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“Japan as seen from foreign countries; Foreign countries as seen from Japan”

Q : When it comes to studying overseas, Japanese students appear rather reluctant whereas students from other Asian countries are very positive. What do you think?

A : According to my observation, Japanese students are also motivated to do so. Given the prolonged recession, they tend to become hesitant for fears that the chance of finding employment may be delayed by at least one year. Some students opt to study abroad only after having secured their employment though . . . I’m always trying to take students with me to participate in international conferences. This often turns out successful because such occasions stimulate students’ intellectual appetite and motivate them to study overseas.

I think that Keio University is providing its students with sufficient opportunities in this respect. Keio maintains double-degree programs* with some overseas universities and an internship collaboration agreement with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETHZ), my alma mater. Opportunities are not few. The foremost reason for this problem is that students are concerned about employment. This is my impression.

Q : Why did you choose Japan and what merits did you find in working here?

A : I chose Japan because I wanted to lead a challenging life as a researcher in an environment with a different cultural background. Once settled in Japan, I found this country very favorable for my research activities. First of all, I found it relatively easy to obtain research funds. Another merit was easy access to a network of human connections, which is vitally important for developing research work in this country. In this respect I owe much to my teacher, Professor Suzuki, who is a leading figure in his field and keeps many valuable connections in and outside of Keio.

Q : In what ways do you think human connections are important in Japan?

A : In Japan human relationships among researchers are strong and exchange of information among them is relatively open. Though I have no experience of working in the United States, my impression is that individual researchers there are more inclined to protect their own worlds than those in Japan.

(*Double-degree program: This program allows a student to obtain double degrees simultaneously from Keio and an overseas counterpart in agreement if the student has completed a specified curriculum mutually agreed upon by the two universities. Currently Keio University (Faculty and Graduate School of Science and Technology) maintains such programs with Intergroupe des Ecole Centrale (France) and Lund University (Sweden).)

“Encouragement of Cosmopolitanism”

Q : What points do you think are important for Keio students to develop activities on international scenes?

A : First and foremost is the ability to communicate in English. Suppose you can communicate fully in English when participating in an international conference, even if you are a master’s course student you’ll be able to make a presentation on one-of-a-kind research achievements of your own, which gives you great confidence as a researcher. If you lack the ability to communicate in English, especially that concerning your own specialty field, the hurdles will remain high. So I’m always telling my students to lower the hurdles of language to begin with.

Q : Mr. Citterio, you are proficient in Japanese in addition to German (your mother tongue) and English. Do you have an aptitude you can recommend to Keio students?

A : To learn Japanese, I began by listening to rinko* sessions held in Japanese in our lab and at seminars. To master technical terminology, listening is particularly important since good dictionaries are rarely available. As for English, I’d suggest students listen to lectures by overseas researchers. By merely listening to lectures in English, you can substantially increase your knowledge of English technical terms. I’d like them to avail themselves to such opportunities as much as possible. This is the way I learned Japanese. So I can now read theses written by students in Japanese, although I still find it difficult to read more common Japanese sentences as found in magazines and the like.

(*Rinko: Rinko is an occasion where students report on the progress of their respective research activities and discuss their contents and directions. In some cases, rinko is held to read imported books and original theses with students taking turns, or to solve fundamental problems.)

