

Factors contributing to low levels of intercultural interaction between Japanese and international students in Japan

Liang Morita

Nagoya University of Commerce and Business, Japan

Abstract

This paper is a continuation of the discussion of the results of a series of studies (n=465) in which low levels of intercultural interaction between Japanese and international students were observed. While the analysis of the data in the studies was conducted at a micro level and has been completed, the perspective of the current paper is at a macro level. The low levels of intercultural interaction is a matter of great concern because young Japanese need the experience to function in intercultural contexts. Within Japan, the population is declining and aging rapidly and immigrants are expected to supplement the workforce. Current methods of English language teaching also render the standards of spoken English insufficient for it to function as lingua franca.

Keywords: *English, Japan, globalisation, internationalisation, intercultural interaction*

Introduction

There is a recent tendency in Japan to describe young people as inward-looking, in the media as well as government documents. While it is true that young people have attitudes which can be described as inward-looking, it is inappropriate to blame them for these attitudes. Blaming young people diverts attention from elements in the sociopolitical context responsible for fostering such attitudes. In an editorial in *The Japan Times* (2013) in which young people are described as inward-looking, the writer acknowledges that fact that they pick up the attitude from their environment “from parents, teachers, media and society. Burgess (2013) points out that young people are being made scapegoats for being inward-looking. Their attitudes can be explained by the rigid job-hunting system, parochial immigration policies or conservative corporate culture, none of which young people are responsible for. In most high-profile youth-related discussions, young people themselves are relegated to the status of a muted group. Their voices are assigned to the periphery, from where they can rarely influence the terms of the debates about them. Instead, groups of adult 'experts', 'commentators' and 'authorities' are free to represent youth as they wish (Toivonen and Imoto, 2012).

Criticism of young people being inward-looking started because the number of Japanese studying and working abroad has fallen significantly in recent years (Burgess, 2013). Fear that Japan is being overtaken by its closest neighbours, China and South Korea, also contributed to the criticism. The US is the most popular destination for Japanese students and their numbers have dropped while Chinese and South Korean numbers remain steady. Burgess found that an inward-looking orientation is not the main reason for the fall in Japanese studying abroad. In fact, the British Council found in a survey in 2010 that the majority of Japanese high school and university students were interested in studying overseas and had become more interested over the past five years. The reason why students did not go abroad was because of worries about safety, expenses and negative influences on schoolwork or work. A survey conducted by Sanno Institute of Management in 2010 produced similar findings on why young people did not want to work overseas. It was because of the financial risks involved rather than an inward-looking mentality.

Burgess suggests three features of Japanese companies which discourage overseas experience: the rigid and inflexible job-hunting system, lack of enthusiasm and reluctance to hire young people with overseas experience and lack of global awareness.

This paper deals with another phenomenon related to globalisation, intercultural interaction. The author has observed low levels of intercultural interaction between Japanese and international students in a series of six surveys involving 465 respondents at Nagoya University. As with inward-looking attitudes, it is easy to blame the students and ignore the elements in the sociopolitical context which are responsible. This paper attempts to draw attention to two key factors responsible for the low levels of intercultural interaction: English language education and intercultural aspects of internationalisation. The analysis of the data in the six studies at a micro level has been completed (Morita, 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2014) and does not play a prominent role in this paper. This paper is a continuation of the discussion of the results of the studies from a macro perspective. References to many sources are used to support the claims here with only some student quotes from the studies functioning as illustrations.

Low levels of intercultural interaction are just as serious as decreasing numbers of Japanese going overseas to study or work. Students need the experience in intercultural interaction to prepare themselves to function in intercultural contexts both within and outside Japan. Within the country, the number of foreigners will inevitably increase. Even without taking into account the large numbers of immigrants necessary to keep away the effects of a declining and aging Japanese population, the number of foreign residents has doubled to 2.2 million over the past 20 years. Signs of transformation are also evident in increasing numbers of international marriages, foreigners gaining permanent residency and foreign wives (many from low-income countries) playing a key role in rural areas. In some sectors facing a shortage of skilled workers such as information technology, the government has initiated a new fast-track permanent residency programme that targets the relevant foreigners (Kingston, 2013b).

The Japanese population is declining and aging rapidly. The country has the best records for longevity in the world. In 2005, it had the oldest population in the world with a median of just over 43 years, which is expected to increase to over 88 years. The total fertility rate has been falling from 4.32 in 1949 after the war to 1.57 in 1989. The population structure is changing. In 2012, 24% of the population of 30 million was over 65 years old. It is estimated that by 2025, 30% of the population will be 65 or over and barely two people of working age will be supporting one person of retirement age. The number of workers supporting each retiree is decreasing from 10 in 1950 to 3.6 in 2000 to 1.9 in 2025. The process of the population shrinking has already started. The population reached a peak of 128 million in 2006 and has begun to shrink. To reverse the reduction in the size of the population and avoid the effects of a declining and aging population, the level of immigration would have to be very high at 650,000 per year until year 2050, according to UN estimates. This dramatic demographic shift directly or indirectly affects every sector of society, from maternity wards to undertakers (Goodman, 2012).

Two measures which counteract the effects of the declining and aging population are frequently discussed in the media and government: female participation in the workforce and immigration to supplement the Japanese workforce. Even though Japanese women are well-educated, their rate of participation in the workforce is below that of other high-income countries. Most women seek employment after graduating from tertiary education but withdraw from work after marriage and having children. Relatively few women land career-track jobs, constituting only 12% of such new hires in 2010 (Kingston, 2013b). Many do not resume working after giving birth because there is inadequate support for them to do so and inflexible employment policies mean their careers have been derailed. A recent IMF report argued that increasing women's participation in the workforce could boost economic growth (Kingston, 2013b). Many are doubtful of the speed and rate at which women may be coaxed into returning to work after having children because of conservative attitudes and structural inflexibilities. Recently, an assemblyman in central Tokyo criticized women for their 'shameless' demands for more public nursery schools, suggesting that raising children is their responsibility. Long waiting lists for public nursery schools in cities are the norm and more than half the women seeking these places are turned down because the facilities are full.

Another option is immigration, although there is considerable resistance to immigrant labour in influential circles in the government, media and more generally the public. The Japanese are worried about national

identity, the future of the country, crime and how to manage the influx. There are however strong economic reasons for attracting immigrants: the shrinking population, impending labour shortages, and the need for more taxpayers to keep the national medical and pension schemes solvent without considerably increasing individuals' contributions. The public discourse is dominated by widespread misconceptions that foreigners commit crimes, even though national crime statistics prove that they are not a menace to society. In the early 1980s, Japan accepted more than 10,000 Indochinese refugees and they have done well and contributed to the communities they live in. The Chinese who have been arriving since the 1990s have made use of their transnational networks to facilitate and contribute to trade and investment. Many have started profitable businesses. Increasing immigration could boost Japan's capacity to innovate and create new wealth, bringing in new ideas, languages, cultural skills, global networks and entrepreneurial spirit. The potential benefits of attracting resourceful immigrants are significant. Like in the US, they could innovate, create employment, help rejuvenate the economy and make Japan more dynamic (Kingston, 2013a).

There are not many viable options available for coping with the declining and aging population. Statistics show that few foreigners commit crimes and it is difficult to ignore the benefits immigrants bring to Japan. By the time current undergraduates have completed their studies, there would probably be considerably more foreigners in their daily life as well as workplace. Students need to engage in intercultural interaction now to prepare themselves to live and work in intercultural contexts.

The data in the six studies is briefly introduced in the next section, followed by globalisation and internationalisation in the Japanese context. The two contributing factors to low levels of intercultural interaction studied in this paper: English language education and intercultural aspects of internationalisation, are presented in Sections 4 and 5 respectively.

The data

The author conducted a series of six surveys on intercultural interaction and attitudes towards globalisation while teaching at Nagoya University, a top national university. Nagoya University students are generally thought of as academically-inclined. The participants were Japanese undergraduates and postgraduates as well as international students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In total, n=465. The details of the first three surveys can be found in Morita, 2012, while the fourth, fifth and sixth can be found in Morita, 2013a; 2013b and 2014 respectively.

The context of globalisation and internationalization

For many years, researchers have written about Japan's unwillingness to open up to the world. Itoh (2000), for example, explained the attitude by referring to *sakoku*, the 250 years of self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world from 1639 to 1868. She claims that the pervasive Japanese attitude of exclusiveness and insularity stem from two powerful roots: geographic isolation as an island nation and the history of *sakoku*. Itoh believes the *sakoku* mentality still influences the way modern Japanese think, behave and relate to the world. Although Japanese manufacturers are keen to flood the world with their products, this is not matched by Japanese people working for the world.

Along similar lines, Dougill (1995) discusses the history of insularity and argue that the Japanese have no real interest in integrating with the international community due to a deeply ingrained form of cultural conditioning. Clammer (2001) points out a lack of interaction with the international community and provides examples of individuals who put into practice the rhetoric of internationalisation but are not rewarded by Japanese society. They include Japanese graduates of foreign universities who are discriminated against when seeking employment and company employees who resist being posted overseas because they know they will be left out of the inner political circles. More recently, Burgess (2013) found that although some high-profile companies such as Rakuten are exceptions, Japanese hierarchical corporate culture can be uncomfortable with confident and outspoken returnee students. A number of young people with study-abroad experience found Japanese companies unenthusiastic and

reluctant to hire them. In a survey of 1,000 companies on their recruitment plans for the fiscal year 2012, less than a quarter said they planned to hire applicants who had studied abroad.

Yamagami and Tollefson (2011) found an ambivalence towards globalisation in Japan. Globalisation is perceived as an opportunity as well as a threat. On one hand, the government emphasizes that individuals and the nation must develop new skills (especially in technology and English) in order to meet the challenges of globalisation. On the other hand, Diet (parliament) discourse articulates the threats that globalisation presents: violent crime, reduced personal and national security, and a sense of loss and uncertainty about the future. Burgess (2013) also found an ambivalent attitude. The country is aware that in order to remain economically competitive, it must open up, instigate reforms and embrace globalisation in all its aspects. However, there is still a strong tendency to close in, reject global norms and standards, and retreat inwards. He concludes that both government and society are inward-looking and remain rooted in an insular world view that sees globalisation as an external process owned by somebody else.

In her analysis of government documents, Hashimoto (2009) argues convincingly that what the government claims to promote can be quite different from what it really wants to achieve. Although Japan embraces internationalisation, there is at the same time an emphasis on Japanese culture and tradition. The focus is on the exportability of Japanese culture to the world or the promotion of Japaneseness in the international community. Likewise in the discourse on English, the learning of English as a lingua franca to increase global literacy should be carried out within the framework of Japanese culture. The goal is enrichment of Japanese language and culture through interaction with other cultures and languages.

The term *kokusaika*, which is most commonly used to refer to the process of internationalisation, captures the ambivalence towards globalisation. The use of *kokusaika* first became popular in the early 1980s, when Japan had enjoyed almost 20 years of astounding economic growth, became the world's largest creditor nation and more Japanese began to travel overseas (Goodman, 2007). To outsiders, *kokusaika* may seem to refer to the process of internationalisation similar to those seen in other nations, but the meaning of a Japanese-only nationalism that reinforces a closed national identity has been dominant and flourished with financial support from government and business leaders (Burgess et al., 2010). English language education in Japan is an illustration of *kokusaika*, of how something which appears to be internationalisation in fact serves the purpose of strengthening national identity and protecting national interests. Although the government has taken many steps over the years to develop English education, such as introducing English in primary school, many have interpreted them as measures to train Japanese people to use English to promote, enhance and defend national interests and independence. Another example is the government plan to expand the number of overseas Japanese language facilities 10-fold, which was announced soon after the target of having 300,000 foreign students in Japan by the year 2020 was set. These international students have to study Japanese language and culture, based on the belief on the part of the Japanese that in *kokusaika*, there should be recognition of Japanese culture and society. *Kokusaika* is thus a challenge to preserve Japanese identity, national unity and economic power, a defensive reaction to pressure from other nations' criticisms of Japan's economic self-centredness and cultural insularity.

As we have just seen, *kokusaika* is not usually used to describe the phenomenon of the world becoming increasingly interconnected. *Gurobaruka*, which is based on the English 'to globalize' or 'globalisation' but has adapted to Japanese phonology, corresponds closely to the English meaning of a growing interconnectedness in the world. The main difference between *kokusaika* and *gurobaruka* is that Japan has control over and is an active participant in the former but the latter is an external process over which the country has little or no control.

English language education

A common rationale for learning English in Japan is that it is the international language of business, science and technology. English is also essential for participation in the global economy (Yamagami & Tollefson, 2011). The learning of English has been a major thrust of the government's push for internationalisation since the 1980s. Policy documents and discussion papers have emphasized the need

for the Japanese to speak more and better English (Gottlieb, 2005). The role English plays as international language in the globalizing world is stressed:

'With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, it is essential that our children acquire communication skills in English, which has become a common international language, in order for living in the 21:st century. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of our children and the future development of Japan as a nation.' (MEXT, 2002)

According to the quotation, Japanese children will be using English in living with the rest of the world in future and the ability to do so is very important to the children and the country. The above justification for learning English is common and can be found in Korea or Singapore. However, unlike in Singapore, where English is taught using modern methods, Japan uses the grammar translation method in which most of class time is spent on word-by-word translation of English texts into Japanese. The lessons are taught in Japanese and the communicative aspects of English are neglected. This is one manifestation of the defensive attitudes towards globalisation and internationalisation.

The widely-used grammar translation method had its origins in the beginning of the 20:th century, when the teaching of foreign languages focused on the translation of foreign written texts into Japanese for the purpose of keeping up with technological developments in the rest of the world and importing and processing information from foreign cultures. English was seen as a means of acquiring knowledge rather than for facilitating dialog or cross-cultural communication. English teaching traditionally focused on grammar and translation rather than on developing communicative competencies, intercultural awareness and global perspectives (Whitsed and Wright, 2011). Little has changed. The main classroom activity in this method is systematic word-by-word translation of written English texts into Japanese. The teacher provides grammatical explanations in Japan and English is rarely used (Morita, 2010). This method has harmful effects on language learning since the learning of authentic language is less valuable than the memorization of grammatical rules (O'Donnell, 2003). Research has shown that Japanese undergraduates' motivation to learn English is generally low (Hayashi, 2005) and the grammar translation method has negative effects on motivation (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009).

Critics have argued that the fundamental purpose for English is not to foster intercultural and cross-cultural communication skills or global competency but to build national identity among students. Discourse placing importance on English is often accompanied by emphasis on Japanese. The Japanese people are exhorted to master the national language before attempting to learn English:

'However, it is not possible to state that Japanese people have sufficient ability to express their opinions based on a firm grasp of their own language.'
(<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2002/07/020901.htm> - 12:th July 2002; cited in Byram, 2011 [link no longer exists])

The quotation implies that the Japanese language should have priority over English. There is a tendency to perceive English as a threat to Japanese identity, and this tendency has been revealed at times, such as in the debate about whether English should be taught in primary schools. The Japanese people are also encouraged to use English as a tool to tell the rest of the world the merits of Japan or present Japanese points of view. English is linked to national development, including that of presenting Japan to the world:

'At present, though, the English-speaking abilities of a large percentage of the population are inadequate, and this imposes restrictions on exchanges with foreigners and creates occasions when ideas and opinions of Japanese people are not appropriately evaluated.'
(<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2002/07/020901.htm> - 12:th July 2002; cited in Byram, 2011 [link no longer exists])

The quotation indicates that it is important for the Japanese to have a voice in the global community. English is taught in a de-contextualized way by focusing on grammar and translation and excluding the

communicative aspects in order to preserve Japanese values, traditions and cultural independence (Whitsed and Wright, 2011). In spite of criticisms, the grammar translation method is still common in schools and universities (Nishino, 2008; Stewart & Miyahara, 2011).

Communicative learning became fashionable from the 1980s. The need for a communicative-based approach has been repeatedly emphasized over the last 30 years (Seargeant, 2009). The government attempted to improve English education in the Reform Acts of 1989 and 2002, which stressed a communicative approach to English teaching. Other improvements include the establishment of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme in 1987, which invites native speakers of English to work as assistant English teachers in schools. In 1997, English conversation was introduced in primary schools as an elective. From 2006, the central university entrance examination included a listening component in English. In spite of the improvements, Japan continues to score very low in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) among Asian countries (Morita, 2010). Yano (2011) describes the Japanese as hardly having enough English proficiency to successfully conduct business negotiations, academic presentations and discussions.

In Whitsed and Wright's (2011) study, native speakers of English teaching on a part-time basis in Japanese universities felt that the norm in English education is 'appearance over substance' and institutions are more concerned about 'impression management' than real education. Communicative English classes give an impression of being modern but in reality lack substance. The offering of these classes satisfies the government, businesses, parents and students but in classrooms, teachers are not expected to teach in a way that maximizes students' learning. The teachers in the study reported that the universities they worked in were ambivalent about the development of communicative competencies. In many cases, these classes lacked clear coordination, were unstructured, or were not integrated into the wider curricula. The majority of the teachers believed that most universities placed little value on authentic learning outcomes. The teachers also felt that their students were unable to see English as a living language beyond the context of English tests on grammar and translation in university entrance examinations.

The quality of English language education has a strong impact on levels of intercultural interaction. Comments such as the following are common in the data:

'(I feel anxious about interacting with international students.) I am worried about my (English) language skills.' Japanese undergraduate

'I don't have confidence in my English communication ability.' Japanese undergraduate

In the past, the vast majority of international students entered Nagoya University via Japanese, meaning they had to have Japanese language skills prior to admission or take entrance examinations in Japanese. In recent years, especially under the G30 programme, international students increasingly gain admission via English, because the government wants to remove the Japanese language barrier. Japanese universities are supposed to compete for top international students who would otherwise apply to universities in English-speaking countries. This also means that international students have a lower level of Japanese and use more English. It is ironic that in removing the Japanese language barrier in order to attract more international students, the English language barrier in interactions between Japanese and international students has been created.

Intercultural aspects of internationalization

As we have seen earlier, *kokusaika* may appear to refer to the process of internationalisation but what it means is a Japanese-only nationalism that reinforces a closed national identity. It is a challenge to preserve Japanese identity, national unity and economic power, a defensive reaction to pressure from other nations' criticisms of Japan's economic self-centredness and cultural insularity. In this context, it is not surprising that in the internationalisation of universities in Japan, the intercultural aspects have been

neglected. There is a distinct lack of emphasis on fostering intercultural development at both individual and institutional level (Whitsed and Volet, 2011) and this is confirmed in the data:

'I think the number of foreign students is not the key to enhance mutual understanding for Japan and other countries. Instead, the education which teaches the locals how to have better tolerance toward different cultures seems to be more important.' Taiwanese graduate student

In the first part of the comment, the respondent is referring to the G30 project which has set the target at 300,000 international students in Japan by year 2020. He/she feels that numbers are irrelevant in the development of reciprocal intercultural understanding. Instead, education in Japan should foster tolerance towards other cultures. The following respondent feels that the quality of relationships between Japanese and international students is more important than numbers:

'The important thing is not the number of international students but the relationship between them and Japanese students.' Japanese undergraduate

According to another respondent:

'A problem is though there are many international students, the (intercultural) communication is not enough.' Chinese undergraduate

In this respondent's view, there is insufficient intercultural communication between Japanese and international students.

In a world which is becoming increasingly interconnected, students need to learn how to live and work with those from different cultural backgrounds. They also need to develop reciprocal intercultural understanding and inclusive social practices. In universities, *kokusaika* refers to pragmatic processes that largely ignore the intercultural dimensions of internationalisation. According to Goodman (2007), the *kokusaika* discourse creates impressions or appearances of a forward-looking, progressive suite of policies and initiatives towards intercultural understanding but lacks substance.

Although there have been attempts to emphasize the intercultural aspects internationalisation such as study abroad programmes for Japanese students and collaborative programmes between Japanese and foreign universities, cases of oversight are more frequent (Whitsed and Volet, 2011).

In the case of Nagoya University, an exchange programme named Nagoya University Program of Academic Exchange (NUPACE) is particularly interesting because most of the international students in the programme have entered via English with low levels of competency in Japanese. Their experiences are similar to those of students in G30 programmes because the latter also gain admission via English and many do not know Japanese well. Morita (2012) found that NUPACE students were segregated from Japanese students because they took English-taught classes and Japanese students do not. NUPACE students also felt constrained socially with the Japanese because of the lack of a common language which both parties are comfortable with:

'Apart from people at the help desk and ACE, I have few chances to talk to Japanese.' Hong Kong undergraduate, NUPACE

ACE stands for Action Group for Cross-cultural Exchange. It is a student organisation in which Japanese students provide support for international students. According to other respondents:

'The interaction I have with Japanese students is mostly due to these students' desire to speak with foreigners. But as things are now, the people I interact the most with are other foreigners.' French undergraduate, NUPACE

'As a NUPACE student, I get the feeling that I spend most of my time with other foreign students and not that much with Japanese students. Most of the classes and events for foreigners take place at the ECIS, where not many Japanese students spend their time. We get little information concerning the events organized by/for the Japanese students, making it hard to actually meet them.' French undergraduate, NUPACE

ECIS stands for Educational Center for International Students and is the building where the NUPACE programme is based. The segregation between Japanese and international students comes across clearly in the comment. The following respondent also refers to the ECIS and blames the university for the lack of opportunity for intercultural interaction:

'The university should present more opportunities (for me to interact with international students). I feel the Education Center for International Students is not open enough.' Japanese undergraduate

The availability of information on student events seems to be an issue. Both Japanese and international students claim the information is insufficient and hold the university responsible:

'(The university does not provide the environment and opportunities for me to interact with international students.) I don't get enough information.' Japanese undergraduate

Discussion

Nagoya University students in general seem to be influenced by government rhetoric on globalisation. Many comments in the data mirror government rhetoric, especially on how the Japanese should be protective of Japanese culture in the context of globalisation or internationalisation:

'I should understand Japanese culture well, and I should be careful not to lose sight of the goodness Japanese originally had because of too much globalization.' Japanese undergraduate

'Introduce our country and culture to other countries. In order to do that, one should have enough knowledge about his or her country's history.' Japanese undergraduate

Comments similar to those above are common in the data. The first comment is a warning against losing Japanese culture in the process of globalisation, with globalisation being a possible threat to the national culture. The second emphasizes knowledge of the national culture and presenting it to the world. This tendency to turn inwards when one is required to face outwards confirms Hashimoto's (2009) finding that what the government claims to promote can be quite different from what it really wants to achieve. Students' comments show that the message the government really wanted to convey came across to them clearly: to value Japanese culture.

The government needs to express with unambiguously clarity how serious the situation is. The number of foreigners in Japan will soon reach unprecedented levels. The G30 project has set the target at 300,000 international students in the country by year 2020. With intensified globalisation and multinational work environments, there will be a lot of contact between the Japanese and foreigners. This challenge is compounded by the aging Japanese population and the demographic changes that will result from immigration of foreign workers to supplement the Japanese workforce. Japanese students need to be able to speak English soon. They also need the ability to communicate effectively across cultures. Some may argue that it would be more appropriate to teach Chinese, Korean or Portuguese to students. That may be true but so is the fact that English is going to be used in a significant portion of the interactions between the Japanese and foreigners.

As Byram (2011) has shown with examples from Britain and Norway, English is not necessarily a threat to national identity. In fact, national identity can be strengthened in the context of foreign language learning:

'Language competence and intercultural understanding are an essential part of being a citizen. Children develop a greater understanding of their own lives in the context of exploring the lives of others. They learn to look at things from another perspective.' (Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages 2005; cited in Byram, 2011)

'By learning (foreign) languages, pupils have opportunity to become familiar with other cultures. Such insight provides the basis for respect and increased tolerance, and contributes to other ways of thinking and broadens pupils' understanding of their own cultural belonging. In this way pupils' own identity is strengthened.'

(<http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/dav78FB8D6918.PDF> - January 2005; cited in Byram, 2011 [link no longer exists])

Language learning is linked to learning about other cultures which will have a positive effect on students' tolerance and understanding. Language teaching plays a role in the creation of national identity, in that learning about other people gives us a stronger sense of who we are.

Students need to learn to live and work with people from different cultural backgrounds, which is why they need all the intercultural interaction they can experience now. As cited earlier, the dramatic demographic shift directly or indirectly affects every sector of society, from maternity wards to undertakers (Goodman, 2012). Poor intercultural relations can have severe consequences. One of the most recent racial riots took place in Singapore in 2013, which shocked many. Singapore is well-known as a tightly-controlled nation state of law and order. A traffic accident in which a Singaporean bus driver killed a Bangladeshi man triggered the riot. The Singapore economy depends heavily on workers from India, Bangladesh and Thailand to work in the construction industry. Intercultural relations between these workers and Singaporeans are practically non-existent, one of the reasons being the former are looked down on as lowly-paid workers who perform menial work from low-income countries. These workers mostly keep to themselves in their own communities.

The road to building a multicultural community can be a long one with setbacks, as we can see in the case of Britain. A recent representative survey found that 90% of all Britons agree the UK has become a multicultural country, and 70% are in favour of this development (*The Guardian*, 2013). Public opinion has become less hostile to people of different cultures and ethnicities living in the country. There is also evidence that attitudes towards immigrants have improved since 2002.

In a recent survey (*The Japan Times*, 2013), university and high school students said they did want to become an active person in a global society. They just do not know how to do it. It is the responsibility of educators and policymakers to provide the guidance, education and environment.

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About the author

Liang Morita was trained in sociolinguistics in Singapore and Britain before taking up a position in Thailand teaching and researching the Thai Chinese. She taught in Nagoya University for 10 years and in 2014 was appointed Professor at the Faculty of Communication at Nagoya University of Commerce and Business.

Author's address

Faculty of Communication
Nagoya University of Commerce and Business
4-4 Sagamine, Komenoki-cho, Nisshin-shi
Aichi 470-0193 Japan

Journal of Intercultural Communication, ISSN 1404-1634, issue 36, November 2014.
URL: <http://immi.se/intercultural>