



# **International Studies, Possibilities and Future: A Message from FIS, Bunkyo University**

Takaharu OKUDA\*

What is international studies, what does it consist of? This question is very useful in recognizing that this inter-disciplinary major can be an intellectual tool for global citizens in standing up to the contradictory contemporary world. We realize international studies must not be merely an academic subject but one of intellectual movements for reshuffling our values and way of thinking, applying our imagination to make radical considerations on the global relationships or connections between people all over the world. For the sake of finding answers to global issues, international studies, our major, will ask you to join in.

## **My dear colleagues to whom this concerns,**

The rising trend of interdependence has urged us to realize closer and more complex relationships between people in the contemporary world. Everyone must admit that human beings need to share all interests as well as stand up to the many

troublesome issues around the globe. Global climate change and even the prevalent “merciless terrorism,” for example, should be discussed by the international community from the point of view that we are all global share-holders. But unfortunately, these issues have very complicated contexts, and thus, we cannot solve them easily. Different viewpoints sometimes cause hostile sentiments among the people concerned and lead them to clash with each other in order to protect their interests. Needless to say, deepening interdependence and entangled relationships around the world are characteristics of the globalization in which we are involved. In this context, our livelihoods are impossible without paying consideration to those of others, that is, the necessity for achieving a better coexistence between people in the world cannot be ignored. In this light, the role of international studies as an academic means of profound analysis and radical understanding of global issues becomes very important.

---

\* Professor, Faculty of International Studies (FIS), Bunkyo University, Shonan, Kanagawa, JAPAN

So, what is the definition of international studies and what does it consist of? This question is very useful. When I had the opportunity to participate in a symposium on the theme of the future of international studies organized by FIS of Prince of Songkla University of Thailand, November 2010, I noticed that Thai professors also make efforts in seeking possibilities for the future by selecting educational materials carefully and coordinating multiple disciplines. Of course, international studies is composed of various synthetic and inter-disciplined characteristics. By making use of multiple disciplines, one can try to understand contemporary global issues and challenge oneself in finding answers for overcoming the many contradictions in the world.

Also, through several academic trials, one can become aware of entanglements involved in his standpoint or existence in the world, in which he is irresistibly involved with contradictory, frustrated sentiments. For example, we, the people living in the so-called “developed world,” have more responsibility than those who live in the under developed world on global climate change in the meaning that our “abundant” livelihoods are producing vast amounts of greenhouse gasses, much more than those of the people in the Third World. Contradiction is seen here in that although we are the main sources of global warming, the most serious damages have been seen in Third World countries, such as where the rising sea level has put people in danger through the prospect of their homelands sinking. In this context, we cannot help realizing our structurally abusive position and the need to reconsider our lifestyles with great regret. Considering the present world is nothing but to

reconsider ourselves, and thus, one of the essences of international studies must be the quest not only for better understandings in multilateral and pluralistic relations, connections and ways of communications of the world’s people, but also liberation from the standpoint of being unwitting agents of structural abuse. So, in consideration of this, it will be very important for us to realize the academic significance of international studies as social activities, i.e., intellectual movements of global citizens for establishing better relationships and the future of the world.

In the above-mentioned context, we need to radically reconsider our values and ways of life as well as take action in reorganizing the established socioeconomic situations in the world. In cooperation and working together with the people concerned, the diverse intellectual movements can give us opportunities for establishing better relationships between global citizens. For example, some students of our faculty voluntarily organized a movement for setting up small-sized solar panels on the campus as a symbol of a lifestyle using independent and decentralized energy, and they have succeeded by collecting the money needed recently. Though this may be a very small action, they can propose radical criticism against developing nuclear society in which an increasing dependence on nuclear power would lead our society to be more authoritarian and for civilians’ rights to be more fragile under the pretext of “safe management” of nuclear power, as well as against our present lifestyle of producing vast amounts of greenhouse gasses, as a concrete theme of international studies.

As an academician specializing in international studies, I would like to make an appeal to take actions for getting better understanding on world issues in various academic ways. As one example, I will focus on the importance of field studies, especially visiting the “real places” of international studies, that is, the places where we can face head-on the contradictory issues and can get a true image of the contemporary world. In our case, for example, Bunkyo University has organized an Asian Study Tour every December. As an escorting professor, I have been to Bangladesh more than ten times with students. This country is regarded to be one of the most underdeveloped countries. In fact, there is no electricity or sufficient accommodation facilities in some rural areas of Bengal. Poverty is a real problem. But there is another reality. Children’s smiles reconciled us and economic activities are gradually growing in Bangladesh. Especially, peoples’ efforts for joint self-help through microcredit programs organized by Grameen Bank and other NGO’s can make us aware of our arrogance and self-centered ways of thinking in international relations. We can learn so many lessons from the positive and confident movements for self-independence by the local people. For, the participants of the field study can understand that reliance on the peoples’ abilities and belief in possibilities of cooperative organizations are key factors for fulfilling human development. One-way donations from the developed world to the developing world would never establish an equal partnership in the international com-

munity. Rather, we should learn from the efforts of the people in the Third World. Through these experiences, the students can also change their ways of thinking and develop values for international coexistence and cooperation, fostering their identities as global citizens. Also on the intellectual academic movements of international studies, I can refer to the transnational modern East Asian history project that is mentioned in another article of this journal. Through the project, the participants could imagine the pain of the people who experienced violent colonial rule or invasion by imperialist powers in the past by means of paying attention to their “memories of sadness.”

We know well that the world is diverse and peoples’ values are also pluralistic. So, we can see that the most important attribute for developing international studies is to have multiple viewpoints standing up to contemporary contradictions. Being liberated from self-righteous and self-centered values, we can remake consideration to the people suffering from hardships such as hunger and dispersion. For this task, imagination is so important that we can share optimistic prospects for international studies. John Lennon’s song “Imagine” from the 1970s is still meaningful and powerful for achieving our goal, i.e., establishing global citizenship in the community we belonged to. For this purpose, we would like to ask you to join with us, collaborating in the field of this intellectual movement.