

【研究ノート】

Seeking alternative lifestyles via international exchange

(a report on the Rikkyo-Hallym program in Ogawa, Saitama, & Tokyo)

SATO, Futoshi KITAJIMA, Kenichi KUGA, Atsuki

Introduction

The idea of holding the exchange program was proposed by Joon-Shik Park (Hallym University in Korea) to Kenichi Kitajima (Rikkyo University in Japan) two years ago. Both of them are members of an international research project on social enterprises. Originating in European countries, social enterprises are projects that aim to tackle social problems using market transactions; they have seen remarkable, unique development in Asian countries recently. Park insisted on the importance of launching an Asian student exchange program that (1) highlights social enterprise as a promising grassroots community revitalization alternative against the recent trend of the global economy that emphasizes economic growth more than anything else and (2) enables students to build international networks. Agreeing with this suggestion, Kitajima proposed starting it in Japan first and shared this idea with Atsuki Kuga (Rikkyo University in Japan), his colleague who conducts community revitalization activities in Japanese rural areas. Kuga became interested and gave a short presentation about his community revitalization initiatives in rural Ogawa at an international conference held in Rikkyo University on the 19th of February 2017, with Park and Kitajima participating as well. The three of them then proceeded to create this program that was held in Ogawa (Saitama Prefecture), Toshima, Shinjuku and Itabashi (Tokyo Metropolis) from the 22nd to the 26th of December 2017.

The program aims are:

- 1) promotion of international exchange between Korean and Japanese students;
- 2) cultivation of a better understanding of the approaches for sustainable living in Japan in both rural and urban areas; and
- 3) opportunities for the participants to start sustainable living initiatives voluntarily and, if possible, build communities with a concrete image in mind.

In order to accomplish these goals, three main activities were set up:

- 1) site visits to key persons and organizations involved in grassroots community revitalization activities;

- 2) field activities carried out alongside local people; and
- 3) sharing of thoughts, ideas, and experiences in discussions.

The report is composed of the following sections: Section 1: on-site activities conducted on the first and third days, Section 2: organic farmer and multi-activist Futoshi Sato's thoughts on Day 2, Section 3: Kitajima's account on the itinerary in Tokyo, Section 4: feedback, achievements and issues, Appendix: program schedule.

I . Activities on Day 1 and Day 3

During the activities held in Ogawa, the participants stayed in a 118-year-old renovated house so that they could experience being in an actual community revitalization effort instead of staying in a hotel that offers more comfortable lodging. Korean students (eight females and four males) arrived there at 7 p.m. on the 22nd of December. The Japanese participants who were already there at 6 p.m. prepared supper with Mr. Takada, a Tokyo publishing company owner and the old house's manager/program director who holds events in the place. By having the participants prepare their own food, they are considered to be members who formed the program rather than mere consumers of a service, as contrasted with usual guesthouses wherein everything is provided for. We also had asked them to clean the rooms by themselves for the same reason. The participants were able to get a lodging fee discount as an extra benefit.

We made a pot dish of organic vegetables harvested by local farmers. The participants seemed to enjoy not only the meal itself but also the preparation, deepening a friendship during the process.



Eating a pot dish together

The third day revolved around several trips. The first one is a visit to a town forest that is contractually managed by a local environmental organization called Satoyama-club. Mr. Wako, one of its founding members and a licensed forestry instructor capable of teaching people about

the forest, gave us a brief explanation about their history, purpose and main activities. He explained that Japan is a country rich in timber resources: two third of its national land is forested, and around half of it is natural while the rest is afforested. However, these places are under threat and being devastated; due to the fall in timber prices, tracts of afforested land have been abandoned. Thirteen years ago, Satoyama-club started to make use of them to educate children as well as communicate their importance to the local people. They thin out the growth, plant mushrooms, and make tree houses in the forest owned by the town. While walking around the area, he explained how to distinguish a well-cared forest from a devastated one.



Hirayama's talk at Tamarindo

Old but still-usable buildings and the venue for our lunch were our next destination. We had lunch at a traditional Japanese restaurant that we had chosen not because of its quality meals but also its attractively decorated premises. Mr. Hirayama, the resource person of the next activity and one of Tamarindo's founding members, provided historical and cultural background of the premises. Afterwards, we visited Tamarindo, a local NPO office renting a renovated old house built in the early years of the Taisho era (1920s). The NPO is carrying out various renovation-reuse housing projects of historically valuable old houses abundant in the town. Mr. Hirayama identified depopulation as the main cause of house abandonment, an accelerating trend over the past decade. Unoccupied houses spoil the landscape, and to cope with this public matter, this organization provides activities for local residents in cooperation with the local town office that in turn supplies information about unoccupied houses for those who want to move to this town. One example is the "Treasure Hunting to Rediscover Gems in the Town" program wherein participants are treated to a tour wherein a guide who talks about the old houses' historical backgrounds and cultural significance. After the presentation, we visited several renovated premises near their office. The second half in the afternoon had the Korean and Japanese students talk about what they study every day in their universities,

an exchange of presentations with the titles “Aging and Low Fertility Problems In Korean Society”, “Job and Income Creation for the Elderly in Korea”, “LGBT Issues in Japan”, and “Job Hunting Activities of Japanese Students”.



Japanese and Korean students giving presentations

II . Activities on Day 2: Sato's Thoughts

I was honored to host a day's activities for this student exchange and study program. In this chapter, I would like to summarize the day's activities by covering the theme of the day, objectives, actual activities, and evaluations. We had 12 Korean students and 18 Japanese students for the activities for the day.

1. Theme and objectives of the day

1) Theme:

What is a prosperous life?

2) Why this theme?

This exchange program intended to give Japanese and Korean students opportunities to exchange opinions on the issues related to community revitalization and sustainable living. In community revitalization or in any other development project, setting a clear target is one of the most important first steps. Prosperous life, as it is conventionally measured in GDP for example, is one of the most sought targets for development including community revitalization. Definition of the term “prosperous life” or “prosperity” affects dramatically how we deal with the issues, thus this theme becomes very relevant for the program.

3) Objectives and considerations

There were four objectives and various considerations in each objective as explained below.

- ① Letting students get to know each other and create a friendly and secure atmosphere for discussions. In a program where participants are expected to have exchange of opinions, it is

vital to create sense of trust and friendly atmosphere at the beginning.

- ② Organizing activities meaningful enough but at the same time manageable for the participants with their level of English fluency. In international student exchange programs, the issue of language level discrepancy is a huge and very difficult one to handle. If the contents are too easy, the participants will not enjoy, but on the other hand if they require high level of English fluency, many of the participants will be left behind in discussions. Assessing the participants' English level is difficult without proper data, but with previous experiences with some of the Japanese students who were to participate in the program, the author of the chapter organized the program for people with English level around TOEIC points 400 to 500, or upper A2 to lower B1 in CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) scale. For this reason, the theme was set to let participants engage in conversations with relatively daily words and terms instead of more academic and technical terms.
- ③ Letting students have fresh and relatively new ideas and real examples on alternative lifestyles. One of the main things that the author of the chapter would be able to contribute in the program as a freelancer/part time farmer was to let students know about an example of rather unique lifestyle and stories behind it. Some concrete data and arguments on the shortcomings of GDP in measuring prosperity and some alternatives for it were presented as well.
- ④ Letting students start exploring and developing their own ideas for community revitalization projects and sustainable living.

With all these points listed above, the day's activities tried to let students start working on real issues of community revitalization and sustainable living. The day's activities would also prepare the students for their visit to different projects in the following days by opening their perspectives in the issues of community and development.

2. Activities

1) Farm visit

This visit was placed in the first part of the day's activity to give real sense of what was going to be talked about in presentations. Because of time limitations, original idea of doing some farm work was omitted. The participants visited the winter farm with relatively few crops but with quizzes and some information on issues around farming such as climate change and animal intrusions.

2) Icebreaking game: What's in common?

This was organized to achieve the first objective of the day; to create a suitable atmosphere of

trust and friendship. The participants were instructed to approach to as many peers of different nationality as possible and ask different questions to find things that both had in common such as hobbies, pets, interests etc. and at the same time to remember the persons' names.



Japanese and Korean students engage in an icebreaking activity

3) Talk 1: An example of alternative lifestyle: self-sufficient farmer freelancer

This talk was the author of the chapter's self-introduction on current life and life history. The real example of an alternative lifestyle would help students to recognize that they were talking about something real when they discuss issues such as prosperity and its measurement tools later.

4) Discussion 1: What do I need to feel happy?

The discussion was organized to be done in small groups and in the way that students could talk about real issues but with relatively common terms and expressions so that they get to know each other better and to prepare them for later discussion on more concrete and more technical issues on prosperity. The discussion about happiness was done under the condition that the person had basic human needs fulfilled. Participants were asked to list five elements for happiness individually before sharing them with their group mates and choose top five among them. They were asked to be specific in naming what they need, for example numbers, specific brands or things.

As a preparation for better exchange of opinions and participation, we agreed on a set of ground rules for the discussion. They were;

- ① Give everyone chance to speak.
- ② Participation of everyone is the most important.
- ③ Wait until the person before you finishes his or her comments before starting to talk.

5) Lunch

This catered lunch was not only to fill the hungry stomach of the youths but was also a part

of their learning experience. The lunch was prepared by wife of a local organic farmer with whom the author of the chapter shares works and farm tools in daily life. The person, wife of the farmer, explained about the food, which was vegetarian curry, as well as about the mutual support organic farmers in the area enjoyed.



Lunch time!

6) Talk 2: Alternative to GDP - Happy Planet Index as an example

The second talk was designed to let students learn about more concrete data and arguments with more academic approach. It explained what GDP was, how governments were utilizing it as a tool to measure prosperity, and what side effects it had by adding even socially negative use of money as plus in the calculation. The talk then introduced alternatives to GDP as indexes for development projects. It introduced the Happy Planet Index to show how we could and needed to consider resource efficiency when we talk about prosperity.

7) Discussion 2: Let's make creative indexes to measure prosperity!

This second set of discussions gave further opportunities for the students to mingle and exchange opinions in a bit more academic and group work situations. At the same time it was intended to have some fun features by inviting the students to be very creative in designing their own indexes. This discussion was also done in small groups where each member had to present ideas and defend them in discussion to finally create an index of up to 20 elements for the group. The elements could be used to add, deduct, divide or multiply in an equation to form an index.



Presentation time after discussion

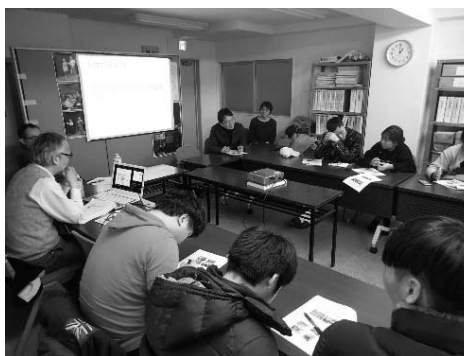
3. Evaluations and ideas

First of all, it should be mentioned that the students were much more active than the author of the chapter expected, and that helped a lot in achieving the goals for the day's activities. That being said, the icebreaking activity contributed a lot in creating friendly and secure atmosphere to freely express one's opinions in discussions. The assumption of students' English level was not far off even though there were people outside of the range both below and above. Having some data on students' English level would help in better designing activities, but it won't be realistic to assume that we can have a homogeneous group in these exchange programs. The information on GDP and the Happy Planet Index seemed to be new for the students and therefore accomplished the objective 3), together with personal example of alternative lifestyle. The majority of the students participated in discussions very actively, and the discussions helped the students from two countries to get to know each other and create friendship. One reflection about the topics for discussion would be that we could give a bit more controversial ones so that they had even hotter discussions beyond friendly exchange of ideas.

III. Activities on Day 4: Kitajima's Thoughts

On the fourth day, we have visited the head office of Tokyo seniors' co-op ("Koreikyo") at Toshima city in Tokyo, where the chair Koji Tajiri gave us a lecture about Tokyo "Koreikyo", as follows.

Tokyo Koreikyo was established in 1996 with a slogan "well-being, work and fulfilling life, with our own hands" with a strong support of "Center Jigyodan", i.e. business enterprises directly controlled by National Council of "Jigyodans", the predecessor of Japan Workers' Cooperative Union (JWCU).



Tajiri speaking in the head office

In fact, an idea of “Koreikyo” was proposed for the first time in 1987, and had been promoted since the national assembly in 1990 by National Council of “Jigyodans”. It’s about “a co-operative of, by and for senior citizens and beyond”. More precisely it was designed as a self-help or mutual help organization for the senior citizens with the collaboration of organizations and/or individuals in favor of caring community.

But in face of a slow reaction from local “Jigyodans”, Center Jigyodan launched the first “Koreikyo” in 1995 in order to stimulate and accelerate the movement at the local level. As the foundation of Tokyo Koreikyo shows, this direct intervention of Center Jigyodan has succeeded. And many of “Koreikyos” successively founded were incorporated as consumer co-operatives as was Tokyo Koreikyo, to be qualified as a service provider under the Long Term Care Insurance System (LTCI) enforced in 2000. In 2001, 17 incorporated Koreikyos among 22 established a coordinating body named Japan Older Person’s Co-operative Union.

At the beginning most of the members of Tokyo Koreikyo belonged to age groups between 50s and 70s and the majority of the members were male. And the main fields of activities consisted in job creation and cultural activities, especially the former. Actually Koreikyo was promoted just after a National Council’s decision to reorganize “Jigyodan” from enterprise managed by labor union to workers co-operative. Then even though Koreikyo was characterized as mutual help organization, accent was put on the side of not service beneficiary but provider.

However five years later this structure has changed drastically. Because of joining into the LTCI services, main activities has changed to care services as well as cultural activities, on the contrary activities for job creation have stagnated. In relation to this structural change of field, the female members have increased to become a majority.

Activities carried out by Tokyo Koreikyo are the following: 1) a variety of cultural activities, for instance choral society for Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, fashion show for the elderly etc.; 2) organizing of training course for care workers; 3) provision of care services under the LTCI; 4)

management of 6 elderly welfare facilities entrusted by districts. As to 3) care services, Tokyo Koreikyo have as its own facilities 2 day care centers and 7 Home-helper stations. Provision of these care services was made possible by the human and financial resources procured by 2) implementation of fee-charging training course for care workers.

Lecture of the chair Tajiri was concluded by this remark: we started our activities as “a co-operative of, by and for senior citizens”, i.e. mutual help organization, but as soon as we began to provide care services within the LTCI System, we were obliged to take on younger generations than members as professional service workers. Nowadays there is a variety of age group in our organization.

After the visit of head office, we visited also one of its day-care center “Fujimi” in Itabashi city and one of its entrusted elderly welfare facilities “Yamabuki-cho chiiki-koryukan” in Shinjyuku city.



Fujimi, a day care center

It seems to me that Koreikyo is now reaching identity crisis in two senses. In the phase of project Koreikyo was supposed to be a mutual help organization for the senior citizens. We could consider it as a so called social co-operative in terms of multi stake-holder type. But over time, relying more and more on the “jobs created within the institution” (Tajiri), Koreikyo had to accept younger generation as care workers in consideration of quality of service on one hand, and on the other this trend means a replacement of volunteers or “paid volunteers” by professionals, which will result in the change of basic character of organization, i.e. from mutual help type to service provider type. This change of organizational character could be an important research question to tackle.

Unfortunately we had no time to discuss about the experiences of Koreikyo, especially its significance and limits in our student exchange program. In order to develop our educational project towards this direction, it will need to include the ex-ante lectures in the program, which

we couldn't realize this time.

IV. Feedback, Achievements, and Issues

A feedback questionnaire that included the following eight questions was filled out by Korean participants:

1. Which initiative is the most interesting to you?
2. Which initiative is the most useful to you?
3. How happy are you with the meals?
4. What do you feel about the old house as our lodging facility?
5. Are you satisfied with the dormitory as our lodging facility?
6. In general, are you satisfied with the program?
7. Please give your honest evaluation of the program.
8. How could this program be improved, in your opinion?

For the questions 1 to 2, we asked to choose one activity out of the following six options (① "Day2: Sato-led activities", ② "Day3: Satoyama-club", ③ "Day3: Tamarindo", ④ "Day3: presentation exchanges", ⑤ "Day4: civil society organizations in Tokyo", and ⑥ "Others"), for questions 3 to 6, the meals, accommodations and the program as a whole were assessed from a scale of 1 to 7 ("1" very dissatisfied, "7" very satisfied); and for questions 7 and 8, they were free to write their thoughts down.

According to their answers, the most interesting initiatives for the Korean students were the Sato-led activities on the second day and the presentation exchanges on the third day, and the most useful one the visit to civil organizations on the fourth day. The average satisfaction level for the meals was 4.4 while the stay at the old house was 3.7: 5 of the 12 participants appreciated the place, but all the participants thought the room was uncomfortable to sleep in because it was too cold at nights. While most of the Korean participants enjoyed the meals, 3 students frankly expressed that they did not like the taste and the portions were not enough. The average satisfaction level for the program as a whole was 5.0.

Given the participants' relatively high satisfaction ratings shown in the feedback forms, it can be said that the first launch of this program was successful as the following positive observations suggest:

- 1) Close friendships among participants were fostered despite the language barrier: an unexpected achievement. The Japanese participants' English level was not so high, so we were slightly concerned that the Japanese and Korean participants would not be able to communicate deeply, and consequently the program might end up being superficial. However, the worry was unnecessary, as the young Japanese and Korean participants were

able to open up to each other right away. The icebreaker workshop conducted by Sato on the second day seemed to contribute a lot to foster this friendly atmosphere.

- 2) Staying in the old house was a precious experience for the participants, even though they complained that the house was extremely cold, because they were able to receive the kindness of local people that cannot be purchased by money. Worrying that the heating equipment was not enough, the townsfolk lent stoves and sleeping bags free of charge. Mr. Hans Nagl, one of the locals who moved to the town last spring from the United States, gave useful advice; he even put life into the Christmas party by playing the accordion while his daughter Shiori danced.



Hans and his daughter Shiori

- 3) The students were able to reexamine their current lifestyle that provides a convenient, comfortable, safe, standard of living but unsustainable and unfulfilling in the end. Encounters and engagements with the locals who chose an alternative lifestyle empowered them to review their ideas about happiness, wealth, and well-being.

Nevertheless, various issues were noticeable:

- 1) Even though the participants were reminded to “clean-as-you-go” verbally and in writing, the rooms of the old house had to be cleaned up by the landlord and the manager/program director respectively, after we left. These days, renovating unoccupied houses and utilizing them as lodging facilities is considered a promising way to revitalize communities in Japan. We decided to follow this trend and asked Ms. Iwata and Mr. Tanaka to lend their old private house as a lodging facility for our visitors: both readily accepted our request. They still strongly urged us to remind everyone that the house was not a hotel and people would have to help prepare meals, and keep the rooms and bathrooms tidy at all times and before leaving. However, this message did not clearly reach our guests.
- 2) Only 2-3 Japanese students were able to stay in the old house with the Korean students.

Although it is understandable that the Japanese students were not available during the project implementation period at the end of the year, including Christmas Day, it was regrettable that they were not able to spend a lot of time living together under the same roof with their Korean counterparts. Choose a more convenient period should be considered next time.

- 3) The students' lack of preparation should be noted. Given the organizers' own lack of experience since this is the first project of its kind, we were not able to provide reading materials that could have enabled the participants to understand the project's key concepts. Learning historical backgrounds, the current situation, and the main issues of community revitalization would certainly make the participants find the program more fruitful and fulfilling.

These three issues teach us that sharing the objectives of the program with all the participants by linking them to the activities is crucial. If the organizers had informed the participants more clearly that they would stay in a private house in order to show them community revitalization in action, then they could have engaged in the housework more actively. In preparing for their stay, we should have provided the participants with documents about the recent trends, possibilities, and issues in using private houses as lodging facilities so that a deeper understanding of their contributions would be attained. We learned that it is not enough to inform participants of the objectives unilaterally: involved dialogue is key. In addition, having more Japanese students with them would have made interactions more lively.

We had set out to achieve three program aims:

- 1) promoting international exchange,
- 2) learning sustainable living from practices in Japan, and
- 3) providing opportunities for the participants to start sustainable living.

Although we were able to achieve the first goal, it must be said that there are many points for improvement in order to say we had been successful in reaching the other two. Professor Park gave feedback as well. He mentioned that giving the students more opportunities to engage in field work and conduct seminars on campus would have imparted the value of learning about the context of local people living their lives and Japanese students studying in the university. Time constraints had prevented us from expanding the activities. Next time, we will improve our program by taking his advice and other lessons learned into account.

Conclusion

East Asian countries are facing similar issues: aging populations, depopulation in rural areas, and deterioration of communities. In order to address these problems, revitalizing the community

by promoting grassroots campaigns conducted by local people is indispensable. European countries have seen people develop various citizen-based activities; Scholars, activists, and ordinary people in Asian countries have learned a lot from their achievements. Still, it is high time that Asians find their own way based on their own historical, cultural backgrounds, and values.

It is the young generation who would create more sustainable communities based on new lifestyles to replace apparently unsustainable practices dominant in modern capitalist societies. International exchange among Asian youths would contribute in attaining this goal. Instead of studying practices already done in Europe, they could learn more actively from their own trial-and-error attempts since their mentalities have so much in common. We would be so happy if our new project becomes the first step towards inspiring the first batch of young participants.

The organizers would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Korean and Japanese students for their active participation, to Professor Park for his considerate cooperation, and to the local people for their cordial welcome and contributions.

Appendix: Whole Program Schedule

DAY1 December 22nd, Friday

14:25 arrival at Haneda (NH0864, ANA)
 Around 19:10 arrival at Ogawa station
 (Mr. Mouri brought the Korean participants' bags to the lodging facility using his pick-up truck)
 19:30 arrival at the lodging facility
 20:00-21:00 supper
 21:00-22:30 bath time (Kawarano-yu: a hot spring nearby the lodge)
 23:00 bedtime

DAY2 December 23rd, Saturday

07:30 wake up time
 08:00-08:45 breakfast
 09:00-09:20 a lecture by F. Sato
 09:30 leaving the old house
 09:44 taking the bus
 10:00 farm visit
 11:00 self-introduction (icebreaking workshop)
 11:30 talk (F. Sato: his alternative way of living)
 12:00 lunch + Q & A
 13:00 workshop ("If my basic needs are already met, what else can make me happier?")
 13:45 group presentations based on workshop
 14:00 break
 14:15 talk (F. Sato "Alternative to GDP: the Happy Planet Index as an example")
 14:45 workshop ("create your own well-being index")
 15:30 group presentations based on workshop
 15:45 tea break
 16:00 feedback from faculty members

17:05 back to the lodging facility
17:30-18:40 shower
19:00-21:00 dinner (OOTA Horumon: an izakaya restaurant popular among common folk)
21:00-22:00 social gathering (Transit: bar run by an organic farmer)
23:00 bedtime

DAY3 December 24th, Saturday

08:00 wake-up time
08:30-09:15 breakfast
09:30 field activity + talk (Satoyama-Club)
12:00 lunch (Fukusuke: an old Japanese-style restaurant)
13:10-14:30 Tamarindo: talk (Masashi Hirayama: community revitalization via renovating abandoned houses) + field trip to nearby renovated houses
15:00-16:30 presentations: Korean and Japanese students ("What we are usually studying in our universities")
17:00-18:20 bath time (Kawarano-yu)
18:30 preparation for dinner
19:00 dinner
20:00 free time
23:00 bedtime

DAY4 December 25th, Monday

07:30 wake-up time
08:00-08:45 breakfast
08:45-09:15 housecleaning
09:20 leaving the old house
09:30-17:00 field trips to various care facilities (Koreikyō: a civil society organization engaged in activities concerning the elderly care, job creation, and life enrichment)
17:00 arrival at dormitory Farewell party

DAY5 December 26th, Tuesday

08:00 wake up time
08:30-09:15 breakfast
09:15 free time (sightseeing in Tokyo)
20:00 flight back to Korea