

## *Foreword*

# **Beyond the Culture of Excuse: Ten Years of "Kokusai Gakubu," the Faculty of International Studies**

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### **1990: the birth**

In April 1990 our "Kokusaigakubu," the Faculty of International Studies, was newly founded on Bunkyo University's Shonan Campus.

1990 was an epoch-making year in world history. Michael Gorbachev, the president of the former Soviet Union, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. But he resigned as the last president of the USSR in the next year 1991, and the Gulf War began in January of the same year.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the one-sided result of the Gulf War strongly impressed upon the world that the age of Pax Americana had arrived.

### **Before and after the war**

The Gulf War was not only the first "live" television war, it also had a serious impact on Japan's "Kokusaika," the internationalization of Japanese society, and therefore also on the present and the future of our faculty.

The war was the watershed when Japanese society's passion to become international began to diminish. Simply traveling abroad was a pleasant thing before the war, but it became an unpleasant or dangerous one after that. The Kokusaigakubu experienced a sudden decrease in the number of applicants in 1992, after the Gulf war.

In general, the 1980s was a flourishing period for the Japanese economy, which became a "bubble economy". However, some serious trade conflicts occurred between the United States and Japan especially in the automobile and silicon chip industries.

"Kokusaika," becoming international, was born in those boom years of the globalized Japanese economy. In this context, "kokusaigakubu" were needed to educate young people in how to solve many international problems caused by the globalized economic environment.

Yet these optimistic 1980s disappeared and were replaced by the dark 1990s.

### **The culture of excuse**

“Shiyoganai” or “shikatanai” — to do something not because one wants to do it but because it cannot be avoided — are terms frequently used in everyday conversation. A typical “outer reason” is gaiatsu, political or economic pressure from abroad.

Decisions are often believed to be forced because “one-cannot-do-other-than-one-does”. This way of understanding what we do suggests that the decision maker has a strong desire to be free from as much liability as possible.

I would like to coin a new term, “the culture of excuse”, to describe such a general attitude. Frankly, the “kokusaika” boom was created within such a culture.

To do something in response to a changing environment is often a good thing. But it is not a good thing to forget the fact that not only is everyone made by the outer world, but that what we ourselves do also re-makes our environment day by day. The reality we live in is created in an interactive way.

Therefore a culture of excuse can be dangerous because it ignores this interactive reality.

### **2000: beyond the old culture**

In April 2000, 365 new students enrolled in our redesigned faculty system which now has two departments, International Communication and International Relations.

Questionnaires reveal that more than one in five of them have their own email addresses and an internet environment in their home.

A digital generation is rapidly maturing and beginning to displace the old culture. They are armed with a new intellectual weapon, the net. The net is an interactive medium, not a passive, one-way medium. This is our hope. But this hope is also a challenge.

The most noticeable technical feature of the internet is its two-way interactivity. Information flows both ways on the net. Information does not pass one-way like in traditional media. This two-way communication gives us an almost incomprehensible freedom. The information now available to all of us is now extremely rich. The choice is yours.

Every user can choose what he or she wants from the enormous amount of resources available. Yet this may be an information labyrinth rather than an information resource.

## **The Challenge to become global citizens**

In order to enjoy freedom in the net age, we must be able to decide for ourselves and to act free from outside authority. To manage this personally, however, is usually a heavy burden.

The freedom of choice created by the internet is too huge for most people to manage by themselves. Our personal ability to endure the tension involved in such a difficult task is limited. Ironically, this powerful tool to liberate people from an authority-dependence syndrome seems to be producing more authority-dependent people.

We should not overlook the most important point, that we have not yet been educated to be able to participate freely in this two-way or interactive environment. The real challenge to global citizens is right here.

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