

Symposium | Study abroad : [Symposium 96] Studying in a Japanese medical school as an international student: aims and challenges

 Sun. Sep 28, 2025 1:10 PM - 2:40 PM JST | Sun. Sep 28, 2025 4:10 AM - 5:40 AM UTC  Session Room 5 (Conference Room A)

[Symposium 96] Studying in a Japanese medical school as an international student: aims and challenges

Moderator: Yuji Ozeki (Shiga University of Medical Science), Akiko Onishi (The University of Tokyo)

Discussant: Chizuko Tezuka

Commentator: Akiko Onishi (The University of Tokyo)

[SY-96]

Studying in a Japanese medical school as an international student: aims and challenges

Uyanga Tsovoosed¹, Asraa Faris Aldoghachi¹, Nur Azrah Fazer Binti Mohd Ariffin¹, Chizuko Tezuka², Yuji Ozeki¹, Akiko Onishi³ (1. Shiga University of Medical Science (Japan), 2. formerly Keio University (Japan), 3. The University of Tokyo (Japan))

[SY-96-01]

Studying in Japan: Aims and Challenges

Personal and professional challenges of an international psychiatry student in Japan

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[SY-96-02]

Beyond Just Research: Navigating Culture, Challenges, and Growth as a Muslim Iraqi Postgraduate Student in Japan

*Asraa Faris Aldoghachi¹, Chizuko Tezuka², Yuji Ozeki¹, Daijiro Yanagisawa¹ (1. Shiga University of Medical Science (Japan), 2. Keio University (Japan))

[SY-96-03]

Studying in Japan: aims and challenges.

Transitioning from Multicultural Roots to a Homogenous Society

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[SY-96-04]

Transforming Challenges into Resilience in Cross-cultural Adaptation among Medical Students in Japan

Discussant: Chizuko Tezuka

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Keywords : international student、adapt to the country's lifestyle、cultural friction

In 2008, the Japanese government formulated the “300,000 International Student Project.” According to a survey by the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), the number of international students in 2023 was 279,274. The number of international students enrolled in medical departments of medical schools is not indicated in this survey. Shiga University of Medical Science currently accepts 33 international students from 8 countries.

Several reports have already been published on the issues faced by international students. Akiko ONISHI discusses the construction of student support services that respond to diversity in her book (2016), and Toshiko OHASHI has published a book on the mental health of international students (2008). These reports give us an idea of the psychological and cultural issues for them and helpful services for them. However, we have not found any reports focusing on international medical school students.

International students need to learn in-depth about their significant fields, learn about the lifestyle of the country where they study, and adapt to life there. Such attempts can be a psychological burden. On the other hand, overcoming challenges can also be an experience that has a positive impact on the lives of international students, such as in terms of learning and growth.

In this symposium, speakers who are currently studying at medical schools in Japan will reflect on their own experiences and how they overcame them. Such autobiographical events as a person involved in the situation may lead to a broader cultural, political, and social meaning and understanding (it could be said that it is an auto-ethnographic attempt). Ultimately, these efforts will clarify the issues Japanese universities and local communities face when accepting and studying with international students and the goals we should challenge.

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Personal and professional challenges of an international psychiatry student in Japan

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Keywords : International student experience、 Cross cultural adaptation、 Academic adjustment、 Resilience

I have been working as a psychiatrist at the National Mental Health Center in Mongolia since graduating from the Mongolian National University of Medical Sciences in 2013. Since October 2022, I have been pursuing my PhD at the Department of Psychiatry, Shiga University of Medical Sciences, Japan. In this presentation, I will share the personal and professional journey I have experienced as an international student adjusting to Japan's academic and social environment. My initial expectations included gaining insights into Japan's healthcare and academic systems, enhancing my academic and clinical skills, fostering personal growth and building connections with Japanese and international colleagues. While the journey has been rewarding, I have also encountered meaningful challenges. The language barrier has limited my participation in clinical activities, as most discussions and departmental communication are conducted in Japanese. Cultural differences, particularly the indirect communication style, initially made it difficult to interpret feedback and social cues during the early stages of my adjustment. Securing housing as a foreign resident also posed difficulties due to limited support and unfamiliar rental conditions. However, these challenges have also provided opportunities for personal and professional development. They have deepened my appreciation for cross-cultural communication, strengthened my resilience, and increased my motivation to contribute to more inclusive academic environments. By sharing my story, I hope to shed light on the international student experience in Japan not only its difficulties, but also its potential for development. With perseverance, openness, and mutual understanding, I believe we can build more supportive and globally minded academic communities.

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[SY-96-02] Beyond Just Research: Navigating Culture, Challenges, and Growth as a Muslim Iraqi Postgraduate Student in Japan

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Keywords : Cross-cultural adaptation、 Host culture、 Challenges、 Identity、 Resilience

Studying abroad is often seen as an academic dream, but over time, it becomes a deeply personal journey of cultural adaptation. As an international neuroscience PhD student from Iraq, where few students pursue higher education in Japan, I faced academic demands, profound cultural contrasts, and a sense of cultural solitude. Navigating a society where emotional restraint, indirect communication, and unspoken social expectations are valued, I found myself facing aspects of Japanese culture that lie beneath the surface. Adapting to such a high-context environment while overcoming language barriers, finding few fellow Arabs/ Iraqis, and managing religious practices like halal dietary restrictions and daily prayers required ongoing negotiation between authenticity and sensitivity.

What initially felt overwhelming gradually became a catalyst for growth, leading to one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. This journey has promoted scientific development, mental and emotional resilience, and a more profound sense of identity. In my presentation, I will reflect on the interplay between cultural norms, personal identity, and adaptation and share strategies that helped me thrive. Through my presentation, I hope to offer a personal lens into the realities of studying abroad in Japan and its transformative potential, especially for those coming from minority backgrounds.

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Transitioning from Multicultural Roots to a Homogenous Society

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Keywords : honne and tatemae、 intercultural sensitivity、 diversity

Studying abroad offers immense opportunities for academic growth, cultural exchange, and personal development. For a student from multicultural and multiracial societies like Malaysia, transitioning to a homogeneous country such as Japan brings a unique set of experiences. Malaysia's rich diversity, laidback lifestyle, and multilingual environment have nurtured in me a strong sense of openness, adaptability, and intercultural sensitivity attributes that enriched my cross-cultural experiences throughout my stay in Japan. As a graduate student, my journey in Japan has involved more than academic exploration especially in a process of cultural adaptation and self-discovery. Japanese social and professional etiquette centered around harmony, formality, and implicit communication presented new social dynamics that initially contrasted with the more relaxed and expressive Malaysian norms. The concept like *honne* and *tatemae* (true feelings vs. public façade) challenged me to balance self-expression with cultural sensitivity. Although there were cultural differences, I did not view my cultural or religious identity as a hindrance. Rather, practicing my beliefs including maintaining halal dietary habits and religious practice were seamlessly integrated into my life in Japan. Despite the challenges, I found strength through community networks, intercultural programmes programs, and moments of mutual understanding. My journey reflects the importance of creating more inclusive environments for international students, especially those navigating religious and cultural differences. Through this presentation, I aim to share insights and strategies that may benefit future students, while also encouraging institutions to consider deeper intercultural support. This personal experience is one of growth, adaptation, and resilience a testimony to the complexities and rewards of studying in Japan as a minority student.

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For more than 20 years, I have worked both in multicultural counseling for international students and in teaching English-based psychoeducational courses such as Japanese psychology and intercultural communication where Japanese and international students learn together at a private university in Tokyo. Hopefully, this background will qualify me to serve as a discussant at this symposium.

Three ambitious and intelligent female students from Mongolia, Malaysia, and Iraq studying in graduate programs of Shiga University of Medical Science are willing to share descriptive and reflective studies of their own complex and challenging experiences of cross-cultural adaptation not only in academic spheres but also in everyday life and, more deeply, in adjusting to the Japanese indirect and less emotionally expressive communication style, which lies at a deeper layer of Edward Hall's (1976) Iceberg Model of Culture.

Drawing upon this background, I will try to discuss their precious insights and workable strategies that they have gained through their successful process of overcoming these challenges and even transforming them into resilience, within a broader theoretical framework of what is essential for better cross-cultural adaptation in terms of helpful attitudes and skills so that participants of this symposium can take away something valuable and applicable to their own intercultural adjustment.

Furthermore, accepting international students implies other but similarly precious challenges for a host university and a host community. Particularly when we are encouraged to learn together through intercultural communication with them, I will discuss a concrete case of providing a welcoming *ibasho* (a place where one feels safe and accepted as one is) for both Japanese and international students, drawing upon my own experience of providing an alternative learning space for them outside of campus.