Kyoto University of Foreign Studies 70th Anniversary Commemorative Forum

What skills do you need to live in a global society?
– The concept of community engagement –

Hosted by Kyoto University of Foreign Studies *Supported by The Yomiuri Shimbun*

Global Engagement First Step Forward

The 70th anniversary forum of Kyoto University of Foreign Studies was held on September 10 in its Morita Memorial Hall, Ukyo-ku, Kyoto, on the theme "What skills do you need to live in a global society?" In the first part of the forum, freelance announcer Saki Yagi interviewed model and actress Kurara Chibana, also a Japanese ambassador for the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). The second part of the forum was a panel discussion on the skills required in a global society and studies at the university in light of community engagement.

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Kurara Chibana (Model and actress)

Born in Okinawa in 1982. As well as being a model for various fashion magazines, she began her career as an actress in NHK's Taiga Drama "Hanamoyu." Her natural inner beauty and fashion sense attract great attention from women. As a Japanese ambassador for the WFP, she visits regions facing food shortages in Africa and Asia and is actively engaged in publicizing the situation in Japan.

Interview

"A Global Experience That Changed My Life – Global Engagement That I Can Do"

Helping the world's children through food programs

Yagi: Can you tell us about the WFP?

Chibana: The WFP is an organization that helps improve lives by delivering food in countries which are facing food shortages due to war or disaster. After serving as a WFP official supporter since 2007, I became its Japanese ambassador in 2013. Having always been interested in education and charity work, I immediately fell in love with WFP's school meals program. In regions where there are food shortages, providing meals at school motivates parents to send their children to school, otherwise the children would be kept working. Children are encouraged to build a brighter future in an environment where they can eat well and make friends as well as study.



Yagi: Adults have an important duty to help children overcome their difficulties and foresee a brighter future. You have visited affected regions. What stands out in your mind?

Chibana: I have visited nine countries so far. In Zambia, the country I first visited, I struggled to absorb what I saw and heard, such as a child who goes to school carefully wearing only one shoe, and children who spend their life collecting rainwater skimmed from the ground for cooking because there is no water supply. In an environment where they do not even have simple things that Japanese take for granted, I was upset by their way of thinking which is so different from mine. They work hard to live. I stopped thinking that it was bad because they did not have this or that, and instead began to wonder what they really needed.

Yagi: You don't feel that you are foisting support on them, do you?

Chibana: No, I don't feel that at all. Every time I go there, I feel that what I can do is really small. I used to feel guilty about not being able to spend 100% of my time on the programs but the guilt disappeared when a friend told me that even if you do not spend 100% of your time, 10% or even 1% is much better than none. This changed my view and now I think that there is something I can do by using my job and position.

Yagi: Although I am interested in global engagement, I had thought that my commitment would be too half-hearted as I could only donate or support a little. Doing something is better than doing nothing. First of all, you need to step forward.

Panel discussion

"What Skills Do You Need to Live in a Global Society?"

Expressing clearly and contributing to the community

Yagi: A key feature of the university is community engagement. What is this?

Jeff: Japanese culture is a "receiver responsible culture" where recipients are responsible for interpreting meanings. For instance, Japanese is a language in which conversation is possible by saying only "Have you seen?" or "I've seen!" and communication between Japanese people also relies on facial expressions and reading between the lines. The opposite is an "initiator responsible culture" where people clearly express intent in words or attitudes so that the other person can understand. Community engagement is an activity which requires an expressive person to comprehend the other person's problem and look for solutions together through active engagement with the community and subsequently contribute to the community.

Yagi: Ms. Ino, I believe you're organizing this type of activity, aren't you?

Ino: Our organization is mainly working in Vietnam to promote economic development while preserving the environment and people's livelihoods. Our "duck bank" lends ducklings to the poor. The borrowers raise the ducklings, sell them and use the cash to pay back the cost of the ducklings. This scheme is used by those who want to escape poverty by running their own business. Those who borrow more ducklings using earned money, use the "cow bank" which lends calves, do bookkeeping or try to reduce the cost of feed. Starting with 25 ducks, some people have been able to buy a 0.5-hectare rice field in 3 years.

Yagi: I understand that you are helping to make the first step by changing mindsets.

Ino: But I do not particularly think of this as global engagement. It's just my colleagues I am enjoying working with people in villages.

The power of language breaks down walls

Yagi: Language is also necessary for communication. How do you deal with language barriers?

Chibana: In the WFP, I am not fluent but I try to speak in English, thus avoiding the delay in conversation when speaking through an interpreter. If people all share the same purpose then language is not a barrier.

Ino: I first decided to learn Vietnamese to win arguments with mothers at the market. Then, gradually I wanted to know more about their culture and way of thinking and also to express myself better. As a result, my Vietnamese has improved.



Jeff: While over 90% of human communication is nonverbal, verbal communication is still required to achieve objectives. Please focus on looking firmly at the other person's face, smiling and sending words along with your facial expression.

Yagi: For Japanese people, certain language skills help give confidence in using nonverbal communication freely.

Skills required in a global society

Yagi: Finally, can you tell us what skills are needed to live in a global society?

Chibana: "Empathy." It is simple but important to see things from the other person's point of view in different cultures and environments. I want to be able to comprehend whatever children in front of me feel even if it is not nice.

Ino: "The ability to think, develop and change together." While the world is becoming more divided due to conflicts and the rise of autocracies, society thinks less and less about young people's futures. Programs where young people can fulfill their potential through the process of thinking and developing something together with adults in a position like mine need to be promoted in Japan and other countries.

Jeff: "Understanding other cultures while appreciating your own." Japanese people's "perception" abilities are the best in the world. Kyoto University of Foreign Studies trains students to clearly express their intentions and take action without losing their ability to read the whole context. You can also try to develop both expressiveness and perceptiveness through communications with your neighbors, family, and other people around you.



Jeff Berglund
(Professor at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies and Visit Kyoto Ambassador)

Born in South Dakota, USA. Graduated from Carleton College in 1970 and came to Japan to teach at Doshisha Senior High School. After serving as Professor at Otemae University for Women and Tezukayama Gakuin University, in 2008, he was appointed as Professor at the Faculty of Foreign Studies of Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. His specialties include cross-cultural communication.



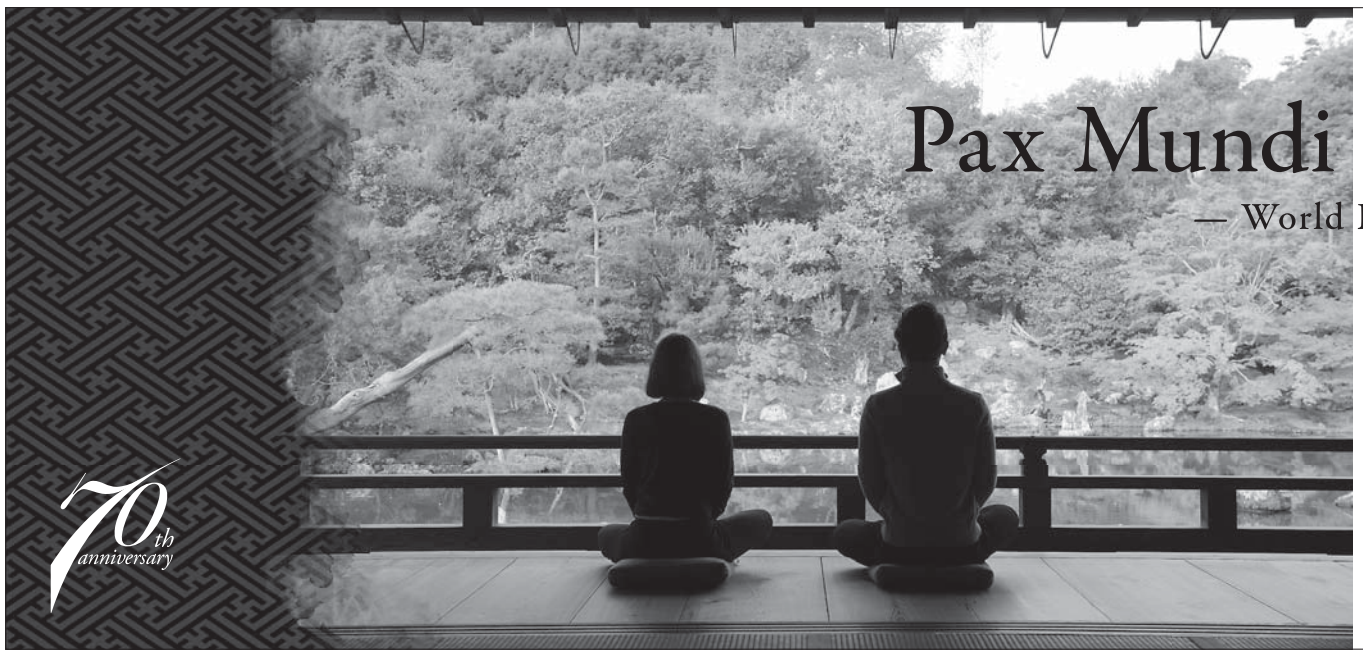
Mayu Ino
(President of nonprofit corporation Seed to Table – Connecting People, Nature and Cultures)

After graduating from Meiji University in 1997, she moved to Vietnam. After participating in Japanese NGO projects as a translator/interpreter and investigator, she took up a post at the Vietnam Office of Japan International Volunteer Center in 2003. She founded Seed to Table – Connecting People, Nature and Cultures in July 2009.



Saki Yagi
(Freelance announcer)

Born in 1978 in Los Angeles, USA and raised in Abeno, Osaka. She lived in Seoul, Korea for 3 years from fourth grade of elementary school and later studied in Seattle, USA for a year during her second year of high school. After serving 10 years as an announcer for Mainichi Broadcasting System, she became freelance.



70th anniversary

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