

## *Behind the Silence of Japanese International Students in the U.S. Classrooms*

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### **Abstract**

Japanese international students (JIS) in United States universities are often labeled by peers, faculty, and administrators as shy, passive, and silent. This stereotypical image reflects, to a large extent, an outsider's view that does not necessarily capture the understanding of the experience of the JIS. The current study examines JIS' descriptions of themselves as classroom participants and the factors that influence their oral participation in U.S. university classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Japanese with 12 JIS who were pursuing four-year college degrees in the humanities and social sciences. The interviewees' average presence in the U.S. was 3.5 years. Although proficient in English by the length of time spent pursuing education on U.S. campuses, all the interviewees reported that they very rarely spoke out in the classroom. Analysis of the data uncovered four main factors that hinder JIS' meaningful oral participation in class: (a) lack of confidence in their English speaking skills, (b) large class sizes that make participation challenging, (c) missing the window of opportunity to speak up due to the fast pace of classroom conversation, and (d) being treated differently by peers and instructors. JIS also revealed four factors that encourage their participation: (a) being asked to speak up, (b) receiving affirmation via others' feedback, (c) having friends in the class, and (d) engaging in discussion topics that are meaningful to them. The study also discusses relevant pedagogical implications for enhancing inclusive classroom instruction in educational settings that involve international students.

Keywords: Japanese, international students, participation, silence, culture, education, English, interviews, conversation, pedagogy

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## Introduction

Japanese international students (JIS) in U.S. colleges are often labeled quiet by peers, faculty, and administrators. The JIS concurred with the assertion; they understand that their reticence in the classrooms is considered undesirable from the U.S. perspective (e.g., see Keaten & Kelly, 2000; Mack, 2012; Petress, 2001). Instructors, especially those in language education, attempt to overcome the students' reticence by advancing pedagogical solutions for enhancing classroom participation. Frequently, these solutions are recommended to encourage English-as-a-second-language (ESL) international students to assimilate to the mainstream talk-oriented classroom culture (Ha & Li, 2014; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005). However, the responsibilities for cultivating a supportive and inclusive classroom climate are, to a large extent, delegated to the international students—the party that is expected to actively engage in classroom participation.

In fact, recommendations aimed at raising the oral performance of ESL international students are not universal across classrooms. For example, the nuances in the mainstream U.S. college classrooms differ from their ESL counterparts. The native English speakers and instructors who populate the mainstream classrooms are not specialized in second language (L2) education, nor do they have vested interests in working with international ESL speakers or addressing intercultural issues in the classroom. Therefore, the JIS may not receive a similar level of attention and support from the instructor and peers in the mainstream classroom. Together with other international students, the JIS occupy very few seats in U.S. classrooms. Consequently, as outsiders and minorities in the classrooms, the JIS likely experience a classroom climate that is different from that of the ESL (e.g., see DiAngelo, 2006; Kanno & Cromley, 2015).

Aside from ESL and cultural adjustment issues, nuances in the mainstream classroom community are seldom interrogated in studies focused on international students in higher education (DiAngelo, 2006). However, the taken-for-granted, mundane dynamics in the classroom that are key to understanding JIS classroom experiences may be overlooked by researchers. In fact, it is in these nuances that the classroom climate is grounded—the setting in which intercultural exchanges between the JIS and natives of the mainstream classroom community take place. Thus, the understanding of inclusive classroom practices is only purposeful when nuances of the classroom dynamics experienced from the nondominant perspective—frequently the students'—is examined (Covarrubias, 2008).

In order to promote genuine intercultural dialogue in the scholarship of teaching and learning, we seek to understand the nuanced experiences of JIS' classroom participation *in situ*. In particular, we examine the JIS' understanding of their lived experiences through oral participation in the mainstream U.S. college classroom. We ask:

*RQ<sub>1</sub>*: How do JIS describe their experiences participating orally in the U.S. college classroom?

Besides language competence issues as suggested by extant literature review, we pay particular attention to issues that the JIS face in interacting with their American counterparts.

*RQ<sub>2</sub>*: What are the factors that JIS consider as encouraging their oral participation in the U.S. college classroom?

### **ESL learning in the Japanese school curriculum**

Academic habit fostered through many years of immersion in home country's curriculum informs the students' subsequent academic performance when they sojourn to a different educational system. Therefore, understanding the Japanese curriculum, especially the learning of ESL, is pertinent to understanding JIS' oral participation in U.S. classrooms. In Japan, students in primary and secondary schools take ESL classes in which written grammar is the primary focus, whereas speaking skills secondary (Kayi, 2006; King, 2013; Kobayashi, 2001). Moreover, the ESL classroom instruction is conducted in the Japanese language using the didactic teaching style.

Even with intensive English language training at cram schools, most students are still not well prepared to engage in conversational English.<sup>1</sup> In fact, even high standardized English test scores, such as the TOEFL used to screen international students for U.S. university admission, are often insufficient indicators of the students' conversational English competence. Thus, the English language training in the Japanese school curriculum does not effectively prepare JIS to engage in conversational English—a fundamental but taken-for-granted requirement for meaningful engagement in U.S. classrooms (Frymier & Houser, 2016; Reda, 2009).

### **The Japanese cultural teaching**

In addition to lacking English speaking skills and being conditioned to the didactic Japanese classroom culture, the JIS face challenges adopting the different and highly nuanced cultural assumptions that are ingrained in U.S. classrooms. Speech practices in U.S. classrooms, especially those in the liberal arts, humanities, and social sciences, require students to self-express—to assert, argue, impose, attack, and even self-disclose to an audience that may not share a close relational history. In the Japanese culture, however, the aforementioned oral skills are not to be performed in the presence of outsiders (i.e., people who are not relations or close friends) (Lebra, 1987; Wierzbicka, 1991) or in a public setting such as the classroom. To the Japanese, the sharing of one's private self with outsiders or the imposition of one's cognitive and affective states on others in public is considered the presentation of the self that lacks competence (Lebra, 1987; Wierzbicka, 1991).

The need to not hurt or offend others—a principal teaching in Japanese communication (Rusch, 2004; Wierzbicka, 2003)—further conflicts with the aforementioned oral skills required in U.S. classrooms. Since culture is a habit of the heart (Bellah et al., 2007), the mainstream speech practices in U.S. classrooms challenge the JIS' life-long cultural assumptions and training. Not only are the JIS required to acquire conversational English skills, but also negotiate the tension between American and Japanese classroom cultures. Therefore, it is not surprising

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<sup>1</sup>Cram school in Japan houses intensive programs that help students prepare for high school and university entrance examinations.

that when conversing in English, the JIS may revert to the more familiar Japanese communication practices.

### **Exposure to anxiety and fear**

Speaking is the most anxiety-provoking aspect of classroom oral participation when it involves the speaker's L2 (Cheng, 2000; Cheng, Horowitz, & Schallert, 1999; Lee, 2007). While the JIS' silence in the classroom can be attributed to the lack of English speaking skills, L2 speaking anxiety may further inhibit JIS' effective self-expression in conversational English. Fundamentally, anxiety—a psychological stressor—produces a mental block that occurs with heightened cognitive and affective filters during L2 speech production (Fallah, 2016; Horowitz, 2001; Tran & Moni, 2015). As a result, speech output is inhibited. The absence of speech then continually feeds the speaker's heightened awareness (Pritchard & Maki, 2006), and the speaker's self-talk in the moment of silence further provokes anxiety and fear.

The fear of negative consequences further triggers defensive behaviors that reinforce the speaker's retreat into silence (Horowitz, 2001; King, 2013; Lee, 2007). In a way, conversing in English is a high-stakes activity in which the JIS risk exposure to undesirable consequences, such as embarrassment, the need to take corrective actions, or negative evaluation by peers and instructors. Thus, the stakes are much higher for the JIS participating in classroom conversations alongside native English speakers who do not necessarily feel the same pressures or understand the JIS' classroom experience. The instructor evaluating the JIS may lack knowledge in L2 education or intercultural communication, or simply do not understand the challenges L2 speakers face. Taken together, the lack of English speaking skills, the unfamiliar speech practices, and the exposure to anxiety and fear, make the JIS feel vulnerable when they participate in classroom conversations.

### **Methods**

The first researcher—a non-Japanese ESL speaker with extensive experience working with East Asian international students, hence able to relate to the JIS experience in U.S. classrooms—designed and devised a plan for this study. The second researcher, who speaks Japanese with native fluency and has networks in the community, collected the interview data. The pair then collaborated in analyzing data and writing the results of the study.

The interview protocol was designed using Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interview method, which permits the participants' articulation of their experiences through symbolic means that are meaningful to them. Descriptive, structural, and contrast questions, along with probes, were used to explore and understand the participants' mundane oral participation experiences in the classroom, where talk is the taken-for-granted tool used in learning and teaching.<sup>2</sup> The JIS were asked about their typical

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<sup>2</sup> Descriptive questions enable the interviewees' use of their native language to label their understanding. Structural questions allow the exploration of domains—the interviewees' cultural knowledge (i.e., how they come to know their perceived reality). Contrast questions permit the discovery of the dimensions of the interviewees' knowledge in distinguishing events in their world (Spradley, 1979).

experience in the classroom, their reflection of their speech behavior in the classroom, and their peers' and instructors' reactions toward their oral participation.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit potential participants. A brief screening interview was conducted via phone with each participant to ensure that the participant had been attending the university for at least two academic quarters and taken classes in which oral participation was required. The interviews were conducted in the Japanese language to build rapport between the interviewee and the interviewer while avoiding L2 speaking anxiety (Lee & Hall, 2009; Spradley, 1979). Each interview lasted 1 to 1.5 hours, and informed consent was obtained from each participant before audio-recording the interview. No compensation was given.

The interviewees ( $n_{male} = 5$ ;  $n_{female} = 7$ ; age range = 21-32) were full-time students pursuing courses with academic majors in the humanities and social sciences and liberal arts. All were Japanese nationals who speak ESL. On average, the participants had attended U.S. colleges for at least 17 months and were familiar with the voluntary and involuntary oral participation that is widely practiced and expected in U.S. classrooms.

The oral data were transcribed into English following Wierzbicka's (2003) semantic metalanguage theory.<sup>3</sup> Simple English words were used, and Japanese native words that could not easily be translated into English were left as is. Data collection and analysis occurred iteratively. We separately read all transcripts repeatedly to immerse ourselves in the data. First, we each made a close reading of all the transcriptions using Lindlof and Taylor's (2013) constant-comparative method. Second, we independently separated the data into meaningful segments and coded the emerging themes. In the process, we compared each transcription with another transcription several times before defining categories and identifying distinct themes. Third, we compared our individual coding. Together, we discussed instances of disagreement, including reflecting on and discussing the similarities and differences in personal assumptions and values. Fourth, we refined our coding categories and agreed on the consistent themes to be reported.

## **Findings**

### **The JIS' experience in oral participation**

#### **Lack of Confidence**

All the participants described their experience of participating orally in the classroom as challenging and indicated that they rarely spoke in the classroom. The participants indicated being conscious that their English speaking skills was not up to par with that of their American peers. This realization, in turn, induced a feeling of insecurity about their English speaking ability. For example, Ai reported that “. . . I'm worried they may not understand my English, and I'm always thinking of how I'm going to

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<sup>3</sup> The natural semantic metalanguage theory maintains that semantic primes—words that are simple and indefinable—are those suitable for analysis (Wierzbicka, 2003). These words are universal in meanings across languages studied by scholars from the school; for example, *I, you, think, want, know, say, feel,* and *people*. This said, translating lexicons with complex conceptualizations into a simplified English word does not help capture the people's rich meanings of understanding their cultural world.

say what I want to say.” Similarly, Takashi noted, “When I’ve to speak without preparation [in class], I listen to what others are saying and then . . . I think about what to say and then speak up when the chance presents itself.” Takashi’s hesitancy to speak up spontaneously reveals his uncertainty about his oral English skills.

However, the spontaneity of classroom conversation creates ambiguity for the participants and often renders useless their painstaking preparation to speak up. Similar to being caught off guard and not knowing what to say, Takashi continued, “I feel a lot of stress, especially when I cannot prepare. [It is] really unpleasant.” The insecurity felt is compounded by the fear of making mistakes, and the combination works to shatter the participants’ confidence to speak up. Takashi observed, “I’m afraid that I will say something wrong. . . when I say the wrong thing, I feel very ashamed. In order not to feel that way, I don’t speak up. It’s like my instinct for self-defense is activated.” In truth, what feels “wrong” in the eyes of the participants, as Rie revealed, is that “I think I made a mistake . . . when their responses are different from mine.”

### **Missing the Window of Opportunity to Speak up**

Due to the anxiety and uncertainty, the participant’s reaction time is slowed down. However, real-time classroom conversation does not account for the time the JIS need to process the information and prepare a response, which often involves translation and back translation. As Shinichi observed, “The Americans raise their hands really fast. Even if I want to speak up, I’m unable to do so.” He added, “First, it takes time to understand [what is being said]. Then it takes time to speak up. In the end I miss the opportunity to speak up.” While juggling the multiple cognitive activities, “the topic changes while I’m still deciding what I should do,” Shiho lamented.

### **Large Class Sizes**

The participants also reported feeling uncomfortable and vulnerable when speaking up in classes of 20 to 35 students. Rie disclosed, “I talk a lot in small groups or with a peer. But when I’m in a large group, I get frightened.” The participants feel intimidated by their audiences’ expectant gaze and silence as they struggle to formulate their responses. According to Takuya, “I pause in that situation, and I think it’s not good. I . . . panic and think, ‘I should not speak up next time’ . . . I feel embarrassed . . . I try not to look at others.” By avoiding eye contact, Takuya is trying to further disengage from the discomfort and awkwardness.

In fact, small group settings give the participants a sense of comfort and support and thus lessen the fear of speaking. In such a setting, Akiho revealed, “If I don’t understand the question for the discussion, I start the conversation with, ‘What is the question?’ and they usually explain it to me.” Shiho explained the sense of security that comes from working with just a few peers, thus:

I’m able to say the things I want to in small group discussions, but not in big classes. I think, ‘I can say this now without feeling nervous,’ and I feel that I can finally express my feelings, and that is fun. Ha!

## Being Treated Differently by Peers and Instructors

Many participants notice the non-normative treatment they receive in a classroom community that *otherizes* them. They recognize being treated as an outsider—someone different from other classroom community members. Such a status does not give them equal access to the privilege of the group. The resulting feeling of isolation adversely affects the JIS' oral participation. Echoing Rie's comment about not having equal access to speaking turns in class, Yuko explained:

When they . . . think, "This person is an international student and cannot speak English well, so she might not want to speak up," they've already created an environment that suggests we don't need to speak up.

This kind of treatment manifested when the JIS were asked to speak up in class. Peers and instructors asked questions designed to probe for or reinforce the JIS/foreignness, seemingly justifying the non-normative treatment. For example, Akiho, Sayuri, Sinichi, and Takuya recounted being asked repeatedly about *go-kon*, a cultural food and drink night out where single men and women meet to find romantic partners; karaoke; sushi; and *ai puchi*, a make-up tool used to create double eyelids. Akiho reflected, "They don't ask me deeply meaningful questions. . . I'm pretty much asked these similar questions repeatedly." Such treatment works to illegitimize JIS' membership in the classroom; it does not engender feelings of acceptance and respect in the classroom community. Rie explained, "I think it's also the Japanese way of thinking . . . I don't want them to think that I'm different. . . [otherwise] they look at me differently or look down on me."

The non-normative treatment also results to lowered expectations, as Hiroto discovered, "I was told, '*Your English is not English.*' . . . The Americans don't care about our pronunciation . . . they don't expect good pronunciation from us because we are foreigners to them." Such biased treatment, especially coming from instructors, further alienates and silences the JIS in the classroom. Sinichi recalled, "His (the instructor's) reaction was like 'Um?' ((tilting his head and looking confused)). I thought it was the worst reaction that I'd ever seen. . . it was like *Um. Okay. Who else?*" Discouraged, Sinichi retreated into silence, hoping that nobody would notice that he was different—a response akin to Takashi's trepidation and discouragement from further oral participation (see the Lack of Confidence Section).

## Conclusions

### Recommendations by the JIS and Pedagogical Implications

Instead of relying solely on suggestions by scholars, we incorporate the participants' recommendations that are meaningful and specific to their situation in addressing their concerns about oral participation in the classroom. While the learners' suggestions may not necessarily echo the pedagogical expertise of teachers, consideration of the JIS input may provide the following benefits: (a) adoption of classroom teaching strategies that the participants deem useful and comfortable for them, and (b) a culturally inclusive strategy to create genuine intercultural dialogue by incorporating the JIS voice (e.g., see Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2004; Harumi, 2010). After all, the JIS as outsiders and minorities may pay attention to the nuances

in U.S. mainstream classrooms are taken for granted by the natives in the community (DiAngelo, 2006; also see Covarrubias, 2008). In general, the participants' recommendations address the need to enhance cultural inclusivity in the classroom—a crucial practice that has been overlooked in numerous past studies aimed at supporting international exchange in higher education. In the following subsections, we also discuss the pedagogical implications of the JIS recommendations.

### **Being asked to speak up**

JIS participants preferred to be asked to speak up by their peers or instructors than to compete for speaking turn, as exemplified by Shiho's revelation that ". . . Raising my hand is the scariest thing to do. If I'm called on, I feel like I've been saved." If not called upon, JIS must skillfully identify the right timing to chime in, such as by cutting off someone else and simultaneously deliver relevant and useful talking points. Doing so successfully requires that the JIS be competent English speakers, a tall order for most of them. Hiroto spoke for many when he explained:

. . . my brain froze for about a minute. Those situations are scary. . . . They [the class] might have been thinking like "Hey, come on! Answer!". . . . I thought, it's bad. What I was planning [to say] was crushed right in front of me, and I couldn't come up with an alternative.

Rather than helping, Hiroto's self-talk during that moment of silence as he tried to formulate a response only provoked more anxiety, making him lose his confidence and the chance to speak. This finding is consistent with past literature on the complexities of cognitive tasks that ESL speakers face when participating spontaneously (Horowitz, 2001; Lee, 2007; Pritchard & Maki, 2006). However, advanced preparation of talking points reduces cognitive task complexities and helps the participant speak with ease and confidence, as Sayuri discovered when invited by her instructor to talk about the Japanese practice of modesty. Having relevant knowledge of the subject and having been asked beforehand to prepare an answer, Sayuri was happy to share her cultural knowledge with her classmates. She narrated, "It's . . . really valuable. . . . Everyone [in the classroom] seemed not to understand why modesty is a good thing. . ."

At first glance the JIS' preference for being asked to speak up seems like a performance issue they can correct themselves. However, the JIS draw confidence from the classroom community and need their support to speak up with confidence. Therefore, to ensure a balance of input from different students, instructors should facilitate inclusive classroom participation that encourages the silent to speak up. Moreover, all classroom participants should be encouraged to be mindful of others, to reach out to those who are quiet, and to initiate conversations with peers from various backgrounds.

### **Receiving affirmation via others' feedback**

Undoubtedly, positive feedback and reinforcement enhance self-esteem, and affirmation from peers and instructors raises students' academic performance (e.g., see Hufton, Elliott, & Illushin, 2002). The findings of this study support these common academic assertions and further explain why affirmation is crucial to



enhancing the JIS' confidence to speak up. As Sinichi explained, any affirmative feedback he receives acknowledges and legitimizes him as a classroom participant whose contribution is welcome in the classroom discourse:

When there are more people who nod their heads, I feel that I've said something good. . . when professors say *Good! That's right!* . . . or something they usually don't say to me in many situations, and when their reaction is validating, I feel satisfied, like "I've said something good."

The verbal and nonverbal affirmations that Sinichi yearns for are, unfortunately, hard to come by for JIS. While Sinichi's experience illustrates the immediate reward of affirmation, Nao portrayed its long-term potential, "When someone says 'I agree with you,' I think 'Yes!' and it also give me confidences. It's the motivation for me to take the next step, to speak up [in future]. . . ." Since the JIS fear being out-of-line, instructors should encourage and skillfully guide them to participate in classroom conversations. Affirmations should not be limited to confirmation of students' correct answers, but also acknowledge their effort in participating. Additionally, instructors should be observant and regularly show affirmation to students who appear isolated and quiet during classroom discourse through displays of encouragement, attention, and care (DiAngelo, 2006).

Furthermore, all class participants may also be taught the joint responsibility for validating their peers and co-creating a welcoming and conducive learning atmosphere. In this respect, effective oral participation exceeds just oral expression to encompass leadership skills that help promote inclusivity in the classroom. Even silent, nonverbal confirmation—which, as Sinichi reported, can be as simple as a head nod—can be effective means of affirming the speaker. Therefore, the Eurocentric mode of communication—talk—should not be seen as the only standard for oral participation in genuine intercultural dialogue.

In the findings, the non-normative treatment of the JIS reveal a classroom atmosphere that lacks intercultural sensitivity (also see DiAngelo, 2006; Ha & Li, 2014). While Hiroto and others reported being ridiculed for speaking English with an accent, Rie experienced outright discrimination, ". . . when I asked him, 'Why do you only talk to my friends but not me?' He said, 'You're not White. You're not American . . . . You are yellow.' I thought, they treat foreigners harshly." Such overt discrimination forces the JIS to retreat into silence to avoid further negative emotional repercussions (*cf.* Takashi's comparison of his retreat to silence as self-defense in the Lack of Confidence Section). As Rie confessed, "I don't really want to say that I'm an international student." In short, non-affirmations, either overt or covert, discourage the JIS from speaking up in the classrooms.

### **Having friends in class**

The JIS reported that they rarely have friends they can count on for support in class. Sayuri explained, "To start with, we don't even have friends from our home country, especially when we study abroad for a short period of time." Although the JIS frequently initiate conversations with their American peers before and after class, the latter rarely venture beyond small talk with their JIS counterparts. This "superficial thing," as Takashi puts it, hinders the development of meaningful friendships that can

support JIS growth and learning in the classroom. The brief exchanges typically cover class assignments and weekend plans. According to Ryuta, “Rarely, if we get really close, we sometimes go for lunch on campus, but that’s it.” Having friends, however, encourages JIS classroom participation. In the words of Takuya, having friends in the class is like having “a system that allows me to make mistakes [when speaking up] in the class.” Hiroto, too, thought it helps to have a friend in class, “I think it’s more comfortable if I’ve at least a friend in the class or when I give presentations. They understand me.”

The finding that American students interact superficially with the JIS agrees with previous reports that the average American college student lacks the intercultural competence to make friends with people from different cultural backgrounds (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). Despite JIS’ initiatives, the American peers were unable to utilize the opportunities available in the classroom to develop meaningful relationships that engender deep intercultural learning. Akiho noted, “The Americans aren’t going to be interested in us, even if we can’t get along well with them. . . .” Thus, common American stereotypes of the Japanese impede their involvement with the JIS, as Sayuri explained:

The Americans say, like “She is shy, so we can just ignore her.” . . . and so there are people [the JIS] who could not join any group. When the Americans were talking about something interesting, they are like, “You are shy. You should just stay here. We will go over there.”

In fact, the participants in this study demonstrated that they were highly motivated to participate in classroom discussions and take risks in reaching out to their American peers. However, they found the reciprocity from their hosts wanting.

In many ways, the American students and instructors in higher education are the cultural ambassadors for their country. Therefore, they are ethically obliged to support and expand the efforts to build bridges with global partners. Since diversity is already a feature of American higher education, instructors and students should be encouraged to purposefully tap into and benefit from the available cultural wealth in order to benefit all involved in the learning community. What is more, the skills required to network with people from different cultures should be promoted as important assets in learning. In short, educators should consider promoting interpersonal and intercultural involvement in the globalized higher education system.

### **Engaging in meaningful dialogue.**

Finally, the findings of this study emphasize the necessity of diversifying discussion topics in classroom conversation. The JIS reported that their lack of contextual understanding of local current issues impedes their active engagement in classroom discussions. To compensate, they seek creative outlets to enhance their local knowledge so that they can contribute meaningfully in conversations with their American counterparts. For example, Sinichi described his approach to dealing with mainstream American conversational topics:

. . . people often talk about movies . . . . That's why I try to watch a lot of movies so that I can expand on the topics to talk about. . . . I'm working hard to make conversations like this.

Sinichi's effort shows he has a highly nuanced understanding of the American classroom discourse. However, without a reciprocal American desire to learn from the JIS, meaningful intercultural exchange is impossible.

Even when classroom discussion could use international perspectives, the opportunity is not pursued consciously and effectively by the American students and instructors (e.g., see Yep, 2014). Ryuta elaborated, “. . . what I'm learning now is ethics in American journalism . . . so it excludes the Japanese perspective. In Japan, I think different organizations establish the ethics codes, and it's way too different [from the American], so they don't really ask about my perspective . . . .” Consequently, the opportunity for meaningful intercultural exchange that could benefit the classroom community is not explored.

In fact, the teaching of any national cultural perspective divorced from other cultural influences should be obsolete in the current internationalized higher education environment. If the pursuit of provincialism remains the focus of the curriculum and class discussion, then current efforts to recruit international scholars to enhance diversity in higher education will come to naught. Therefore, educators should consider incorporating international perspectives in college classroom discussions, since the goal of higher education is to create a globalized learning community.

Although the findings reveal provincialism among American students and instructors (see the Being Treated Differently section), our suggestion that classroom discussion topics include international perspectives is not an endorsement of the JIS as experts representing the Japanese culture. On the contrary, Akiho, Sayuri, Sinichi, and Takuya decried the practice of asking awkward and inappropriate questions meant to confirm the Eurocentric, exotic view of the Japanese culture and people. However, Sinichi acknowledged the tension inherent in wanting to be accepted as an equal member of the U.S. classroom community while refusing to conform to the American stereotype of the JIS:

I feel like I'm a Japanese representative, haha, or I represent Asia, so if possible . . . when Japanese students are participating in the class, I think they [instructors] want to hear opinions that are different from those of American students, so I try hard to speak up . . .

Generally, engaging participants in meaningful intercultural dialogue requires the effective incorporation of international and intercultural knowledge in the higher education curriculum. Based on the JIS' classroom experience—their desire for greater speaking opportunities and more meaningful friendships with their American counterparts—the results of this study provide a possible path for U.S. higher education to follow to enhance intercultural sensitivity in teaching and learning. In conclusion, the shift in U.S. higher education toward greater intercultural inclusivity and meaningful internationalization is essential. Otherwise, the defense of U.S. higher education as world class becomes an exercise in futility. More importantly, the results of this study urge the American academic community to show reciprocal

respect and cordiality to their international partners in learning to enhance genuine intercultural dialogue (Lee, 2016).

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