

# **The Role of Japanese Universities in Enhancing the Japanese Tolerance and Sensitivity to Other Nations Cultures**

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## **Abstract**

This paper proved how, through their curriculum, teachers, and cultural activities universities in Japan help to create cultural tolerance. Universities, as social organizations are playing a vital role in this regard. The universities have the potential to contribute in shaping the cultural tolerance and sensitivity that will foster respect for life, appreciation of diversity, commitment to sustainable development, social justice, and participation of people in shaping their own destiny and peace.

The political level support given to the Japanese universities. The linkage between Japanese tolerance and sensitivity to other nation's cultures and the global position that Japan's incumbent are explored as well in this paper. Primary data are gathered through field trips and intensive interviews with the representatives of a purposeful Japanese universities sample.

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## Introduction

Nations are different in the degree of tolerance for cultural diversity, but the most outstanding fact is that the more the country is tolerant to other nation's cultures, the more it becomes developed and takes the leadership of the world in terms of socioeconomic development. Cultural tolerance and development might seem to sit oddly together. The number of conflicts of different character is increasing. Cultural confrontation, xenophobia, racism are still extending (Mikhailenko, 2002). That is why issues of tolerance, mutual understanding and forbearance have become of utmost importance at this stage of human development. While tolerance means not interfering with other's ways of living or thinking, "respect" actually attaches a positive value to what one is or does - respect thus goes beyond mere tolerance (UNU, 2001).

Cultural sensitivity- being attuned to the nuances of culture so that a new or different culture can be viewed objectively, evaluated, and appreciated. Perhaps the most important step is the recognition that cultures are not right or wrong, better or worse; they are simply different. Just because a culture is different does not make it wrong. People's own culture influences their assumptions about other cultures. Being culturally sensitive will reduce conflict and improve communications, and thereby increase success in collaborative relationships. It is assumed that the Japanese universities are playing an active role to influence Japanese people to be more sensitive, tolerant, and flexible to other different cultures.

The root of Japanese culture is a concern for the protection and perseverance of the Japanese society as a stable but dynamic whole. Unlike the U.S., Japan is not a melting pot of different races, religions, and cultures. Japan truly is a homogeneous society, and Japanese value that homogeneity in appearance, behaviors, and decision making processes (Schatzberg *et al.*, 1997). The point is that these values of the Japanese culture have constituted a strong base for the Japanese society to be culturally tolerant society, this is a taken for granted a assumption for this research paper and rationale, the efforts in this paper are paid on exploring and discussing the way by which Japanese institutions like universities build and enhance cultural tolerance of the Japanese people. Western civilization is both Western and modern. Non-Western civilizations have attempted to become modern without becoming Western. To date only Japan has fully succeeded in this quest, Japan is a society and civilization unique to itself (Huntington, 1993).

This paper attempts to show how, through their curriculum, teachers, and cultural activities universities in Japan help to create cultural tolerance. That is, advocating the collegial and interdisciplinary role for universities in looking towards cultural tolerance and sensitivity in Japan. The tolerant approach becomes a natural mediator both in multicultural society and in relations between a national culture and global civilizations.

### **This research aims to explore and discuss the following issues:**

- The role of Japanese universities in enhancing the Japanese tolerance and sensitivity to other nations cultures. Specifically, the research aims to explore and discuss the strategies, cultural activities, and programs adopted by these universities, as well as the role of teachers.
- The political level support given to the Japanese universities in terms of laws and regulations.
- The linkage between Japanese tolerance and sensitivity to other nation's cultures and the global position that Japan's incumbent; it is known that Japan is a

worldwide leader in innovative research and development and the adoption of new technologies, that is, socio-economic development.

## Research design

**Methodology:** descriptive case study research.

### Research procedures:

**Sampling:** A purposeful sample is chosen from the Japanese universities; the sample included many Japanese universities, mainly Waseda university, Hiroshima Shudo university, and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies because they are the leading universities in Japan. Also a leading national university is chosen, it is Hitotsubashi University for the comparison with private universities.

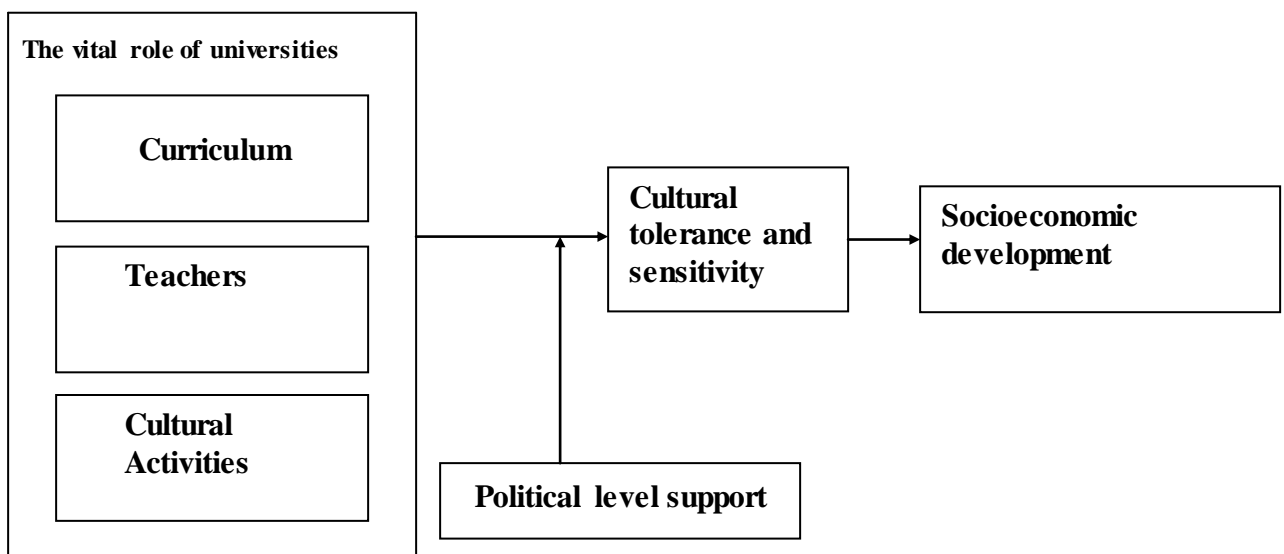
**Data resources:** 1- secondary data are gathered through searching published information; e.g. articles, releases regarding the research issues.

2- Primary data are gathered through field trips and intensive interviews with the representatives of the universities, in addition to utilizing lectures and workshops discussions to enrich the research.

This information is gathered, verified, analyzed to achieve the research aims and to come up with some results and recommendations that are as expected to be of a great value for cultural exchange. That is; to assist our social organizations especially the universities to take the lead in promoting, facilitating, and maintaining the culture of tolerance and sensitivity at national and international level benefiting from Japan's experience.

Responses to the interviews questions were received from the universities, most of which provided direct answers to the interview questions and one of which provided only indirect but written answers. The researcher also received many supporting documents from these universities. In the following is the analysis of the responses and the supporting documents.

*Graphical Model depicts the relationship between the role of Japanese universities in enhancing the Japanese tolerance and sensitivity to other nations cultures, and Japan's ability to take the leadership of the world in terms of socioeconomic development, as could this relationship be supported by the political level:*



## **The vital role of universities**

In fact, universities have a vital role in contributing to cultural tolerance, it is clear that science and technology by itself is not enough. Cultural dimensions represent one of the world's most pressing challenges. As a community of scholars, universities can bring knowledge and new ideas to address these issues, not only to improve material or economic wellbeing, but also to address matters of the global citizenship. Universities as social institutions are a privileged arena for the development of a multicultural approach (Canen, & Canen, 2001), they have a responsibility to provide students in a multi-ethnic, multicultural environment with appropriate education. Bringing about understanding, tolerance, and liberal education to students of such backgrounds requires a common language of instruction, a good orientation, a liberal curriculum, special settings, and wise guidance (Nasser, 1998). However, universities can play an active and vital role through:

### **1. Curriculum**

No one can deny the own people community, believes, religion, self-image, and at the same time it is assumed that cultures are change with the passage of time, so universities take or are to take a lead role in this process, to pass on the new generation their values to youth. Universities contribute to shaping a vision of the future in the global context, to facilitate a change from "ethnocentric" to "global view", from "my country right or wrong" to "our planet" and from exclusive identification with a group or nation to "identification with human kind".

Teaching and other cultural activities in the universities must reflect issues of global concerns like environmental pollution, the poverty, nuclear threat, newly financial crises. Universities have to develop interdisciplinary approaches in the sake of enhancing tolerance. It is necessary to pursue international issues in global framework from the stand point of several disciplines and professions, such as international economics, international police, international law and international sociology.

Universities continue to be the main social institution with the responsibility of developing advanced knowledge and interpreting and disseminating it in society.

In the teaching programs, the appropriate cultural tolerance related modules include courses such as political science, international relations, history, sociology, social work, religion studies, anthropology, etc. The idea is the given tolerance dimensions to each of these courses.

At the Japanese universities level there are various ways adopted to promote tolerance through teaching programmes. They set up centers and programs that are focusing on cross-cultural issues as well as tolerance-related courses in various fields. For example in Waseda University, the Islamic Area Studies is a research field with the goal of massaging a body of empirical knowledge on Islam and Islamic civilization, emphasizing both comparative regional studies and a historical approach to contemporary issues. And they have many of international promising programs such as the Double Degree Programs with world leading universities, and cross cultural distance program, and many other programs offered in English such as School of

International Liberal Studies which aims to cultivate rational thought process and abroad perspective in its students, the curriculum consist of course offerings in seven broad but important areas of education for the modern world. SILS is of two study plans to accommodate different native languages. It offers a rich selection of courses, thus allowing its students wide latitude in learning, while supporting them in developing the capacity for nuanced, multifaceted, analytical thinking. Examples of courses clusters are philosophy, religion and history, governance, peace, human rights, international relations, communication, expression, culture, mind and body, and community, etc. In addition to these programs there are many courses on peace and human rights, and social development in less developed countries, cultural diversity, conversation across civilization and culture available to all students in different faculties. Another example is Hiroshima Shudo University; this university is committed to nurturing people free of racial prejudice by providing them with cross-cultural experiences, a goal eminently suitable for Hiroshima, the International City of Peace and Culture. The university curriculum include many tolerance-related courses such as cross-cultural understanding and relations, cross-cultural English studies, international business communications, history of western culture, peace studies, peace movement, cross-cultural communication. Some universities are playing a more explicit role in cultural tolerance enhancement like Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. In this university there are many course thought on multiculturalism in the "Center for Multilingual Multicultural Education and Research". Examples of the courses thought are, Societies and Cultures, Languages and Communication.

## **2. Teachers**

Training teachers is necessary to indicate the values and attitudes that foster tolerance, crate respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity as well as human rights.

To equip them for that task they must follow courses in multi- cultural education, languages, ethics, human rights, including the universal declaration\*. Enhancing culture of tolerance requires training of teachers and empowering them to have them able to help students being open and overcoming racism, xenophobia. This will encourage students as well as their teachers to learn more about other cultures.

Replies and supporting materials on Japanese universities teachers indicate that universities are trying to empower them and give them more freedom in running their lectures. They believe that through free thinking and ideas exchange and interaction, teachers will become more efficient. For example, Waseda University has recently set up a center for faculty development to train the university teachers on issues like English languages and the other different skills.

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\* "International Declaration on Cultural Diversity" which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2001, and wherein the governments, together with the UN and the concerned NGOs are called for planning and implementing appropriate cultural, instructional and social programmes geared to consolidating the concept of inter-civilizational dialogue.

### **3. Cultural Activities**

Global alliances of universities can be away to build bridges across continents, cultures and disciplines. In the 21st century, universities must take the lead to nurture graduates who are able to go beyond mere tolerance to experiencing and celebrating the rich diversity of cultures the world has to offer (SHIH, 2007).

Universities can reach such goals through building international and regional cooperative relationships with universities and other social organizations as well as sponsoring and participating in workshops, seminars, joint projects aiming at promoting intercultural dialogue, understanding to develop and expand programmes to support better education. They should exploit fully the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies, notably by stimulating the emergence of multimedia programmes for the general public focused on "Knowledge about Others". New distance learning technologies and concepts can be meaningfully employed to enhance the outreach of such programmes and to complement exchange programmes for teachers, students and education policy makers (UNU, 2001).

Based on data gathered regarding Japanese universities, the researcher could conclude that Japanese universities are promoting international and regional cooperative relationships with universities through many international programs and activities and at the same time eager to expand their collaborative relationships. For example, Waseda university has more than 500 world wide university-wide agreements and departmental agreements (as of august 2007). The university also has established the international community center in order to respond to both Japanese and international students' needs for cross-cultural exchange on campus. ICC offers such an environment, where all students can interact regardless of nationality or culture and, through that interaction, deepen their understanding of each other's cultures while generating new values and interests. With respect to the international and local student's interaction, the ICC presents events, programs and activities aplenty for students to share culture.

Another example is Hiroshima Shudo University; it has 19 overseas affiliations with universities and colleges in seven countries and include both academic staff and students exchanges. Also Tokyo University of Foreign Studies has many centres specialized in multiculturalism like, Multicultural Community Learning Support Center, through this Center, the University aims to develop human resources demanded by modern times, which is becoming more and more multicultural. For the national universities, inspite that cultural tolerance issues seem to be less direct and less intentional than with the private universities, they also progressing toward more involvement in international cultural programmes and activities at least as a response to some of the problems that appeared in Japan society like the "Ageing of Japanese society". For example, Hitotsubashi University, the university provides multiple learning opportunities to enrich students learning experiences. It promotes active exchanges with different cultures, and also encourages students to contact with outside world to broaden the mind and develop creative thinking skills. The university has student exchange agreements with 29 institutions around the world.

#### **The supporting role of political level**

It is presumptuous to think that the universities have a separate role. It is a shared task. It is clear that government and the other several social organizations active within the country have a collective role in shaping the local and international vision in fostering a new social ethic, and in addressing the different aspects of cultural tolerance and sensitivity. Civil society plays an important role in overcoming cultural differences and promoting intercultural awareness and tolerance in all societies worldwide.

(Havlova, 2002). Public and civil society actors should step up their efforts to organize multicultural events to increase exposure to and enhance knowledge of different cultural and religious value systems, such as festivals, competitions, lecture series, etc. Governments should also endeavor to foster civil society engagement by defining a legal framework that provides favorable conditions for non-governmental activities. To foster the implementation of the curriculum, national governments, in cooperation with civil society groups, should establish programs to improve multi-cultural teaching methods through exchange of information, research and training for teachers (UNU, 2001).

The political side can greatly influence universities and other social institutions through laws and regulations that lay the ground for and support cultural tolerance. Laws and regulations may call for respecting the religion rites and holy books and texts, written and oral, of a people or a nation, as constitute foundations of the different religions and faiths, and respecting also mankind's unity and cultural differences. On the Japanese side, most universities are privatized universities, and according to replies in this regard, universities are fully responsible to develop their own curriculum, and teachers are given the freedom to choose the texts, materials on courses they teach.

### **Liking cultural tolerance and sensitivity to socioeconomic development**

Cultural diversity can be a fundamental factor of development, mutual understanding; peaceful coexistence, economic and social progress (ISESCO, 2004). Socio-economic development is only possible when the culture of tolerance, dialogue and peace provable. Universities have a vital role to play in this regard. Cultural diversity tolerance and sensitivity unites individuals and societies, this unity represents the prerequisite to the sustainable socioeconomic development in a period of rapid globalization. Lack of tolerance within and among nations bring conflict and social unrest, and lags socioeconomic development. At the same time, human identity, and equal dignity must be asserted through cultural policies.

### **Main findings**

- This research improved that Japanese universities enhancing tolerance, specifically through systems liberalization, qualified teachers, curriculum, and cultural activities which are developed, adopted and practiced by the universities.
- Universities seem to be increasingly eager and interested in multicultural investment through:
  - setting up centers and programs that are focusing on cross-cultural issues, as well as tolerance-related courses in various fields.
  - promoting international and regional cooperative relationships with universities through many international programs and activities and at the same time eager to expand their collaborative relationships.
- Universities are empowering their teachers and give them more freedom in running their lectures, they believe that through free thinking and ideas exchange and interaction teachers will become more efficient.
- The Political support- Most Japanese universities are privatized universities, and according to replies in this regard, universities are fully responsible to develop their own curriculum, and teachers are given the freedom to choose the texts, materials on courses they teach.
- Cultural diversity tolerance and sensitivity unites individuals and societies, this unity represents the prerequisite to the sustainable socioeconomic development in

a period of rapid globalization. Lack of tolerance within and among nations bring conflict and social unrest, and lags socioeconomic development.

## Conclusion

The universities have the potential of contributing to shaping the cultural tolerance and sensitivity that will foster respect for life, appreciation of diversity, commitment to sustainable development, social justice, and participation of people in shaping their own destiny and peace. The recognition of differences alone does not yet lead to mutual understanding. It is only through a genuine respect to other viewpoints that mutual appreciation occurs. Universities, as social organizations are playing a vital role in this regard through curriculum they developed and adopted, and cultural activities they are practicing, and the teachers they recruited and trained.

"Tolerance" is truly a triadic collaboration of government, social organizations, and businesses as well.

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