

Japanese Students' Cross-Cultural Dialogue with Chinese Students Through English and Media Information Literacy Education

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Abstract

Experiences on how media and information literate citizenries foster inter-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding have been discussed in Japan, China and Asia. Updating such continuous discussion, this paper will attempt to answer the following question: why can't Japanese university students in Tokyo better improve their cross-cultural dialogue skills with Chinese students? In our understanding, there is a factor that prevents smooth realization of inter-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding between the Japanese and Chinese public. Primarily, there is a mutually negative perception of each country, a negative Japanese perception about China and a negative Chinese perception about Japan. Second, there is lack of media information literacy education. People, especially younger generations, frequently use the Internet. However, in our hypothesis, they do not effectively use Information Communication Technology (ICT) to overcome language and cultural barriers to communicate. In this paper, we are going to look at the Japanese case. First, this paper starts by discussing negative perceptions among Chinese and Japanese. Following a literature review, we will provide an overview of how Japanese students use social media outlets. Then, we will discuss the way media information literacy education can be introduced in Japanese higher education. As a proposal, we will address the language policy, critical thinking and collective wisdom in English and media information literacy education. In conclusion, we will draw attention to how education regarding the better use of ICT for smarter cities could materialize in Japan, China and Asia by creating new social spaces.

Keywords: Japanese university students, Chinese students in Japan, public opinion, social media, English education.

Introduction:

This paper consists of three parts: 1) impediments for Japan-China cross-cultural dialogue, 2) the lack of media information literacy education in Japan and 3) a suggestion for improving Japanese media information literacy education through English language education.

Global cities emerge and create ethnically diverse, multicultural societies while global networks stretch beyond national borders. Tokyo is not an exception. Despite Tokyo being a metropolis where people from all over the world congregate, its native citizens are not as multicultural as one might expect. Some argue that Japanese young people are not communicative enough when it comes to speaking foreign languages such as English (ETS, 2008). In our view, this is even the case even if they are considered to be skilled in using mobile phones, smartphones and the Internet. Also, few studies have been conducted on the English communication ability of Chinese university students in Japan and their use of technology. We are witnessing an increasing number of Chinese students, tourists and employees in Tokyo, but it appears that they remain distinctive others who cannot engage well with Japanese communities.

Why can Japanese university students in Tokyo not improve their cross-cultural dialogue skills with Chinese students in Japan? Despite the efforts to overcome historical disputes and to establish friendship, Japan and China are faced with rising anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiments, due to reasons such as territorial disputes. Yet, we need to understand that one source of such negative Japanese public opinion about China is a lack of media information literacy, since Japanese university students lack chances to learn this skill.

In various works, like that of Len Masterman's volume *Teaching the Media* (1985), media literacy scholars have historically emphasized the importance of education for the generations that live in an information society. This still remains as an important idea. Our ways of communication through new media have been changing dramatically in the 21st century, and we rely more on interactive, digital and network-oriented media outlets. However, not much research has been done on the use of social media for diffusing information and expressing opinions in Japan (Nakanishi, 2014). In particular, there is little information that has shed light on the connection between Japan-China relations, social media outlets and Japanese students' English language acquisition. The ability to communicate in English language became more significant both for Japanese

and Chinese students. It is true that one needs to be critical about the predominant use of English language worldwide. However, English education is relevant to this situation because this contributes to foster critical thinking ability. This paper therefore contributes to the study of media information literacy by examining this Japanese case.

Section 1: Impediments for Japanese students' cross-cultural dialogue with Chinese students

To make Tokyo a more inclusive and media literate city, we need to understand the existing impediments of Japan-China intercultural dialogue, including issues between Japanese and Chinese university students in Tokyo. There are two major obstacles: the negative Japanese public opinion about China and an increasing number of Chinese people in Japan. The following analyzes these two elements.

Japanese public opinion about China

First, we must notice that there is a negative Japanese public opinion about China. A survey conducted by Genron NPO suggests that, in the year 2018, as many as 86.3% of Japanese have a negative perception of China (Genron NPO, 2018). The peak of this negative sentiment was in 2012, when territorial disputes broke out and it was considered the most serious tensions between Japan and China since the end of the Second World War. The Japanese public opinion in 2013 was as high as 90.1% of Japanese people having a rather negative perception toward China (Genron NPO, 2018). In the same year, 92.8% of Chinese people held a rather negative perception toward Japan (Genron, NPO 2018). In contrast to the steadily high negative perception of the Japanese public's opinion toward China, the public opinion of Chinese people toward Japanese has improved over the past five years. Now, only 56.1% of Chinese people have a rather negative public opinion toward Japan. While feelings have softened in China, we can see that there is a steadily held negative perception from the Japanese public about China over the past decade.

For the formation of the negative public opinion toward China, Japanese media plays an essential role. 95% of the Japanese public rely on Japanese mass media to form their opinion about China (Genron NPO, 2018). Only 3.5% of the Japanese public have had actual communication with Chinese people (Genron NPO, 2018), and only 1.7% of the Japanese public formed their opinion about China through visiting China (Genron

NPO, 2018). In other words, the Japanese public's opinion is heavily influenced by Japanese mass media. It is not only the governments that are responsible for Japan-China tension, but also some Japanese news stories that contribute to shaping Japanese negative public opinion about China. For instance, the majority of Japanese who have negative opinion about China suggests that the territorial disputes over Senkaku Island are the major reason to dislike China (Genron NPO, 2018). Some may argue that young Japanese students now rely on the social media outlets, so the Japanese mass media does not take much responsibility now for these negative feelings. However, the majority of news stories on Japanese social media outlets come from the major Japanese mass media. Those who uncritically read the stories of Japanese news either through traditional mass media or social media outlets will likely form an essentially negative perception about China.

Increasing number of Chinese People in Tokyo

Secondly, Tokyo sees more Chinese people visiting than ever before. Today Chinese people are indeed the major foreign ethnic group in Japan. There are 730, 890 Chinese people in Japan, and 167,559 Chinese nationals residing in Tokyo as of the year 2015 (Japanese Ministry of Justice, 2018 & Todo-Ran, 2015). 1.25 out of 100 residents in Tokyo are Chinese nationals. There is also an increasing number of Chinese tourists visiting Japan. In total, 13,774,000 foreigners visited Tokyo in the year 2017, and one fourth of that number were Chinese (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2018). On Japanese TV, we often see reports showing Chinese tourists visiting major Japanese touristic, cultural and shopping sites. For example, a large number of Chinese tourists used to visit Akihabara to buy electronic goods. Such an increasing number of Chinese immigrants and tourists result in unease for Japanese people due to daily experience with Chinese people in Japan. They do not share exactly the same cultural norms as Japanese, and some of the Chinese are considered to have bad manners. For instance, they are considered too noisy at the hotel where they stay or they do not know how to separate trash on the designated collection day (Manshion caretaker, 2018). The increasing presence of Chinese in Tokyo contributes to create negative perception about Chinese.

Section 2: The lack of social media literacy education in Japan

There are a few studies that reflect on the way Japanese students use ICT to interpret news about China critically. Additionally, there has some research about how Japanese students

create new social networks, diffuse information and , express opinions. In the previous section, we have discussed how Japanese mass media makes the Japanese-Chinese cross-cultural dialogue difficult. It has been challenging to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers and to enhance mutual communication and mutual understanding because of the media's influence. Therefore, it is important to consider how media information literacy education can contribute in that regard. Suzuki defines media literacy as 'the power for citizens to critically analyze, evaluate and have access to media in the social context and the power to create communication' (Nakanishi, 2014, pp. 114). Social media outlets are not only a source of information, but also a source of disinformation and fake news. However, many Japanese students did not have a chance to learn media information literacy during Japanese language education classes throughout their primary and secondary school education. Media information literacy education is not explicitly included in the Japanese government curriculum for primary and secondary compulsory education. In such a context, Japanese university students likely do not have the capacity or knowledge to use media outlets well enough to critically investigate news stories on China, especially those from social media. Indeed, the use of the social media outlets is popular among Japanese university students. To be specific, 44% of Japanese teenagers use a mobile phone or smartphone to have access to the social media (Takaya, 2017). Since the introduction of Mixi in the year 2004, Social Networking Services (SNS) have been expanding rapidly in Japan. In 2008, Twitter was introduced in Japan and, in the same year, Facebook started its service in Japan. Also, more recently in Japan, Instagram has been used from 2010. As a result of the East Japan earthquake in 2011, LINE started its service, and it is the most popular tool among youth and Japanese university students now (Takaya, 2017).

Despite the popularity of social media outlets, there remains a difficulty for Japanese university students to communicate with Chinese people in Tokyo via the use of social media outlets. Previous studies have demonstrated the difficulty of having a holistic view on Japanese university students' usage of social media outlets (Takaya, 2017). Indeed, there is a lot of marketing research that has been done (Mizunuma et al, 2013), but relatively a little academic work has been conducted on their use. For instance, Muramatsu and To analyzed Japanese young people's use of Facebook and Twitter, specifically on how they disclose information and express emotion (Muramatsu & To, 2018). Further, Ueta highlighted the rapid spread of Instagram influences upon the

feminization of media culture (Ueta, 2015). One important aspect of Japanese students' use of social media outlets is personal connectivity. Young Japanese university students use social media outlets to maintain social networks that already exist, but they rarely use social media to create new social networks (Hamano, 2016). They do so 'not only to adjust human relationships but to communicate with others' (Aoyama, 2018, pp.16). For these reasons, it is likely that there remains a boundary between 'us' and 'others', Japanese and the foreigners as Japanese students do not necessarily use social media to stretch their social networks. Therefore, one may argue that it is difficult to create new social spaces beyond already existing Japanese national, cultural and linguistic networks just because students frequently use social media outlets. This aspect needs to be further investigated and discussed with an empirical study in the future.

Section 3: A suggestion for improving Japanese students' media information literacy in higher education through English education

In reality, there are media-based impediments for Japanese university students trying to communicate with Chinese in Tokyo. How can educators therefore teach media information literacy? Media information literacy education is difficult to introduce in an English as a foreign language course. The Japanese language is the major field in which media information literacy education is conducted in Japan. However, there is a possibility that media information literacy education can be introduced in English as a part of foreign language education.

There are some reasons why English education can be introduced in media information literacy. One important reason is that English is now a lingua franca in the world. There might be a criticism that English can be a language hegemony. For instance, one argues that the United States uses the cultural power of 'English' as a political means to propagate its norms and values (Yoo and Namkung, 2012). However, it is difficult for both Chinese and Japanese to become the lingua franca in the world. Now that both countries' presence in the international community are relatively inferior to that of the United States.

Indeed, Japanese students sometimes use social media outlets to study English. Traditionally, newspapers have been the major source of news media outlets for Japanese to study the English language. This is the case even though Japanese university students rely more on other media outlets like Twitter, LINE and TV for their communication and

access to information. In order to connect learning in the classroom and outside the classroom, there has been an attempt to use smartphones and social media networks for language studies. An example of this is Itoyama's work that analyzed the use of LINE in English education (Itoyama, 2014). In essence, there has been an attempt in the study of media information literacy to use social media outlets within the context of teaching English as a foreign language in Japan. This paper suggests three educational policies to strengthen media literacy education to improve Japanese students' cross-cultural communication skills with Chinese and their understanding toward China.

English as a Lingua franca

In this essentially globalizing city of Tokyo, young Japanese university students have many more chances to communicate with Chinese people than previous generations. However, linguistic and cultural barriers can be a source of conflicts.. It is important for young Japanese students to have the desire to communicate with Chinese people, through Japanese, Chinese or English. It is important for Chinese to learn Japanese, and Japanese to learn Chinese. However, there is a debate about whether English can be a lingua franca in Japan, China and Asia (McArthur, 2002). Having seen the experiences of European Union, we can possibly introduce this idea of English as a lingua franca into Japan, China and the Asian context. There is a need for further discussion; however, this paper argues for English as a lingua franca for better communication between Japanese and Chinese people. With more English programs opening in Japanese universities, more Chinese students who do not speak Japanese come to study in Japan. In such a situation, the official language for communication between Japanese and Chinese students is English. In our view, the ability to communicate in English prevents Japanese students from having a negative image about Chinese because there can be direct contact and communication. Now there is little direct contact and communication because of linguistic and cultural barrier. And the Japanese perception of China is largely based on the information that Japan disputes with China over Senkaku islands. There exists a little social space for mutual understanding.

English and critical thinking

One can argue that we can best utilize the ability to critically think in English as a second language for media information literacy education. There are some studies that have been

done on media information literacy education in English teaching (Forster, 2018). Also, one study emphasizes the correlation between media information literacy and critical thinking (Arke, 2005). In our view, one important element is the skill to think critically. Homan argues that English education required at Japanese university shall be defined as an ‘acquisition of citizenship’ (2018). This means that ‘the attitudes and actions to deal with public issues of our society in collaboration with other people with different backgrounds’. She adds that critical reading is essential in order to materialize this enterprise and eventually to improve the media literacy.

From Transdisciplinary Education and Cognitive Pedagogy to Collective Wisdom

Collective Wisdom is a sustainable human ability that is created and fostered by the contribution of individual talents, skills, and diverse experiences to support a common purpose; it is also a dynamic ecosystem for individual and collective learning in which emergent patterns of meaning, coordination flows, insights, and inspiration interact, cross-fertilize, feed upon, and grow on each other (Pór, 1995). It is important to facilitate the fusion of transdisciplinary education and cognitive pedagogy applied to English language education to produce collective wisdom within the learners. It will impact social relationships and dialogues.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Japanese university students in Tokyo need to receive the benefits of English language as a lingua franca, critical thinking and collective wisdom in teaching English as a second language and media information literacy. Further research requires an empirical study on the use of social media outlets by Japanese university students and should investigate how Japanese students interpret news stories about China in Japanese and English and stretch social networks with Chinese students in Japan. Comparative studies with Chinese cities like Beijing will also provide greater perspective in the region.

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