean unemployment rate was higher than the one in Japan, so that they were forced to look outside of their domestic market. Even the domestic market relayed on the external factors like export and import more than Japan. As a result, immigration mainly to the U.S., Canada and Australia had been relatively popular in Korea.

The first author's wife experienced another form of outward-looking tendency in Korea. She taught Japanese in a Korean prison, because the government provided English and Japanese lessons for prisoners as a vocational training after release. In a way, it can be said that the government tried to make even prisoners outward-looking.

Last but not least was the programs of the university where the first author works for. The general subject, "SGS500" encourages 500 undergraduate students to overseas voluntary services during summer and Christmas holidays every year. It began with "SGS300" in 2009, but soon after, more students showed their interest in overseas services, thus the subject upgraded to "400" in the following year, and ended up with "500" now. The first author has been involved in the program since 2009 and taken his students to Malaysia. He found out that many of his students felt difficulties in English, so utilized this opportunity to teach Japanese in English, collaboratively dealing with a primary and secondary schools in Malaysia.

Since 2010, an internship program for the graduates began in the schools, and the first intern teacher from Korea was sent and worked for the children for 16 months. This program aims to assure its participants to gain 4 different global abilities.

1. The ability to live in South East Asia.
2. The ability to work with the South East Asians people.
3. The ability to work in English.
4. The ability to teach Japanese.

Soon after the first intern came back from Malaysia, he was employed by a globally operating Korean semi-conductor company. In his job interview, he was mainly questioned about the internship program. It can be concluded that he became outward-looking and gained the global competency in the program.

#### *C. Written Descriptions of Impressions (30 min.).*

Immediately after the special lecture, the students were asked to write their impressions on the special lecture in terms of inward-looking tendency. Students were allowed to leave the class room as they completed it

### IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

#### *A. Sexual Differences*

In Japan, engineering is not a popular academic subject for female students. Therefore, the ratio between male and female students has been almost one-sided. In fact, this student group has only 4 female students out of 41.

#### *B. The countries Visited*

Amazingly, There are 30 students who had never gone out of Japan. This is over 70% of them. The sample size is too small to generalize the fact, but 2 out of 4 female students had been to somewhere outside of their country.

9 male students had been to other countries before, and 4 of them had been to a country, 2 went to 2, 3 visited 3 countries. The most popular place to visit was U.S.A. including the American territories such as Guam and Saipan Islands. The

country was visited 7 times by the students. Most of them stayed there between 3days to a week, but a student lived in the States for 6 years with his family. He visited Canada and Mexico while in the U.S. China, Australia, Thai are following. Some students visited China, France and Taiwan for their school trips. The 2 female students had been to U.S. and Singapore as school trips. On top of that, they visited Thai, China and U.S. in private. The most frequent traveler was one of the female students, and she visited 4 countries in total.

### C. Studying Abroad

7 students out of 41 had ever thought about studying abroad, which is only 17%. 4 students desired to study in the U.S., and Australia, England and Canada are following. Within the 11 students who had traveled outside of Japan, only 2 students desired to study abroad. Consequently, there is no significant relationship between travel experiences and examining to study abroad. The number of the students who had never thought about studying abroad clearly indicated the inward-looking tendency.

### D. Future Job Possibilities

Now, let's look at what the students think about their future job opportunities (Table 1). Amazingly, the vast majority (95%) of the group thinks it is highly probable for them to work for a Japanese company and living in Japan in their future. However, on the other hand, none of them thinks it is very probable to work for a non-Japanese firm and live outside of the country. Moreover, 12 students (29.3%) think it is improbable and 21 (51.2%) have never thought about the case.

The qualitative analysis on the written descriptions also shows that the students were heavily under the influence of inward-looking tendency. 15 of them admitted that they were inward-looking, and 3 wrote they did not know much about the other countries. Fortunately, 7 students believe the tendency was critical and 8 think they should involve non-Japanese enterprises as their carrier opportunities.

### E. Written Descriptions after the Lecture

The Open Coding Method is employed to qualitatively analyze the descriptions.

The analysis on their awareness shows that 15 students were aware of their inward-looking tendency. 8 students admitted non-Japanese companies should be included in their future opportunities, and 7 wrote that being inward-looking must be regarded negatively. The difference between Korea and Japan was pointed out by 5 students and 3 confessed they needed to learn languages.

The vast majority believed that the tendency was as correct as the media said, but some wrote that they realized the tendency in the lecture. I suppose the simple comparison to Korean students illustrated the difference.

TABLE I. PROBABLE FUTURE CARRERS FOR THE STUDENTS

|  | Very Probable | Probable | Improbable | Never think about it |
|--|---------------|----------|------------|----------------------|
| Working for a Japanese company & living in Japan             | 39            | 2        | 0          | 0                    |
| Working for a Japanese company & living in outside of Japan  | 2             | 21       | 6          | 12                   |
| Working for a non-Japanese company & living in Japan         | 3             | 23       | 9          | 15                   |
| Working for a non-Japanese company & living outside of Japan | 0             | 8        | 12         | 21                   |

Many of them wrote their actual future plans in the descriptions. 12 students showed their interest in visiting other countries, and 5 wanted to make a effort to be outward-looking. 4 students would like to learn foreign languages more seriously.

## V. CONCLUSION

Even though the data collection took place in a limited circumstance, this study successfully illustrated the inward-looking tendency of Japanese male students. What the media proactively broadcast was not an exception at the local national university.

As for its extended research, the students from other part of Japan could be different from the locals. It happened domestically, but the students who are away from home should not be the same as the students at home in terms of outward-looking tendency. The questionnaires need to be modified to indicate the students' residences for it.

The students answered the questionnaires anonymously. However, as far as we can see in their post-lecture descriptions with names, they looked very honest and wrote what they really concerned, even some shameful impressions. Concerning the result, it did not need to be anonymous. If the questionnaires were with names, more precise comparison could be made between the post lecture writings.

As another possible comparison, the questionnaires could be answered by Korean students. This cross-national inquiry should be the similar type of students. In such case, some second year engineering students at a national university nearby Seoul City might be appropriate. Through this comparison, the study is able to illuminate how much Japanese and Korean students are inward- or outward-looking.

Again, this study has a limitation on female students in Japan. It is hard to say that the female ones are inward-looking as the media says with the sample. Data collection needs to be extended to other departments, which have more female students like language departments, then it can be said the tendency is not only on the male students, but also the female ones in Japan.

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