

Liquid Space Formed by Courses Taught in English in Korea and Japan through Observation of Organizations Representing International Students

Daichi Ishii

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, e-mail: daichido@gmail.com

Abstract:

The number of students who study outside their own countries has been increasing, and the destinations and types of international students are diversifying these days. One of the reasons for this is the expanding number of courses taught in English because of the public-policy-driven internationalization of higher education. This paper examines courses taught in English in Japan and Korea by looking at the organizations representing international students, which show the homogeneity of international students beyond identity, for their common interest and their necessity of a representative body in relationship to various stakeholders. Then, it suggests a number of merits of observing these organizations in terms of finding out the real issues brought about by courses taught in English that cannot be identified by policy analysis.

Keywords: Hofstede's model, social axioms, personal autonomy, education, intergenerational comparison.

Diversifying Destinations of International Students

An increasing number of students choose their university globally nowadays. According to ICEF statics (2015), the number of students who enrolled in higher education institutions that are located outside their country of citizenship was just 1.3 million in 1990 and increased to 5 million in 2014. It is expected that it will continue to increase in the future. There are various reasons for this increase. One such reason is the universities' internationalization competition, based on university rankings, a competition that leads to government action meant to increase the number of international students at national level.

The number of international students is increasing not only in the United States, which originally attracted international students from various regions. Rather, the number of F - 1 visa issued by the US has declined, especially the number of visas issued to Chinese students which halved between 2016 and 2017. The Director of Public Policy of the National Association of International Educators in the United States was quoted by Web media Axios (2018), "various countries are actively seeking foreign students, and the US is not the only option for them anymore." However, Morikawa (2006) and ICEF (2015) show that more and more international students from East Asian countries are moving in the region these days because of radical policy measures aimed at attracting more international students. Sugimura (2008) shows that Malaysia is trying to attract international students from Muslim countries in the Middle East, as an example of higher education policy in South East Asia. Many similar examples point to the diversification of destinations for studying abroad nowadays.

Diversifying Types of International Students in Non-English Speaking Countries

Even in countries where the traditional teaching languages have been non-English local languages, such as Korea and Japan, international students are increasingly diverse due to active international student recruitment policies. For instance, universities in Japan have implemented various measures to raise the influx of international students. The Japanese Government started "the 300,000 international students plan" in 2008, which aims to receive 300,000 students from abroad by 2020, resulting not only in an increase of international students, but also in their diversification.

The establishment of courses taught in English (English-medium courses), which allows students to graduate without being proficient in the local language, is a typical example of those policies. Studying abroad in the non-English-speaking countries for humanities and social sciences was usually aimed at learning about the host country; but the establishment of the courses taught in English has resulted in receiving students who have various kinds of interests in relationship to those countries.

In Japan, courses taught in English have been introduced in many top schools by the Global 30 (G30) project. However, the fact that it became possible for international students to enter university regardless of their Japanese language ability generated linguistic and cultural minorities that did not exist on campus in the past. For example, Watanabe (2010) identified problems of students regarding their mental health and career after graduation in G30 course at the Faculty of Engineering, Kyushu University, which does not accept Japanese students. One of those reasons is because international students enrolled in courses taught in English are cultural and linguistic minorities, though Watanabe does not point this out directly.

The Korean government introduced a similar policy called "Study Korea Project." This policy includes support for universities to operate more courses taught in English, which make Korean universities face similar problems as well. For example, Kim (2014) pointed out that international students are not sufficiently able to exchange opinions with Korean students due to linguistic barriers in English courses at the university in Korea.

The English-taught courses are diversifying not only the destination of international students but also the character of international students. Students enrolled in the English-taught courses are not limited to international students unless the university specifically limits eligibility for application. It is assumed that there are diverse background students such as returnee children, international school graduates, foreign national students with permanent residence or resident rights in that country. The language level of local languages and English, and their cultural identity are not determined by these attributes, which also vary widely among students.

In short, the introduction of courses with English as the teaching language is a new trend in Korea and Japan, and consequently it became easier for international students who do not speak the local languages to study abroad in non-English speaking countries. As a result, English-taught courses are generating diversification of international students and problems associated with that change.

English medium courses and their problems were discussed not only in Japan and Korea. Macaro et al. (2018) reveal that there are papers analyzed about courses conducted in English, regardless of country or region, and predict that universities and governments in many countries ignore social linguistic conflicts and just move forward with the introduction of English-taught courses. This paper focuses on Korea and Japan as examples of nations that traditionally use local languages more in higher education.

Therefore, the institutional definition of "international student" does not work well when talking about the actual situation of students.

The meaning of "international student" is dependent on the nuance of the language used, even in the same country, such as the case of Japan. For example, the phrase "international students" in English sometimes indicates all students in English-taught courses including Japanese students. It is different from the directly translated word in Japanese (*Ryugakusei*), which indicates only those who are required to get a visa for studying abroad, at some Japanese universities. This paper defines "international students" in principle as those who are required to get a visa for studying abroad in that country.

Establishment of Groups Representing International Students

This paper illustrated the diversification of international students in Korea and Japan generally in the first two sections and offers a number of examples of complicated internationalization, through groups representing international students, in this section.

Despite international students being unlikely to have an integrated identity simply as international students, they are brought together in organizations that then act as their representatives. International student groups consist of students of various backgrounds. These students have undergone a process of diversification in recent years, as discussed in the former section, and they continue to build organizations together, organisations that would represent their interest. This paper addresses the in-campus organizations representing such international students.

The purpose of describing organizations founded by international students is to show that the reason why international students come together and form organizations beyond their national identity is to approach the university's issues connected to internationalization. The increase of international student numbers has caused various problems, though the type of problems is different in each university and each country. However, the common element everywhere is that, in cases

where university administration and domestic students should approach specific issues in order to discuss and solve them, these undertakings lack a representative of international students. They need counterparts from international students in order to reach collective agreement and cooperation. Furthermore, for international students, even if they argue about problems as individuals without any organizational body to support them, it may be received by others as a personal opinion rather than the representative voice of international students.

For these reasons, the establishment of political organizations representing international students is requested from various stakeholders, such as international students, domestic students and university administration. That is why, although it is not so easy for international students to set up organizations as the cultural and linguistic minority on campus, they form organizations for political activities related to their interests.

Therefore, the activities of organizations representing international students have the possibility to show the problem caused by the internationalization of each university and people who are connected with those problems. Further research presented in the next sections will clarify the internationalization of universities and the current situation of those actors for internationalization by illustrating some cases that groups representing international students are involved in the problem caused by the internationalization of higher education in Japan and Korea.

For the purpose of this paper, we selected Keio University in Japan and Yonsei University in Korea as case studies. These case descriptions are based on interviews with members of international student organizations by the author, which were held from June to November 2017. This interviews used English and the semi-structured interview method.

Case 1: Keio University (Japan)

Keio University is one of the most prestigious private universities in Japan. It has two full courses taught in English that do not require any Japanese language proficiency for enrolling, in Shonan Fujisawa Campus (SFC; Faculty of Policy Management and Faculty of Environment and Information Studies) and Faculty of Economics. Although most Japanese universities start their academic year in April, these courses begin in September to attract more international students from regions where high school ends in summer. The author interviewed the organization called "Association for International Students (AIS)" which do activities for the students enrolled in the courses taught in English at SFC.

AIS was established in the fall of 2016 by students enrolled in the course taught in English. There was almost no support from the university to establish the organization, so it was set up only by students. Although international students in courses taught in Japanese had never established an organization of their own, they were motivated to solve problems regarding the courses taught in English, such as the lack of professors' English proficiency and the system of choosing classes, which were unfair for them. Then, they decided to establish AIS as a representative of students enrolled in courses taught in English, to communicate the opinion of international students to university managers and professors. Members of AIS ranged from native speakers of English to Chinese speakers at that time, which is a good example of the international student organization beyond their national identity, being motivated by their sharing of the same interests.

The university administration regards them as an official counterpart of international students now, and AIS currently have opportunities to talk with the dean once a month. AIS has insisted on opening more Japanese language classes for international students, providing vegetarian and halal food on campus, setting up the lounge for international students to interact with local students.

However, after solving severe problems regarding their class, AIS lost their momentum, and now only a small number of students enrolled in courses taught in English remain involved in its activities, as they do not have a common interest anymore. AIS switched their activity to promoting interaction between the students enrolled in courses taught in English and other students on campus by organizing events such as parties. It can be said that the organization is not only for the interest of students in courses taught in English, as they had students who could not even speak English; a Japanese student in enrolled in a course taught in English who could speak Japanese at a native level was a leader of the group at that time. They currently aim to address both international and domestic students by organizing the information sharing session of student associations and seminars, which usually welcome any students.

Case 2: Yonsei University (Korea)

Yonsei University is a private university in Seoul, well known, one of the top Korean universities (SKY). It is also widely known for its radical internationalization efforts, such as founding a liberal arts college with all courses taught in English, called Underwood International College (UIC).

Staff at the department of international affairs first started encouraging international students in 2017, especially those who were recipients of the Korean government scholarship, to see the staff every month for signing in order to receive money. Although that staff just expected there would be a platform that international students could use to make friends, they established an organization aimed to pursue their political interest regardless of that university staff's expectation. They named their organization "Foreign Student Union (FSU)."

There were some organizations that international students could join easily, but most of them were organized by Korean students and

international students, and in these especially students enrolled in courses taught in English could only participate in. Some members of FSU also said that other organizations were unstable and sometimes ceased their activities.

FSU mainly focused on full-time international students excluding students in the attached language school and exchange students. However, the scope of membership was vague as some members said overseas Koreans (*gyopo*) and students from departments with courses taught in English were not included in the beginning of the organization. Although most international students in Yonsei University study in Korean language, their activities were usually held in English and they asked the university to increase the number of courses taught in English. They used both English and Korean in official materials and on Facebook, but they used only English, which they preferred more than Korean, during their meeting.

Their main activities were information sharing, organizing events and complaining to university on behalf of international students. They shared important information on their Facebook page such as a guide for course registration and life around their campus. They also did orientation camp for new incoming international students.

They wanted to be a part of the student council, which was dominated by domestic students, as a goal for the long-term. The president of FSU believed the organization could be a more official institution in that way, but the university staff who suggested them to form the organization did not support that goal.

The Implications of Cases Regarding Groups Representing International Students

The two cases in Japan and Korea show unity beyond the difference of identity and highlight the need for establishing the representative organization of international students from various

stakeholders as discussed in Section 3. These cases are useful in that they show that international students are not weak individuals, highlighting a new perspective about them as active actors, who launch organizations for political activities in what concerns addressing the majority.

The university becomes a more dynamic place through various new initiatives, including expanding the number of courses taught in English in non-English speaking countries these days. That wave comes to Japan and Korea now, but new problems have been arising due to the gap between tendencies related to a strong traditional system, on the one hand, and a new system, on the other. It is impossible to identify the most relevant issues only by analysing the public policies and the national systems, so researchers should also look at the actual situation of international students there. A good way to achieve this goal is by observing the organizations representing them, and this will allow for a clarification of the kinds of problems happening, of who is involved in those problems and for a dynamic change of the definitions of international students.

References

- Axios. (2018). The disappearing Chinese student visa. Retrieved March 10th, 2018, from <https://www.axios.com/foreign-student-visas-dropping-china-india-trump-81e70609-9fa7-43eb-8f40-ccfef9fe3fa5.html>.
- ICEF. (2015). The state of international student mobility in 2015 - ICEF Monitor - Market intelligence for international student recruitment. Retrieved April 10th, 2018, from <http://monitor.icef.com/2015/11/the-state-of-international-student-mobility-in-2015/>.
- Kim, J., Tatar, B., & Choi, J. (2014). Emerging culture of English-medium instruction in Korea: experiences of Korean and international students. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 14(4), 441–459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2014.946038>.
- Macaro, E., Curle, S., Pun, J., An, J., & Dearden, J. (2018). A systematic review of English medium instruction in higher education. *Language Teaching*, 51(01), 36–76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000350>.
- Moon, R. J. (2016). Internationalisation without cultural diversity? Higher education in Korea. *Comparative Education*, 52(1), 91–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2015.1125679>
- Morikawa, Y. (2006). Ryugakusei Koryu [Interaction of International Students]. In *Higashi Ajia Kyōdōtai no kōchiku* (pp. 228–229). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Sugimura, M. (2011). Asia ni Okeru Gakusei Ido to Koto Kyoiku no Kokusaika no Kadai [International Students Mobility and Issues of Internationalization of Higher Education in Asia]. *Journal of Multimedia Education Research*, 8(1), s13–s21. Retrieved from http://www.code.ouj.ac.jp/media/pdf/vol8no1_shotai_2.pdf.

Watanabe, K. (2010). Activities towards global 30 project by school of engineering. *Kogaku Kogyo Kyoiku Kenkyu Koenkai Koen Ronbunshu*, 22, 224-225.