

Effects of *Intercultural Communication*-Focused English Language Education

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This paper is a report of a survey measuring students' knowledge/consciousness of intercultural communication (IC) (異文化コミュニケーション) at Tohoku University and the effects (if any) of having taken a course in Practical English which was designed to teach some basic concepts of IC through discussion and oral reports presented in English. In particular, this paper explores the following two research questions :

1. What do students know or not know about intercultural communication issues when they enter Tohoku University before having taken an IC-focused English class? (What aspects of IC are students exposed to prior to entering university, in education or at home?)
2. What effect does having taken a university IC-focused English class have on students' IC knowledge/consciousness (compared with students in matched classes without an IC focus)?

In order to carry out this study, I gave a questionnaire survey to 283 first and second year students of Tohoku University (See Appendix : Questionnaire). The survey was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). I also include some qualitative analysis based on students' written reflections after each class.

Conceptualizing Intercultural Communication

I define intercultural communication (IC) as representing a quality, consciousness, or proficiency, which enables people to communicate well with and understand peoples of other 'different' cultures. Up until quite recently the notion of interculturalism, as a social practice promoted through education, business, media and politics, had meant Japanese people communicating and interacting with other 'foreign peoples' outside of Japan or with foreign 'guests' coming to Japan. The notion of IC occurring within the social structure of Japan itself has not yet been well problematized. In recent years, Japanese people have had to confront the idea that within Japan itself, diversity is increasing in terms of not only ethnicity and race, but also in terms of gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, and academic/intellectual (and other) abilities/talents, background, looks, history, religion, age, regional differences, and so forth.

Scollon and Scollon, in their 2001 book, *Intercultural Communication*, use the term 'interdiscourse communication' interchangeably with 'intercultural communication' which they define as follows :

Interdiscourse communication is a term we use to include the entire range of communications across boundaries of groups or discourse systems from

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the most inclusive of those groups, cultural groups, to the communications which take place between men and women or between colleagues who have been born into different generations. (Scollon & Scollon, 2001 : xiii).

Learning how to overcome ethnocentric or essentialist thinking in order to facilitate better communication among people of diversity surrounding us daily in this globalized world of today is one of the goals of IC education. To some extent all human beings are naturally ethnocentric. We tend to place ourselves in the middle of our worlds. In terms of our ethnic or national affiliations (or generational, gendered and so forth), we also tend to see the world from our own perspective, with our affiliations central. However, the very point of attaining intercultural communication skills is to overcome our natural tendency to put ourselves central and to see the world from a broader perspective. For a country like Japan, which did not go through a civil war based on racial equality and was not built on immigrant energy and diversity like America, overcoming ethnocentric values is a skill, a consciousness, and a quality that I feel should be taught and nurtured. In this paper, I am proposing that this occur within the English (or other foreign language) classroom.

Studies of intercultural communication have often centered on problems of misunderstandings between peoples of different languages, dialects or regions in terms of not only language, but also *identities* (e.g : Kanno, 2003 ; Noguchi & Fotos, 2001 ; Maher & Yashiro [eds.], 1995 ; Norton, 2000 ; Pavlenko & Blackledge [eds.], 2004 ; Sekiguchi, 2002).

Many studies based in Japan have explored various aspects of intercultural communication, ranging from problems of *miscommunication* (e.g : Armour, 2001 ; Condon, 1984), to *racism/ethnicism* (e.g : Ching, 2001 ; LoCastro, 1990) to *essentialist*

notions of Japan as a homogeneous (one-race) society, even still today (e.g : Befu, 2001 ; Denoon, et al, 1996 ; Donahue, 2002 ; Lie, 2001 ; Weiner, 1997). *Gender theory and gender discourse* is another field that in recent years has seen much new research connected with IC in the Japan context (e.g : Kamada, 2003, 2010 ; Mackie, 2003 ; Okamoto & Shibata-Smith [eds.], 2004).

Several studies have been taken up by individuals from various ethnic groups in Japan on a wide range of topics, including mistreatment or bullying of foreign or 'half-Japanese' children in Japanese schools (Gillis-Furutaka [ed.], 1999 ; Parmenter, 1997 ; Sekiguchi, 2002) ; the unequal access to bilingual education in Japan (Kanno, 2008) ; the mistreatment of Koreans in Japan (Lee, Soo-im, 2002 ; Lie, 2001) and the struggles of children in Japan of mixed-ethnicities (Kamada, 2004 ; 2010 ; 1999 ; O' Hearn [ed.], 1998 ; Singer, 2000).

With these studies as a background, I wanted to examine the mind-set of first and second year university students attending an elite university to see how these often severe current social issues are affecting their consciousness. I wanted to examine their attitudes, knowledge and experiences by conducting a questionnaire and listening to their ideas and reflections.

The Methodology and Participants

The participants consisted of 283 first and second year students of Tohoku University (35% females ; 65% males) of various departments (Pharmacology, Science, Agriculture, Engineering, and Health Science). The surveys were conducted anonymously during a required English class (by this author). While the survey was mostly written in English, all questions were clearly explained question-by-question in Japanese (as well as English) to insure that the participants understood the meaning. Some questions included written Japanese explanations.

During the statistical analysis stage of the study, I used the Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. I had help from a graduate student in the logistical side of setting up and running the program, although the analysis is my own.

After running a program displaying the Frequencies of the entire 283 participants, I then ran a program which divided the participants into two groups: those who had been exposed to a 'Practical' English class with the theme of Intercultural Communication ($n = 114$) and those who had taken my other English classes (reading or communication) without being exposed to concepts of Intercultural Communication ($n = 169$). Finally, I ran a program displaying the correlation coefficients between all of the variables to see which factors showed strong significant correlations. Then, I worked through the data to find significant and interesting results to report here. Beyond this, I also include some qualitative data analysis that I made on students' 'Minute Paper' reports that they spent ten-minutes writing at the end of each class expressing their feelings, reflections and summaries of their experiences of that day's lesson.

In order to simplify the analysis of the data, for questions 1 - 20, I combined the categories of *I don't agree at all* and *I don't agree to some extent* into one category: "disagree"; and I combined categories of *I agree to some extent* and *I very much agree* into one category: "agree". I kept the middle category the same, "I can't say either way", making three categories.

Data Analysis and Discussion

In examining the results for both groups of the dataset, there were several very significant findings which revealed the general thinking of this group of young college students. While 88% of the students felt that it was important to *know about the problems*

of foreigners in Japan, only about half of them (51.1%) disagreed with the statement that *there is no racial discrimination in Japan* (Q3). Also 37% of the students agreed with the statement that *foreigners are one of the causes of rising crime rates in Japan* (Q4) and 21.1% agreed that *foreigners cannot be trusted in Japan* (Q5). This indicates a significant negative conception of foreigners (in general) in Japan held by some of these university students.

While this nuance of 'foreigners' is taken in a very general sense, the media has been influential in constructing 'the bad foreigner' as unskilled laborers from Asian, Middle Eastern, and South American countries and other developing regions, and are often portrayed in police reports as guilty of overstaying their visas and other more severe crimes. In contrast, the notion of 'the good foreigner' is often portrayed as a white (often male) 'guest' from a super-power nation. Few Japanese people are aware that it has been shown that when overstaying visa expirations (which is a crime Japanese people cannot commit) is eliminated to match Japanese crime rates, that crimes committed by foreigners do not represent higher percentages than Japanese rates, and that foreign crime rate has been decreasing in recent years, rather than increasing (see Debito, 2009). These results are indicative of the widespread idea held by Japanese people of Japanese as victims of crimes committed by foreigners rather than of foreigners as victims of racism by Japanese. The commonsensical notion is that of Japan as a country that does not racially discriminate against foreigners, even though racial discrimination towards foreigners in Japan has been (and continues to be) documented (see Debito, 2009).

There were significant positive correlations between the variable of Q1 (*It is important to know about the problem of foreigners in Japan.*) and the following variables: Q9 (*Global warming is of great*

concern to me), Q12 (*Intercultural communication is of great concern to me*), Q13 (*IC is very much connected with English communication.*) and both Q15 and Q14 that *IC and English communication are tools that Japanese need for their futures.*

A variable (Q3) measuring students' views on racial discrimination in Japan (*There is no racial discrimination in Japan.*) showed a significant difference ($r = .274$)** between the group of students who had attended IC-focused classes (indicated as Class 1, in all figures below) and students who attended regular English classes without IC focus (indicated as Class 2, in all figures below). See Figure 1 below.

Most of the students in the IC-focused group (Class 1) did not agree with the statement that there is no racial discrimination in Japan (75.44%), compared with 42.77 % of students from the other group. Also less than 9% of the IC-focused group agreed with the statement compared with more than a quarter of the control group.

As far as gender consciousness among both cohorts was concerned, over 61% disagreed with Q2 (*Gender [or sex] difference is not a problem in Japan.*), revealing a relatively high understanding and sympathy towards gender inequality, even

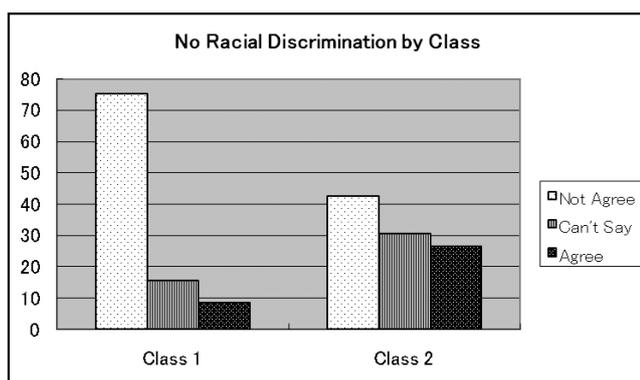
among a cohort of approximately 65% males to 35% females. Over a third of the students (38.8%) disagreed with Q6 (*Women already have the same rights 「権利」 and privileges 「権威」 as men do in Japan.*) with about a third (32.6%) in agreement, here revealing variations in students' perception of gender equality in Japan. Furthermore, a significant majority (73%) agreed with Q7 (*Part of the cause of the declining birthrate in Japan is due to women working.*). Agreement on this variable may be indicative of a commonsense feeling in Japan which tends to blame women for the declining population problem, instead of seeing demographic change as more of a general socio-economic problem. There was a significant correlation between variables of Q2 (*Gender or sex difference is NOT a problem in Japan today.*) and Q6 (*Women already have the same rights and privileges as men do in Japan.*) ($r = .30$)**.

Several questions (Q9 -12) were included on the questionnaire in order to evaluate the consciousness and concerns of students about various global issues. It seems that a significant majority of students showed concern about issues that were close to home such as Q10 (*Activities of North Korea are of great concern to me.*) (70.5%), or Q9 (*Global warming is of great concern to me.*) (81.3%), but showed far less concern about global problems more distant such as examined in Q11 (*The war in Afghanistan is of great concern to me.*) (38.4%). Also 61.6% agreed with Q16 (*Japan is the best place in the world to live*), with only 9.8% disagreeing, perhaps revealing a common satisfaction with 'home', but also perhaps an ethnocentric worldview.

Nonetheless, a relatively high percentage of students agreed with Q12 (*Intercultural communication is of concern to me.*) (66.5%) and 83.9% agreed with Q13 (*Intercultural communication is very much connected with English communication*). Nearly all of the students agreed with Q14 and Q15 that *English* (91.1%) and *intercultural*

Figure 1 : (Q3) There is no racial discrimination in Japan.

	Disagree	Can't say	Agree	
Class 1 (%)	75.44	15.79	8.77	100%
Class 2 (%)	42.77	30.72	26.51	100%



communication (91.1%) are tools that Japanese students need for their future.

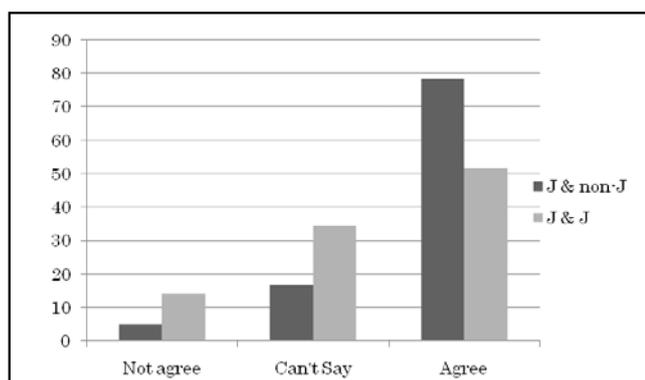
The Meaning of Intercultural Communication

As mentioned above, while most students felt intercultural communication to be important, most of them did not associate intercultural miscommunication as something that might occur between Japanese and other Japanese people. Rather, most of the students perceived intercultural misunderstandings to occur between Japanese and non-Japanese people. While most students (79%) indicated agreement with Q17 (*Intercultural communication misunderstandings often happen between Japanese and non-Japanese*), only 49% felt the same about Q18 (*Intercultural communication misunderstandings often happen between Japanese and other Japanese*), revealing a significant difference in student's responses to these two variables. (See Figure 2 below.)

Figure 2, below, shows high student agreement with the notion that IC misunderstandings often occur between Japanese and non-Japanese people, but we see much weaker agreement with the notion of IC misunderstandings occurring between Japanese

Figure 2 : (Q17 & Q18) Intercultural Communication misunderstandings often happen between : Japanese and non-Japanese ; Japanese and other Japanese.

	Disagree	Can't say	Agree	
J & non-J (%)	5	16.5	78.5	100%
J & J (%)	14	34.5	51.5	100%



and other Japanese people. This indicates that many students may have equated 'intercultural communication' with 'international communication' or 'cross-cultural communication', rather than as a broader conception of communication between people who differ in various aspects, including (but not limited to) national, ethnic differences, and as defined above by Scollon & Scollon (2001).

As we will see below, students who were exposed to IC-focused English classes came more to realize that intercultural communication refers not only to differences between countries, but also between people of the same country who differ in age, region, gender, sexual orientation, and intellectual/physical abilities.

Massacre of Koreans Following the 1923 Great Kantou Earthquake

As one example of students' knowledge of Japanese history regarding non-Japanese people residing in Japan, I included a survey item concerning an extremely violent historical event involving the mass murder of foreign residents in Japan by Japanese people. I posed Q22 : [*Can you explain in a few words about the following : The Honjou Jiken (It occurred a few days after the 1923 Great Kantou Earthquake.) 本庄事件 (1923年関東大震災の数日後 concerning Koreans living in Japan]*. I included Japanese explanation of this event in the wording of the question to try to make it as clear as possible to the students, even if they did not recognize the somewhat obscure name of the incident as the *Honjou Jiken*. Even still, few students indicated knowledge of this event. This *Honjou Jiken* (Honjou Incident) occurred a few days after the 1923 Great Kantou (Greater Tokyo Region) Earthquake which killed over 100,000 people and caused shock and panic in the Kantou region. Rumors began to spread a few days after the earthquake, that ethnic Koreans in Japan had

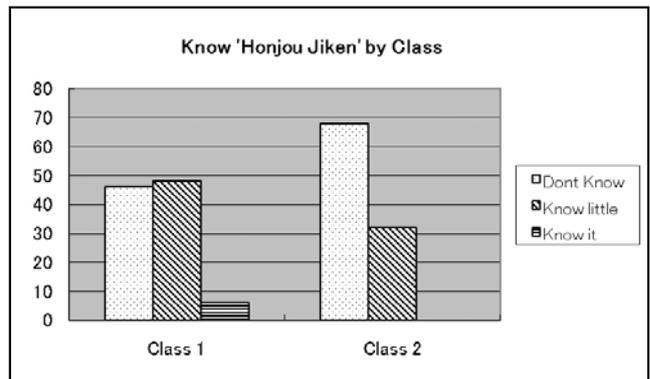
poisoned wells. These rumors caused the execution-style murders of what was estimated to be several thousand people (by most accounts), of mostly Koreans. Tests of 'Korean ethnicity' were conducted by Japanese on the spot by asking suspected Koreans to pronounce certain Japanese words which Koreans generally pronounce differently. When they mispronounced the Japanese words, they were deemed to be Korean and then killed on the spot. Although the vast majority of those murdered were Koreans, there were also Chinese, Okinawans and some Japanese (with rural accents) who were also murdered along with them. It should be noted that this Honjō Jiken was not an isolated incident occurring during the chaos following the earthquake disaster and that other events also occurred which gave anarchists and anti-government groups chances to act out violence such as the Kameido Incident and the Amakasa Incident.

Even though I did not specifically introduce the topic of the *Honjō Jiken* in my IC-focused classes, it did emerge spontaneously in one of my IC-focused classes ($n = 40$) when a student mentioned it in his oral class-presentation. Nevertheless, very few of the students who stated they had known of this incident said they had learned of it *in Kamada's (my) class* (5%) ; 72.5% of those who knew about it wrote that they had learned of it *in school* ; 17.5% said they learned of it *in a book* ; and another 5% said they learned of it *from a relative*. One student later told me that she had learned about it in her high school text book, although it consisted only of a mere paragraph which might explain why not everyone recalled learning it in high school. Thus, I am not really certain of the reason why the results of this variable differed so significantly between the IC-focused English classes and the control group ($r = .233$)** as shown in the Figure 3 below.

While this incident is fairly well-known among the

Figure 3 : (Q23) Can you explain in a few words about the Honjō Jiken which occurred a few days after the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, concerning Koreans living in Japan.

	Never heard of this. I don't know.	Heard of it, but don't know much.	I know about this It is . . .	
Class 1 (%)	46	48	6	100%
Class 2 (%)	68	32	0	100%



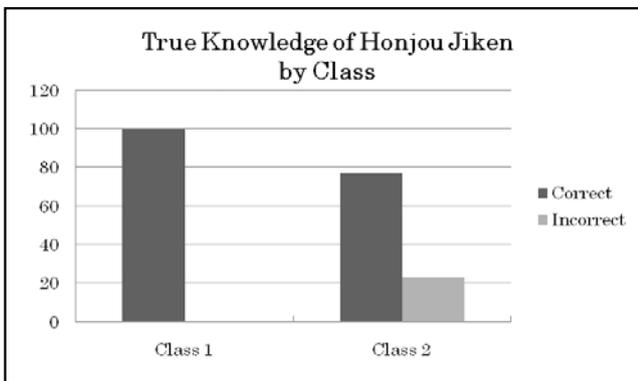
long-term foreign residents in Japan, it seems that few Japanese young people know well about this event. 62% of the combined total of students said they had never heard of it at all and 36% said that they had heard of it, but they didn't really know much about it. Only 2% of the combined total of students said they knew about it well. When examining the breakdowns between the two groups - the IC-focused classes and the control group - (See Figure 3 above), we can see that a much larger number of students in the control group (Class 2) had never heard of it compared with students in the IC-focused group (Class 1). Also while 6% of the IC-focused group stated that they knew about it well enough to identify what it was, none of the students in the control classes did.

However, when I asked those students who had either said 'I know about it a little' or 'I know about it well' to write down what it was, 18% of them were unable to correctly say what happened and none of the students with the incorrect responses were in the IC-focused group.

As can be seen by the chart above, 100% of the

Figure 4 : What is the *Honjō Jiken* about?

	Correct	Incorrect		
Class 1 (%)	100	0	100%	100%
Class 2 (%)	77	23	100%	100%



students in the IC-focused class who said they had heard of the *Honjō* Incident or that they knew about it well were able to correctly identify what it was, whereas nearly a quarter of the control group who said they knew what it was, were actually not able to correctly explain what had happened.

Contact with Non-Japanese People and Discussions about Race/Gender

Only 16.1% of the students answered ‘yes’ to Q23 (*In your home, have your parents ever talked with you about non-Japanese people in Japan?*). Of these parents who talked with the students in the home about foreigners in Japan, 59% brought up subjects which were negative or unsympathetic to foreigners, with only 41% of the parents talking about foreigners in a positive, sympathetic manner.

Compared with issues about foreigners, *gender issues* discussed in the home with parents (Q24) was indicated by a much higher percentage of students (89%) and most of the talk took a positive or sympathetic view of gender or women’s issues (89%).

Finally, even though a relatively high percentage of the students (37%) said they had been abroad at least once (Q25) and 35% said they had a foreign friend residing in Japan (Q26), only 58% said that

they planned to use English in their future (Q27). It is also interesting to note that there was a very high negative correlation ($r = -.544$)** between a variable measuring *how often students met with foreign friends/relatives in Japan* (Q26) and a variable measuring what might be interpreted as an ethnocentric attitude in Q16 : *Japan is the best place in the world to live*. Thus, students who often met with foreign friends/relatives generally did not see Japan as the best place in the world to live, indicating a more globalized worldview.

Qualitative View of Student Feedback

Students of all the classes were required to make oral reports for their final grades. I asked the IC-focused classes to make oral presentations in English about some aspect of IC that we had talked about in class such as stereotypical thinking, ethnocentrism, similarities or differences between cultures, racism (of foreigners in Japan or of Japanese outside of Japan), gender, religion, and so forth. Many of the students gave excellent presentations that showed their deep understanding on a wide range of topics and issues. Some students used Powerpoint. Not only girls, but many boys were interested in examining gender issues in Japan. Some students examined other world religions and compared them to religions in Japan. Students reported that they learned a lot from each other and were very attentive to their classmates’ reports, asking questions and making comments.

At the end of the each class and also at the end of the course, I asked students to reflect on what they learned or how they felt about the class. By the last class, many students expressed that they felt the class was stimulating and interesting, and also that they learned many things that they had never considered before. Even though many felt nervous making oral presentations, many enjoyed the opportunity and thanked me for giving them the opportunity. One student commented that we all

unconsciously have stereotypical ideas that we are not aware of ; another said that the world is bigger than Japan. One student mentioned that before she took this English class, she thought intercultural communication meant communication only with people of other countries, but this class taught her that IC has a much broader meaning. Many students felt that the topic of IC was at the same time difficult and important. One student felt that since IC can't bring us to any conclusions that it should not be a tested subject. Many students said that they felt stimulated during class ; they expressed interest, surprise and shock about reports presented by other students.

Conclusion

Returning to the first research question posed at the beginning of this paper which asked about students' IC knowledge prior to university, this paper has shown that few families had brought up discussion of foreigners in Japan with students, and those who had were generally unsympathetic or negative. However, many families had discussed gender issues in the home and the discussion tended to be more positive and sympathetic. It seems that even though the school textbooks had slightly covered some topics about the history and treatment of foreigners in Japan, the passages were too condensed and brief for most students to recall. The second research question examined the effects of IC-focused university English classes on students' knowledge and consciousness. It was shown that students in the IC-focused classes not only had more knowledge about various topics, but they also seemed to have a more global worldview and were less ethnocentric. They tended less to stereotype foreigners by putting them in certain categories.

For young Japanese university students soon to enter the work force in a fast-paced, globalized, media-driven multicultural world of today, having the

ability to speak English alone is not enough. Developing the skills, tools and ability to communicate interculturally (beyond language usage) is also extremely important. IC is closely connected with English proficiency and both are tools or stepping stones for Japanese, important for students in any academic field, be it sciences or humanities.

Intercultural communication is important in that it helps us to transcend our narrow ethnocentric and stereotypical thinking to a broader global consciousness necessary for students who will become our future leaders. The ability to assume different and competing identities, to appreciate diverse perspectives, and to appropriate different forms of cultural capital as advantageous, should be seen as a vital means of survival and strength for Japanese youths of today, particularly of the elite students attending such leading universities as Tohoku University.

In my own personal reflection of how I could make this survey better in the future, I would want to include more categories addressing Japanese historical knowledge. Also I would like to include more items in the survey about other ethnic groups in Japan who also deserve attention besides Koreans, such as the Ainu people, the Ryukyuu people, Dowa people, Chinese, Brazilians and other marginalized minority groups in Japan (see Weiner, 1997). I feel that Japanese education does not go far enough to teach the rich diversity of culture that exists within the borders of Japan. Instead of concentrating the focus on the 'commonsensical' notion of the homogeneity of the Japanese people, more discussion of these other groups in Japan and their languages, ethnicities and cultures might contribute to making Japan an even richer culture than it already is.

Finally, as an educator at one of the top universalities in Japan, I feel a responsibility to bring my students up to an international standard where

high proficiency in both English communication and intercultural communication have become necessary tools that students need to acquire before leaving university. Within their several years in education at the undergraduate level, students would gain much in coming to realize the importance of becoming globalized human beings on this small planet who can take on leadership roles in whatever field they endeavor.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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Appendix : Questionnaire

- | 全然当て
はまらない | あまり当て
はまらない | どちらも
言えない | 少し
当てはまる | よく
当てはまる |
|--|----------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. It is important to know about the problems of foreigners in Japan. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Gender or sex difference is NOT a problem in Japan today. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. There is no racial discrimination in Japan. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Foreigners are one of the causes of rising crime rates in Japan. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Foreigners often cannot be trusted in Japan. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Women already have the same rights (権利) and privileges (権威) as men do in Japan. | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

