Cultural Diversity and Educational Issues
—— including a Report on the Graduate Class of "International Communication" at System Management & Engineering at the NIT ——

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This paper is composed of two parts: I. Aspects of Multicultural Society and Education; II. A Report on the Graduate Class of "International Communication" at System Management & Engineering at the NIT. In Part I, I examine the cultural diversities and multicultural situations seen nowadays throughout the world. I look into the situations in the United States, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan. Specially, I delve into this theme from a pedagogical angle. Part II is a report on the class I taught at the graduate (M1) course of System Management & Engineering in 2001 and 2002. The aim of this class was to make the students fluent in English and acquaint them with different cultures to acquire the competency to reach agreement on international projects.

Either part considers what we have to do to communicate and reach mutually acceptable conclusions in the present international and intercultural environment. Readers can start with either of them depending on their interests.

Introduction

The rapid development of technology in the past several decades, especially the prodigious development of IT, has dramatically brought people closer to each other. When it comes to communication methods, we can nowadays get in touch with other people wherever they live. Such is the situation that "global communication" is one of the favorite topics covered by the mass media. It is also a popular topic in general conversations. It has become an urgent and essential issue in the present world. It was also a lesson taught to us by that first and probably the last incident of that kind which took place in New York on 11 September 2001. The situation might have been different if global communication had at that stage been more advanced.

It is axiomatic that when we consider global communication, we must pursue it from various standpoints. Communication, however, does not occur automatically, no matter the viewpoint, because it is wholly a human behavior.

In this paper I will examine the cultural diversities and multicultural situations in several countries and the efforts so far made to integrate or understand the diversities encountered in the search for better methods of communication. Specially, I will delve into this theme from a pedagogical angle. It is Part I of this paper. In Part II, I will report on the class of "International Communication" I taught in 2001 and 2002 at the graduate course of System Management & Engineering at the Nagoya Institute of Technology. The students' activities indicated to us a possible method to consider, which is the theme of this paper.

Part I.　Aspects of Multicultural Society and Education

I-0. What is Multiculturalism?

It has been a long time since the word "multiculturalism" came to be used. Semantically, it (multi-cultural-ism) could be regarded as denoting conditions in which people from different cultural backgrounds coexist or the speculation that emphasizes the importance of such situations. With the advances made in the methods of communication and transportation in the last century, more and more people are now able to go and stay abroad fairly easily. Aside from the above, there are many people who left their homeland for good in order to live in foreign countries as immigrants or refugees. Whatever the reasons, nowadays multicultural societies are a common phenomenon throughout the world.

Historically, and as a social phenomenon, multi-

culturalism often denotes a special meaning. In fact, multiculturalism is used to assert that minorities in a society must be protected. At the beginning, minorities in a particular society meant small ethnic groups. For instance, Afro-American, Hispanic, or Asian people are ethnic minorities in the US. Thus, multiculturalism in the US has often suggested that these minorities should be given priority, socially and culturally, in that they have suffered for ages from prejudice, disadvantages in welfare, and disrespect for their cultures.

Over the years, however, the concept of "minorities" has changed. Recently it has come to include many other social groups who were not previously acknowledged as equal to majorities, and have been struggling because of their weak status in society. Women, children, the aged, gays, lesbians, the physically-handicapped, etc. fall into this category.

As can be visualized from the foregoing, multiculturalism refers to dissimilar social situations due to different social backgrounds. Of such importance is multicultural situations as prevalent now that we should not adopt the attitude of wait and see. We should take urgent corrective steps. Therefore, I will first examine various but typical multicultural situations found in the US, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan. Secondly, I will consider what pedagogical issues become apparent from those circumstances.

I-1. Multiculturalism in the US

The United States is often described as 'the melting pot' since it is composed of many different races and ethnic groups. However, Carl Degler used the term 'Salad Bowl' for the first time in 1959 to describe the multifarious cultures in the United States, giving the image of a salad bowl in which various ingredients keep their own original tastes but in harmony with each other as a whole. The ingredients are likened to ethnic groups, and the bowl is of course the US. Emphasizing the importance of original ethnic bonds and ethnic community, the image of a mosaic or a patchwork (quilt) also came to be used to describe America. Those who believe in the image of a mosaic often maintain that the US has been biased against new immigrants, compared with its earlier enthusiasm to welcome the pioneer immigrants who are called WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). However, the fact is that the changing image implies a higher respect for cultural diversity, mainly because it helps people to live as they like with a clear awareness of the ethnic group to which they belong.

One of the remarkable characteristics of American society is that various groups not only form their own communities, but live independently of each other. An example can be found in San Francisco, where three ethnic districts - China Town, Japan Town, and Mission District (Latino) - are separated by only a few streets. Each district consists of a unique ethnic community, particularly in food, religion, architecture, language, etc. Their individuality sometimes gives the impression that they are outsiders.

From this standpoint, Will Kymlicka gives an important account of cultural differences. He argues that multicultur-alism involves two different kinds of cultural diversities. One is the difference in societal cultures. A societal culture provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life (76). It consists not only of collective values and memories, but also a shared language and territory (76-80). The capacity and motivation for such variety has the characteristics of nations or peoples. The other is the cultural diversity created by individuals and familial migration. In this case, migrants or refugees running away from harsh living conditions have chosen to give up their native cultures (100-101). Usually these two kinds of diversities float on the surface of the society without changing it. Three ethnic towns in San Francisco have become so-called fortresses for immigrants.

Then the question is: What is the historical background of the debate on multiculturalism in the US? Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. warned Americans in his book *The Disuniting of America - Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1992). First he describes the America of bygone days: "What is it (then) that, in the absence of a common ethnic origin, has held Americans together over two turbulent centuries? For America was a multiethnic country from the start." He quotes Michel G. J. de Crèvecoeur, an essayist in the 18th century, to the effect that from a multinational family of a promiscuous breed, a race now called Americans have arisen (12). Then, Schlesinger asks a pertinent question: Who is an American? Again citing Crèvecoeur, he writes, "the American is a new man, who acts upon new principles. . . Here, individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men." What he is trying to clarify here is that many Americans are now against this historical goal of "a new race of men." Strong faith in ethnicity is too often found both in white and non-white immigrants. Although the ranting and raving ethnic consciousness has brought about numerous good results in the US., it has also raised many problems in the US. Schlesinger critically describes:

(But) pressed too far, the cult of ethnicity has had bad consequences too. The new ethnic gospel rejects the

unifying vision of individuals from all nations melted into a new race. Its underlying philosophy is that America is not a nation of individuals at all but a nation of groups, that ethnicity is the defining experience for most Americans, that ethnic ties are permanent and indelible, and that division into ethnic communities establishes the basic structure of American society and the basic meaning of American history. (16)

In brief, Schlesinger criticizes multiculturalism as dangerous because it could lead to disuniting America due to its basic idea of ethnocentricity. After Schlesinger's book and other writers' similar views were made known, multiculturalism came to be identified with extreme ethnocentricity such as Afrocentrism and often regarded rather negatively in the US.

However, the current course of debate is apt to raise the issue of traditional views and values. In fact, the educational system has been reevaluated in many states in America. An example is the state of New York. The reformed educational system of New York in 1991 reflected multiculturalism, emphasizing the interdependence of cultures. Several programs were introduced to carry out this idea. For instance, it was decided that if a child in a class did not understand English, an ESL (English as Second Language) program must be provided for him/her. If there were more than twenty such children in a grade-year, bilingual education would be arranged. An instructor who speaks the child's mother tongue would support him/her in the classroom, cooperating with the teacher in charge of the class. In this way, they tried to confirm a student's right to receive equal education.

During the 1990s, the US was the beneficiary of unprecedented economic prosperity. This seems to have diverted people's attention from the crisis of a disunited America. However, as many fundamental problems have not been solved yet, more benefits from the educational system will be expected. Education should respect diverse cultures and history. In this sense, multicultural education will gain additional momentum in the future.

Here I will quote Denise M. Dalaimo's experiment on democracy and critical thinking in a cross-cultural classroom. Her report is based on her sociology class conducted at the University of Nevada. As an antithesis to 'traditional multicultural education,' she introduces the concept of 'critical multiculturalism.' Historically, multicultural studies have encouraged students to address traditionally under-represented and excluded cultures, and to consider them on their own

terms. To the contrary, Dalaimo says critical multiculturalism is an attempt to advance democratic initiatives in curriculum, pedagogy, and social relations in the schools. It encourages students to understand and participate in various associated activities, and buttresses the efforts directed at attaining social, cultural and emotional compatibility. Her educational policy and methods focused on a student-centered classroom environment and placed emphasis on critical multicultural thinking. Methods used here include student evaluations, a suggestion box to hear the students' opinions, class discussions, class votes and other ideas for a continuous feedback from students. Most interesting, however, was an exercise that highlighted privileges enjoyed by members of dominant groups. Dalaimo says, "Privilege is a difficult thing to face, because to do so we must give up the myth of meritocracy, a value so deeply embedded in our society that its very questioning brings accusations of "anti-Americanism." Nevertheless, the exercise was a success because it led students to identify the daily impact that privilege has on their lives, by focusing on not only white male privileges but all types of privileges, i.e., advantages people enjoy because of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, culture, region, physical ability, nationality, appearance, etc.

Traditional multiculturalism, which exclusively asserts the rights of minorities, was often accused of being extremism and sometimes even regarded as the cause of "reverse discrimination." Dalaimo's method can help avoid the dangers of such accusations. Moreover, her experiment seems to have offered more versatile and comprehensive training for students and helped to look into their own situations in society as well as the circumstances of other people. Multicultural education in America is probing its way through trial and error.

I-2. Multicultural Policies in Australia

The attending factors of cultural diversity in Australia are different from those in the US. Multicultural policies have been fairly successful in Australia, although problems have arisen recently. Until three or four decades ago, Australia accepted immigrants only from Europe according to their White Australia policy which had lasted for more than seventy years.

The reasons for the gradual change into multiculturalism are not simple. The main causes were the decline of England as its former sovereign, and the realization that trade with Asian countries were extremely important for Australia's future. Humanitarianism did not play an overwhelming role here. However, Australia subsequently began to accept

immigrants from about 150 countries, according to a survey.

What was dramatic was not those figures. As Humphrey McQueen described in Social Sketches of Australia (1991), "Instead of forcing everyone into a singular Anglo-Celtic mould, differences in custom and outlook were celebrated." Also, "one significant aspect has been the success with which the Anglo-Celtic majority has adjusted to the size and diversity of the migrant intake."

In fact, at one stage, multiculturalism in Australia was fairly successful politically, economically, and socially. In education, for more than a decade, Australia has adopted a comprehensive multicultural program exposing children to various cultures including those of immigrants and Aborigines.

Unfortunately, however, when the number of immigrants increased and Australia's capacity to accommodate them exceeded the limit, a reaction took place. For instance, the political party One Nation raised a ruckus in 1998, when it said that it would curtail the number of Asian immigrants and cancel the welfare benefits for Aborigines. Although the party subsequently broke up and lost public support, the conservative atmosphere remained within Australian society. In 2000, the Australian government announced a national defense policy aimed at removing illegal refugees. According to an article by Jane Perlez in the *International Herald Tribune* (10 May 2002), about 80,000 immigrants and another 12,000 refugees a year are selected to enter the country. Prime Minister John Howard himself does not hesitate to use the word "yellow peril," to imply the danger of Asian immigrants.

Australia is now forced to make a vital decision. Living with people from different backgrounds brings about anxiety. The important thing is to create benefits for both sides, and maintain social harmony through mutual understanding. Perhaps the problems and issues that Australia is now facing will have to be faced by other countries, including Japan, too.

I-3. Ethnic Diversity in Singapore and Malaysia

The societies of Singapore and Malaysia are multi-cultural. Singapore consists of Chinese, Malays, Indians, and a small number of Europeans (called Eurasians). So is Malaysia. English is the official language in both countries, while Malay, Hindu, and Chinese are also spoken. In spite of the cultural diversity, each nation's society is fairly stable. What is the reason for this stability?

First, their multicultural societies are mainly composed of Asians. Asian people respect harmony among themselves. So it is not wrong to say that the awareness of social harmony helps to sustain stability. For instance, in Malaysia, generally, the three main ethnic groups have their favorite professions. Malays try to enter or find jobs in the country's administration. Chinese shine in business. Indians are eager to enter the medical or academic world. It is said that they respect each other's occupational territory. Of course there are many exceptions to this generalization. However, it must be said that it is a fairly stable way to sustain stability in a multicultural society.

Second, their ethnic diversity has always existed. If the current balance in ethnicity changes because of a sudden increase in immigration or due to an economic upheaval, there will be confusion. In fact, this is already happening. It is regrettable that Malaysia passed a new labor law in August 2002 to make undocumented migrant workers leave Malaysia voluntarily or face a six-month prison term.

Third, but a very important reason is that all citizens learn English from early childhood. It is true that there is a problem concerning the accuracy of their English. For instance, English spoken in Singapore is often jokingly called "Singlish." Yet ethnic diversity in Singapore or Malaysia is maintained fairly easily owing to English being their common language. Education in English is a key element in multi-cultural societies like those of Malaysia or Singapore.

I-4. A Case of Bicultural Education in Japan

Japan has long been a homogeneous country. However, nowadays many foreigners live in Japan, who are immigrants from Asia and South America. Notwithstanding this phenomenon, Japan has no definite policy on how to treat immigrants, not to mention educating the children of immigrants. This issue has to be given serious thought because Japan also is in the forefront of cultural diversity. In Japan, immigrants live in areas where big industrial plants are located. This diverts the Japanese attention from cultural diversity unless they live near these areas.

To see what measures are taken with reference to education, I conducted some research at a local city called Minokamo, in Gifu Prefecture, where about seven percent of the population consists of foreigners working in big industrial plants. About eighty percent of them are Brazilians.

Most children attend municipal elementary and junior high schools, although there is a private Brazilian school established to accommodate elementary to senior high students. Most children start their school life here without understanding Japanese. In order to help these children, a Japanese-Brazilian instructor is sent from the city office to

visit the classrooms. This program in Minokamo brings to mind the program adopted in New York which I mentioned earlier. As in the case of New York, mothers in Minokamo are also eager to support their children at school.

Kobi Elementary School accommodates the largest number of foreign children in the city - forty among a total 113 including elementary and junior high students. Kobi Elementary School is designated by the Ministry of Education and Science as one of the thirteen schools in Japan for "A Local Project to Push Ahead Internationalization in Education Together with the Japanese Children Who Lived Abroad and Foreign Children."

Taken together, the bicultural program in Minokamo schools is progressive. Besides, they have a period called "Amigo Time" during which Brazilian children teach Portuguese to Japanese children and vice versa. This bilateral education seem to be effective in letting children experience the pleasures of teaching and learning as well as the chance to communicate with each other.

Despite these affirmative measures, a few problems still remain. First, the higher a student's grade, the more he/she finds it difficult to learn in Japanese. This shows that the Japanese he/she acquired earlier is insufficient for higher education. Second, although Japanese and foreign children mix well in lower grades, as they grow up, they coalesce into groups reflecting their respective nationalities. Third, this advanced program for Brazilians cannot help the other few foreign children such as Filipinos and Peruvians who speak Spanish, and Chinese who speak Chinese.

Probably these problems are related not only to languages but also to cultural differences. Whether we like it or not, multiculturalism is alive in Japan. As internationalization in education progresses, some drastic steps will have to be taken in the near future to solve the above difficulties.

Part II. A Report on the Graduate Class of "International Communication" at System Management & Engineering at the NIT

In 2001 and 2002, I was in charge of a class for "International Communication" which was included in a curriculum at the graduate course (M1) of the department of System Management & Engineering at the Nagoya Institute of Technology. This was based on the concept that an essential requirement to further international projects is the ability to express ideas in English. For that purpose, students must acquire not only fluency in English but also some knowledge about different cultures and the skill to satisfactorily arrive at international agreements. Therefore, the chief aim of the class was to teach students how to express themselves effectively in English as well as the expertise on how to reach mutually acceptable agreements.

This subject was compulsory for M1 students of the department of System Management & Engineering. In addition, each year, more than ten students attended this class from the department of Architecture and Civil Engineering, and Electrical and Computer Engineering, although this was not a compulsory subject. Besides, about one-third of them were foreign students, mostly from China, Korea, and a few from Brazil and Bhutan. In other words, the class itself was international and intercultural, not to mention the title of the subject "International Communication."

I focused on developing the students' ability to express their opinions on various topics, especially about communication ranging from personal to global. Only English was used in the class. As many students took part (38 in 2001, 37 in 2002), my pedagogical approach was to combine my introductory lecture in the first half of each period and the various activities of students in the second half.

The topics I took up in the class were as follows: 1. The role of English as an international language; 2. Verbal and nonverbal communication; 3. Cross-cultural communication; 4. Multiculturalism; 5. International communication on environmental problems; 6. Urgent global issues such as terrorism; 7. International communication in the future.

Based on these topics, students pursued various kinds of activities. For instance, introducing himself/herself; writing his/her curriculum vitae and sending it by e-mail; making a mock plan for international communication in a local community or a company; drawing a brochure to advertise this plan or writing an invitation letter for it; group discussions on each topic; collecting information and data through mass media or Internet; group presentation of their research; and writing reports and a final essay.

Among these exercises, I like to report about group presentation which was held for two consecutive weeks (two periods). This activity showed a highly noteworthy intercultural aspect. Students formed groups of three or four, discussed a theme that they selected, researched, and presented the result. In 2001, the theme was global environment. In 2002, the theme was not specified, and the students were required to select the topic themselves. The only condition was that the topic should reflect the current global situation. As a result, eight of ten groups took up environmental

problems such as the greenhouse effect, ozone layer, energy, etc., and others took up animals and English language as topics.

Grouping was at random. In most cases, however, students formed groups with those who were from the same department, or who were on friendly terms with each other. To my surprise and relief, most groups included different nationalities. As their English ability was limited, they made up for it by cooperating. Students were eager to do this activity and in fact did it well, although they had quite a tough time preparing the materials and presenting them in English. Besides, they had to do much of the preparatory work outside the class. The reason why they were successful was that they were good at using computers, overhead projectors, and other devices for group presentation as well as making various materials and data, as they were all majoring in engineering. In either year, there was a group that included foreign students who had a good command of English and experience in working on international projects in construction or architecture. A predominant characteristic of these groups was that each student skillfully introduced environmental problems in relation to his/her own country. Moreover, it was noteworthy that a few highly motivated Japanese students joined these experienced international groups and presented the well-matched Japanese part.

One group took up the topic: Why are the Japanese not good at speaking English? One of the group members was a Chinese. This incident was interesting and noteworthy from an intercultural standpoint. Generally the Japanese are reserved, and if a Japanese were in a similar situation, he/she might hold back from asking, "Why are the Chinese not good at speaking English?" Somehow I felt at ease by the easygoing attitude of both Chinese and Japanese students in this group. In other words, you find your neighbor's defect and study together with the neighbor about it without any criticism, shame, or disrespect, but objectively in a friendly manner. It appeared that they had no inhibitions that made them feel ethnically different, so far as they were studying a common subject. This impression was strong because their presentations were persuasive and well analyzed, and included suggestions on how the Japanese could improve their methods of learning English.

Only English was used in this class so that students could have a better opportunity to learn and communicate in English. As their English levels were uneven, I prepared brief handouts about my introductory lectures for their benefit. In the questionnaire I gave at the last period, I asked, "What percentage of the lectures did you understand by listening?" and the response ranged from thirty to a hundred percent. I also asked: 1. What their impression was of this class; 2. The extent of their interest in international or intercultural communication before and after taking this class, and the reasons; 3. Which activity was easy? Which was difficult? Which was pleasant? Which was boring?; 4. Their opinions or comments about this class. Anonymity was guaranteed in the questionnaire. Whether a student's understanding by listening was low (30 %) or high (100 %), the most common response was that it is necessary to join activities that lead to international communication and arrive at mutually acceptable conclusions. Moreover, it became apparent that a number of students were looking forward to this kind of subject.

Most students' English ability was limited. In the final essay, in which they were asked to write sentences to total about 500 words, they made many grammatical errors. Sometimes the sentences were too disjoined to make any sense. In fact, I found that students very often depended on translation software of computers at crucial moments when they found it hard to express their ideas in English, which resulted in hindering the flow of what they wanted to say. Their English must be much improved. Nevertheless, they worked very hard and managed to complete every assignment. Perhaps this made them content.

I felt that many students liked this class. At the same time, of course, it became apparent that several aspects of this type of class need quite a few improvements.

Conclusion

The 21st Century started with strong expectations for a blessed future, because the real world is full of contradictions and insoluble problems. Despite these circumstances, globalization is on the march regardless of its merits and demerits. People have come to feel that unless they watched carefully and did something, globalization would be forced on nations unilaterally by the US. The present world is becoming akin to a community where the human lot is decided in common. For this reason, the concept of "the global village" attracts people's attention.

Efforts at internationalization are being made in many countries and, hence, intercultural relations are required more and more. Whether people like it or not, multicultural societies are widespread in the world. What we can and have to do now is to dwell together in this narrowing global village, without hiding, pretending, boasting, and hurting, in what is

called a "symbiotic relationship."

It is undeniable that there are a huge amount of unsolved problems.　Nonetheless, the first step we should take is apparent. As we saw above in Section II, we should start with small cooperative joint studies about ourselves　and our neighbors as scholarly colleagues normally do.

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