

EPISODE 12 TRANSCRIPT

Hello, and welcome to this week's episode of Shizuoka Speaks. I'm Sonia Paul, your host for this podcast. At Shizuoka Speaks, we've been interviewing various students and teachers in Shizuoka City, to find out more about the nature of English and Japanese language learning in Japan...and what personal experiences and opinions from people who come from different cultural backgrounds can reveal to us.

In last week's episode, we discussed some of the reasons behind the way Japanese people sometimes interact with foreigners...and how the younger generation is more "inward-looking"--that is, more focused on Japan and not as willing to go outside the country.

While study abroad rates for Japanese people have been in decline, the rates of other foreigners--especially from Asian countries--who choose to study in Japan has been rising. Even with a stagnant economy, Japan remains the third largest economy in the world. It still maintains a large presence in Asia.

*Throughout our series, we've talked with three foreign students--Manasi, from India, Ria, from Indonesia, and Phan, from Vietnam--about their experiences studying and living in Shizuoka. Today, we'll talk with them more about how they've **changed** since coming to Japan. What can their experience with studying abroad--with immersion language education--hint to us about the role that study abroad can play for Japanese students?*

Sonia: Do you think you've changed since coming to Japan?

Ria: Yeah, I think so. But, it's like more in the inside changes? Like stronger inside? Like, I learn to understand people more here. Because in my country, there's already so many differences, and then I came here, and I see more, many more differences, I was like, oh my God, there's really a lot of things that I need to learn and understand...about life, actually.

Sometimes, in seeing the differences, people who study abroad begin to have a greater awareness of their own identities...here's Manasi:

Manasi: ...I think I've become more independent and now, like, small things which used to irritate me earlier or used to matter to me in life simply don't? So I think I can survive on my own. Which I really doubted before coming here because I'm really pampered, and I've always been around a lot of people. And I've also realized, um, that I'm extremely LAZY at making efforts to go meet people, do stuff.

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Sonia: Why would you say that?!

Manasi: Because I am, you know! I found it quite stupid to actually go and say “hiii...please talk to me and be my friend.” And since those people are not that open, for me to make an extreme effort is something that it is very difficult. So I realize, I probably should have done more of that, I should have gotten out more. But, probably I didn't? But I kind of don't regret it too, it's fine, I got my share of stuff, so, it's fine.

Manasi also revealed some feelings about living in Japan that may be shocking to some people familiar with the culture.

Manasi: I feel that...here, you can just be what you are? Which is very difficult in India. You can just do what you want, you can just change your mind the next day, nobody cares. And do something else? You **decide** what you're going to do yourself, and no one's going to be bothered with that. I think it's kind of very free to be here.

Very free? Wait a minute. Remember what Kotomi said?

Kotomi: But Japanese people... We have so much tension. Mm. So, if you work in the company, the smiling...is not good. Laughing is not also good. Joking is not so good. So be in tense...that is kind of our culture...

That definitely does not sound like a culture in which one can feel free!

So perhaps it's not really Japan, the country, that makes Manasi feel this way.

Sonia: Do you think it's because you're a foreigner living in Japan and not a Japanese person?

Manasi: Probably, yes. One is that, secondly, I don't have my parents or somebody over me? Or looking over me and saying, do this and do that? And so, I can really form views about things myself...believe in things I want to, not believe in things I don't want to. And just basically control my own life and do what I want with it.

*Of course, it's completely possible for people to form independent views while living in their own countries. But it can be harder for some people more than others...especially if they are physically surrounded by people telling them what to do or what to believe...or even simply people who just don't have **different** views to challenge them.*

People can often become more independent after studying or living abroad. And, as Phan reveals, they can often become more empathetic too...

Phan: Mm...from the inside, I am always a poor Vietnamese. But I think I am a little bit manly, manlier. Yes. To live alone by myself and to understand the value of love and emotion... I think that I am more emotional. I feel I can understand the other people's situation better than before. I care about them more than ever than before. For example, when I was in Vietnam, I was the only one in this world, and I don't have to care about the other. If I have to care about them, that is just some kind of duty. Not love. But when I came to Japan, I really love people who come from the same situation with me, and I really put myself in the Japanese shoe. Such as my sempai in the convenience store. When he stood alone in front of the convenience store, I feel that this man's pain is really inside my heart.

Many of the students who graduate from Kokusai Kotoba Gakuin, the Japanese Language Institute that Phan, Ria, and Manasi all attended, leave with a desire to effect some sort of social change...and that desire is based on their own personal experience.

Here's Hakamada Sensei, the principal of the school, with more about this.

Hakamada: One student said to me the other day, She is from Nepal, she was in Nepal until 19 years old. The thing she knew before coming to Japan--course there are a lot of countries in the world except Nepal and Japan, but then the only country she thought was Japan, only Japan. And now she is here, and she says she she noticed the other countries than Japan. So, she says she is very surprised to know this. So maybe, um....in a small world, living in a small world..mm.. They, they...cannot think...they can't have wide vision of the world or of the future. The only thing they are interested in is how to get money, what kind of thing they are going to eat breakfast, or to whom they are going to get married or something like that. But, as for her, she is thinking that she wants to be a Japanese teacher in the future, and they want to teach the children living in Nepal to make the students have their own dreams in the future so...of course, depending on who, but little by little their vision of the world is widened.

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Many of our guests have said that Japanese people sometimes come off as not knowing too much about the outside world. And often, they don't seem to be very interested in stepping outside their country either. But somehow, Japan can still be that place for people from other countries. A place where they can learn not only about Japan, but about the world.

But, of course, every person will experience a country differently. So, we can't say for sure what Japanese students will gain from studying abroad.

But remember what Kotomi felt?

Kotomi: uh, maybe I really got energy to live. Energy to survive.

Next week: How will future generations react to the current circumstances of the country and the rest of the world? And what does language learning have to do with that?

I'm Sonia Paul. Thank you for listening to Shizuoka Speaks.