

**Saison Foundation × Kyoto Experiment: Creative Environment Improvement Program
Report Session + Symposium**

Diversity in the Performing Arts—Community and Foreign Residents in Japan

Friday, October 8, 2021

Part 1: 5:15–6:15 p.m.

Part 2: 6:30–8:00 p.m.

Venue: 3F Lobby, Park Plaza, ROHM Theatre Kyoto

Part 2: Symposium

**Speakers: Wako Asato (Associate Professor of Transcultural Studies, Kyoto University),
Oussouby Sacko (President, Kyoto Seika University)**

Moderators: Yuya Tsukahara, Juliet Knapp (Co-directors, Kyoto Experiment)

Presentation 1

Considering Diversity

Wako Asato (Associate Professor of Transcultural Studies, Kyoto University)

In the first part, we heard a discussion about audience diversity, which led me to wonder about diversity among people involved in the arts. I would like to introduce the difficulties associated with diversity from my experience of doing research.

The Complexity of Diversity: Taipei

Diversity is a trendy word lately, but it is not easy to define exactly what it entails. Diversity is not the same as equality and not all diversities are equal; some aspects of it are established on incredibly unfair disparities, and the true nature of diversity seems different depending on the circumstances from which you view it.

Let's take the example of Taipei. Some 240,000 foreign domestic workers are employed there, a large number of whom come from Indonesia and help take care of the elderly and disabled. Every Sunday, many of these domestic workers wearing colorful jilbabs gather in the middle of Taipei Main Station to enjoy their day off (Photo 1). The station is open as a place for migrant workers and others to gather.

Photo 2 shows Indonesian domestic workers undertaking training in their own country. They all have short hair and are not allowed to wear scarves. The reason behind this is that if they look feminine, they may be perceived as women who could seduce male employers in the country of destination. In addition, Indonesian domestic workers are worried that the impression people have of them might be lowered if people realize they

are Muslim. Consequently, organizations have adopted a strategy of sending people out in a gender- and religiously neutral way. In this way, the bodies of people are controlled when they are sent as migrant workers. In other words, when we talk about diversity, there is often a harsh reality behind it.

The word “diversity” sounds good, but people use it with different intentions. For example, one person may use it to imply dignity for all people and from the perspective of protecting human rights. Another may use it from an economic perspective. In a society with a declining population, there is a dominant economic ideology, sometimes promoted by the government and business, that asks women, people with disabilities, and retirees to work hard and contribute economically. I think this discourse is strong in Japan too.



Photo 1



Photo 2

The Complexity of Diversity: Vietnamese in Japan

On the left of Figure 3 is a graph showing the numbers of “illegal foreign overstayers” (“illegal residents”), people missing from the Technical Intern Training Program, and foreign residents arrested on criminal charges. In all categories, Vietnamese account for the highest number. This kind of story is also in the news, so many of you may have heard about it. On the other hand, we get a completely different picture if we switch indices, as shown by the graph on the right. This is the pass rate for the National Exam for Certified Care Workers. The graph shows the results of Vietnamese exam candidates who are required under an economic partnership agreement to take the test. According to this, the pass rate for Vietnamese candidates is over ninety percent. That is an extremely high rate considering the overall pass rate among all candidates is only around seventy percent. Especially given the fact that the exam is unique to Japan, the high pass rate for Vietnamese candidates is surprising.

In addition, the question arises of how Vietnamese migrants, despite having so many illegal overstayers, missing persons, and people arrested on criminal charges, can achieve such incredible test results. It indicates that people who come to Japan under a good system have good results, while those who come under a bad system, especially the Technical Intern Training Program, end up with bad results. Many of the problems that

arise with migrants in Japan do not involve care workers, but the technical intern trainees. As has been recently reported widely in the media, the Technical Intern Training Program is flawed at a systemic level. For example, there is the problem of the large amount of debt incurred in order to come to Japan. It is not uncommon to have to pay one million yen, which means people are often in debt by the time they arrive in Japan. If there are unpaid wages on top of this, the situation becomes extremely difficult. In the case of care workers who come under the economic partnership agreement, dedicated training for the national exam has been introduced. People entering Japan are expected to obtain N3 by the time they enter, but for care workers, unlike those on the Technical Intern Training Program, there are almost no personal fees involved with coming to Japan, which means more time can be devoted to preparing for the national exam. In other words, if we do not understand the systems and social structures that exist in the background, we cannot understand the problems and mechanisms behind diversity, which, for example, can lead to the misunderstanding that foreigners commit crimes. Diversity itself does not make society abundant. If a society is exploitative or only selectively diverse, that “diversity” will not bring about any synergy. Therefore, we have to consider what kind of diversity we establish.

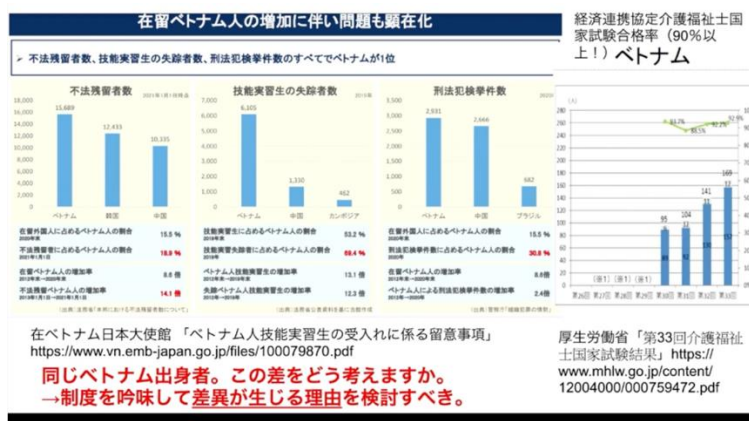


Figure 3

Art and Diversity

When we look at these examples, the truth about diversity gets flipped on its head depending on how we filter our view of it. If we emphasize the negative aspects of diversity without explaining the structure, this leads to misguided views. What to choose and what to focus and report on are all part of artistic practices, and because so much is frequently determined within the mechanics of society, such artistic practices have a big responsibility. Talking about others or the road to diversity is far from simple. In order to confront diversity, it will be necessary for academia and the arts to cast off past values. For example, if we want to create an era that sees diversity as a process leading to true wealth by including not only men but also women, the elderly, the young, people with disabilities, and foreigners, we cannot achieve this unless we change our social values. I

think these points are also reflected in artistic practices.

Presentation 2

Diversity at Art Festivals and Universities: The Experience of Kyoto Seika University Oussouby Sacko (President, Kyoto Seika University)

Challenges of Multiculturalism in Japan

As the president of Kyoto Seika University, I am promoting diversity, yet I sense a large hurdle preventing Japan from achieving this. Accepting lots of foreign migrants is not synonymous with diversity. The media often describes Kyoto Seika University as a place that really values diversity, but things are not simple in reality, even in the case of meals. For example, as a Muslim, I do not eat pork. The meals provided for me at university events, however, still have pork in them, even after twenty years. They thought it would be fine, for instance, with a hamburger of minced beef and pork.

This is partly an issue of awareness among the people making the meals, but Japanese society in general does not think deeply enough about other cultures. There are those who instead of trying to adapt to the circumstances of non-Japanese people, think they should teach them about how wonderful the Japanese language and culture are. This is similar to the situation in Germany, which has put much effort into its immigration policies. But then they realized that, as Swiss writer Max Frisch said, “we asked for workers, but human beings came.” A single person arrives from another country. It is important to consider how we can accommodate that person’s religion and values. It is not about simply increasing the numbers of migrants.

Recognizing Diversity and Aspiring for a University Where We Learn Together

Approximately thirty percent of students at Kyoto Seika University are currently students from outside Japan. As president, I am championing diversity, though this also means firmly understanding that everyone connected to the university is different from one another, and incorporates the desire to make a university where we can learn and grow together.

What is frequently misunderstood is that foreign students are not “visitors” like tourists. I hope they will involve themselves in society in their own ways as members of the university community and as Kyoto citizens, while maintaining their personal dignity. As such, I want foreign students to actively have places where they can feel comfortable, and to offer support for this. The question of having a place in society is not restricted to foreign students, but is also becoming vital in terms of guarding against isolation and of achieving diversity.

To prevent foreign students from becoming isolated, we have an initiative at our student dormitories where a non-Japanese and Japanese student are paired up. In the past, Muslim students have held a workshop on the hijab. Instead of distinguishing between Japanese students and foreign students, I want to think about everyone together as one overarching category of “students.”

Another aspect of my style is to take more and more students on fieldwork to Africa. Coming into contact with other cultures provides an opportunity to really face up to who you are. There’s no need to proclaim these kinds of activities as “diversity.” First, I want to create an environment where students learn that the world is full of many types of people.

Discussion (Excerpt)

Public Space

Knapp: In Professor Asato’s presentation, the topic came up about migrant workers finding a place of belonging in public space like stations. I could sense potential there in terms of how our festival and the theaters are open public spaces. Before approaching audiences through the works shown at the festival, there’s already a lot of meaning perhaps in simply providing a “place” itself.

Tsukahara: Kyoto Experiment is funded by tax revenue from the national and municipal governments, so being widely accessible is ideal. But not only that, it also feels really important to consider how the organizers and performers view society, and whether they are listening to society.

Sacko: Public subsidy from taxes is important, but we don’t get art if we only think about that. After I came to Japan, I was shocked by how “public” meant something very different here. Japanese public space is something controlled by authorities; there is little sense that it belongs to residents, that it’s something that we all share. If you go to a park in Japan, you are confronted by a long list of all the activities that are prohibited, leaving you uncertain about what to do. We can open up this concept of public space for regular people through the power of art; I believe this is the role of art. It’s perhaps a difficult theme to tackle if you are publicly subsidized, but it is worthwhile. I think how the festival approaches this will become important.

Japan’s Immigration Policy

Knapp: It is often said that migrant workers will become increasingly necessary for Japan to deal with the challenges of the aging society. How do you think immigration laws will change in Japan?

Asato: We are right now entering a period of reassessment. That said, for immigration policies to begin in earnest and be accepted in society, it is necessary to first examine what makes it hard for non-Japanese people to live here: the debt faced by technical internee trainees and foreign students; the opportunities to learn Japanese not given to married immigrants, unlike the year-long intensive course given to those who come as part of the economic partnership agreement; the tiny number of refugees accepted despite the conflicts taking place around the world; and the political rights of long-term residents. There are lots of things we need to think about. But since anti-migrant sentiments are strong, it is necessary to consider what kind of vision we should have and what social policies should be adopted.

Sacko: We need to tackle immigration policy at two levels: national and local governments. I have assisted Kyoto Prefecture for a long time, working to make a community easy for foreign residents of the prefecture to live in. A particular challenge has been how to convey information when a natural disaster occurs. Since some people might struggle to understand Japanese correctly during urgent situations, it's important to establish links between non-Japanese and society or the community during ordinary circumstances. If we already have ways in which we interact in everyday life, we can help one another across the whole community. Instead of regulating things only according to the government rules, it's also vital to change the awareness of residents and society.

Asato: I think that we should have non-Japanese people working at Kyoto City Hall and at the ward offices at least in numbers proportional to the ratio of non-Japanese residents in order to hear the voices of minority and deliver proper services. Such people will also act as an important nexus, particularly during a natural disaster or pandemic. Even during a financial crisis, there are many ways to promote inclusion without spending a lot of money. Diversity is not a matter of finance but of how to restructure the social system. Doing so would prevent the emergence of enclave-like, isolated foreign communities, and facilitate smoother coexistence with Japanese residents. Inclusion benefits the individual, but is also a preventative measure to avoid social costs, and a precondition of the idea that diversity fosters a rich society.

Knapp & Tsukahara: Professors Asato and Sacko, thank you very much for sharing with us today. It has been a great opportunity to hear various thoughts and ideas that will no doubt be helpful for the future of Kyoto Experiment.

(This is a summarized and edited version of the symposium. The English text is a translation of sections of the Japanese text and is not a complete translation.)