

SOS JAPAN

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"Let's go out and look for a part time job! Attending class? Who cares? Let's make money!" We often hear this sort of conversation in campus, especially at Waseda. But have you ever thought of people who have to work, even though they are eager to attend class? They are exchange students especially from Asian countries. Today I would like to discuss Asian students issue from the viewpoint of Japan's assistance for Asian countries.

Now Japan is one of the biggest ODA offering countries, ODA stands for Official Development Assistance. Japan offers a large amount of money for Asian countries so that they can build plants, dams and so on, but at the same time they need technology to develop their country. So more and more students come to Japan year after year.

Last year Japan accepted 15,000 foreign exchange students, 85% of them were from Asia and 12,000 of them were self-sponsored, *shihiryugakusei*. Life has been very difficult for them since the value of yen increased. It is easy to recall the incident that a student from Asian starved to death. When I went to 100 ramenya or a cheap noodle shop the other day, I shared a table with students from China. I asked why they came to Japan. They answered at once, "To learn Japan's technology and to experience Japanese life." I was impressed by their enthusiasm. They are eager to study, but they have to endure cheap ramen and spend most of their time on part time job. This is abnormal. They are facing SOS situation here in Japan.

We should help them, otherwise they just go back to their countries with a bad image of Japan. Exchange of people is good for Japan, too because it will bring better mutual understanding.

Well, but I am not saying we should give many privileges to exchange students. What I am saying is that we should improve this abnormal situation in Japan.

In order to do so, today I would like to suggest three points. I call them "SOS suggestions".

The first suggestion is for the Japanese government. "S" is for support. Please support exchange students to a further extent. The scholarship system in Japan is inadequate when compared with Western countries. Besides that, the number of government sponsored students should be increased. It seems to that 3,000 which is the present number, is too small. In this sense I basically agree with Mr. Nakasone's plan of accepting 100,000 exchange students by the 21st century.

The second suggestion is for the big companies. "O" for organize. When the company makes a large profit, organize some foundations just like Rockefeller or Ford instead of "Zaitech", or investing in stocks. It will be a great support for students.

The third suggestion is for you. "S" for speak with a smile. Since most of you are member of ESS. I assume you are interested in talking with people from other countries. So please speak to exchange students. They are waiting to be spoken to. Good communication with local people is the best way to understand the country. Communication is what I expected when I went abroad. When you talk with non-Japanese people, you may feel different, but it is natural because they are from different culture. For smooth communication, a smile will help. That is why McDonald girls smile all over the world.

I hope my "SOS" suggestions will help Asian exchange students studying in Japan and consequently help their countries' development. Exchange students are private diplomats, the bridge between their country and Japan. Helping them is good for both their countries and Japan because we can have better understanding each other. ODA is important but offering only money is not real assistance.