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**International Students' Perceptions of their Academic and Non-Academic  
Experiences at Shiga University, Faculty of Economics:  
The results of 2002 exploratory survey**

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**December 2004**

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**International Students' Perceptions of their Academic and Non-Academic Experiences at  
Shiga University, Faculty of Economics: The results of 2002 exploratory survey**

**by**

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the results of a small survey concerning international students' perceptions of their academic and non-academic experiences at Shiga University's Faculty of Economics in Japan. It explores the general issues that face international students and considers several dimensions, such as the students' reasons for studying in Japan, university assistance, financial issues, Japanese language ability, classroom experience, accommodation issues, part-time employment, and friendships. The results of the survey conclude that the academic experiences of the students highlight deficiencies in the Japanese higher education system concerning international students, such as inadequate academic language course provision; whereas the students' non-academic experiences raise the wider issues of accommodation, cultural adjustment and the cost of living in Japan.

**Keywords and phrases:** Japan, higher education, university, international students, foreign students, student perceptions

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*“Many foreign students criticize Japan a lot as well as dislike it after staying here for some time and in a way, the Monbushō don’t know how to deal with it. I believe that for international diplomacy, the program of offering scholarships to foreigners is done with a political aim of promoting closeness to the country that the students come from. They will go back home, knowing, liking and respecting the country (Japan) which has offered them this great opportunity to study. Those students have great chances of becoming someone important in their country, and if they like Japan, they would be a great tie to Japan as well as be beneficial to it in some way. Unfortunately, the way it is now, it has the opposite effect. From abroad, Japan has a great image, but the students go home knowing exactly what are weaknesses of Japan and the Japanese.”*

## **1. Introduction**

The plan to host 100,000 international students in Japan by the year 2000 was first proposed by the government in 1983 in the “Proposal on the Policy on Foreign Students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. This was followed by another government report in 1984 on the “Development of the Policy on Foreign Students in the 21st Century”. These proposals were part of the wider higher educational reform process, which concerned the internationalization of Japanese higher education. (Umakoshi, 1997)

In 1999, a further government report on the “Discussion on the Policy on Foreign Students” called for the ‘100,000 Foreign Students Plan’ to be maintained and this was confirmed in 2000 at the first meeting of G-8<sup>1</sup> Education Ministers. (National Science Foundation Tokyo, 2002) In 2000, the proportion of international students studying at Japanese universities out of the total Japanese student population was 2.2 per cent, in comparison to the ratios of the international student population in the United States of America (USA) and United Kingdom (UK), which stood at 6.4 per cent and 17.8 per cent respectively. (National Science Foundation Tokyo, 2002) The maintenance of the ‘Foreign Students Plan’ was a response aimed at balancing the disproportion between the

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<sup>1</sup>G-8 is a group consisting of the eight heads of state or government of the major industrial democracies (France, the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan, Italy, Canada, and Russia). The group meets annually to deal with the major economic and political issues facing their domestic societies and the international community as a whole.

low numbers of international students studying in Japan in comparison with other G-8 nations.

In 2002, the international student population in Japan increased by 21.2 per cent from the previous year, to stand at 95,550. (National Science Foundation Tokyo, 2002) Although this figure fell short of the government's plan to host 100,000 international students by the year 2000, it was nevertheless a significant increase in numbers.

This paper presents the results of a small survey of the academic and non-academic experiences of international students at the Faculty of Economics at Shiga University in 2002. Shiga University is a medium-sized, national university and it has the largest Faculty of Economics in Japan. Since the late nineties, its international student population has steadily increased because of two main factors. Firstly, international students maintain a continuing interest in studying Japanese economic processes and business culture. Secondly, the university's own policies of internationalization, which consist of establishing links with other universities outside of Japan on an institutional level, as well as personal networking of faculty members with respect to their individual international research projects.

In 2002, the international student population at Shiga University was 157, and at the Faculty of Economics in particular, it was 121. In comparison to other well-known and large Japanese national universities, the international student population at Shiga University was relatively small. In 2000, the University of Tokyo had 2000 international students, which was the highest number of international students in Japan at one university. Nagoya University had 1,130 international students and was ranked fifth, while Hitotsubashi University had 524 students and was ranked twenty-eighth. (National Science Foundation Tokyo, 2002) However, it is suggested that given its medium size, Shiga University's international student numbers are fairly commensurate with other national universities of similar status.

The survey was distributed to all international students at the Faculty of Economics in November 2002 and was written in both Japanese and English. Students could respond in either or both languages. Forty-six students participated in the research. Informal discussions also took place with a number of international students and some of their comments have also been included. The aim of the research was to gain an overview into

some of the general experiences of international students at the Faculty of Economics at Shiga University.

## **The results of the survey**

### **2. Students' background**

#### a) Gender

National statistics showed that there were almost equal numbers of male (51.8 per cent) and female (48.2 per cent) international students in Japan in 2002. (National Science Foundation Tokyo, 2002) This was also reflected at Shiga University where 54.7 per cent of international students were male and 45.3 per cent were female. Specifically, at the Faculty of Economics, there were 57.8 per cent of male international students and 42.2 per cent of female. The higher ratio of males to females could be accounted for by the perception that Economics is still considered a more “male” subject and therefore, has a tendency to attract fewer female students. The results of the survey found a higher participation rate among females in comparison to males; 61.4 per cent were female and 38.5 per cent were male.

#### b) Age

The age breakdown of the student-participants showed that 51.9 per cent were between 24 - 30 years old, 17.6 per cent were between 31 - 40 years old, and 22.7 were in the younger age group of 18 - 23 years old.

#### c) Previous occupational status

The students were asked about their previous occupation before coming to Japan to study. The results found that 52.3 per cent stated they had been students before coming to Japan, while 38.6 per cent said that they were employed. Only 4.5 per cent said they were unemployed and a further 4.5 per cent said they were employment trainees.

The occupations in which students stated they were engaged included working as a teacher, a civil servant, a translator or language guide, a company employee, an accountant, a lawyer, a researcher, and/or sales person.

#### d) Country of Origin

In 2002, 92.8 per cent of all international students in Japan were from Asia, 4.2 per cent were from North America and Europe, 1.0 per cent were from Central and South America, and 0.9 per cent were from the Africa. It should be noted that 82.3 per cent of all international students in Japan specifically came from China (61.3 per cent), Korea (16.6 per cent), and Taiwan (4.5 per cent). (National Science Foundation Tokyo, 2002)

In 2002, the overwhelming majority of international students at the Faculty of Economics at Shiga University came from China (79.3 per cent), the second largest group of students came from Taiwan (5.8 per cent), while the third largest group of students came from Korea (2.5 per cent) and Malaysia (2.5 per cent), both of which had equal numbers of students. Other students came from a variety of other Asian countries, as well as from Mexico, Brazil, Russia, and Senegal.

The survey results found that 68.2 per cent of student-participants were from China, 9.1 per cent were from Taiwan, 9.1 per cent were from the Latin American region, 9.1 were from the Indian Sub-continent region (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh), and 4.5 per cent were from the South East Asian region.

#### e) Single or accompanied students

International students generally come to Japan on their own to study, although a minority of graduate students are accompanied by their family members, namely spouses and/or children. The results of the survey showed that 69.6 per cent of students stated they came to Japan on their own, whereas 19.5 per cent stated they came with a partner/spouse, children and/or other family dependents. A further 10.9 per cent said they came to Japan with a friend, but that they were financially independent of each other.

#### f) Financial issues

In 2002, 8,419 international students received Japanese government scholarships, while 67,664 were privately funded. (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2003) The survey results showed that 68.2 per cent of students stated they were self-funding students and it should be noted that 93.3 per cent of these students were from China. The

results also found that the remaining 31.8 per cent of students received scholarships of some kind; 15.9 per cent of those students received *Monbukagakushō* scholarships, 11.4 per cent received other Japanese scholarships, 2.3 per cent received scholarships from their home countries, and 2.3 per cent stated they simply received 'other scholarships'. Of the students who received scholarships, 75.8 per cent stated they had not received any other funding prior to their arrival in Japan, whereas 24.2 per cent said they had received some financial assistance from their parents, spouse, or from their own savings, which included monies from their previous employment. The majority of these students (72.2 per cent) stated that this advance money was sufficient for them to live on before receiving their scholarship stipends; only 27.3 per cent said it was not sufficient.

*"I bought one thousand dollars with me from my country and after coming here I got advance money. I was glad that I came with money before."*

*"I had to use my savings and the aid of my parents in the beginning."*

*"I was self-funded by savings from my part-time job."*

Japan is noted for its high cost of living, particularly in comparison with other Asian countries. Therefore, students were asked if they had received any information about the cost of living in Japan prior to their arrival in Japan. The results found that 74.4 per cent of students stated they had received such information, whereas 27.3 per cent said they had not. When the students were asked about the sources of their information, 51.5 per cent stated their information came from individuals in their home countries who had previously lived in Japan, 15.6 per cent said they found the information themselves from the internet or library, 11.6 per cent said the information came from the Japanese Embassy, 8.6 per cent stated the *Monbukagakushō*, and 8.6 per cent said other organizations in their home country. Therefore, most students gained their information about the cost of living in Japan from searching the internet or from other informal sources, such as individuals who had previously lived in Japan.

It would be expected that individuals who were going to study in another country would do much of the research themselves concerning the new environment in which they would be living. However, official organizations which appeared to supply little

information regarding such matters could perhaps provide international students with more non-academic information in this respect.

g) Undergraduate or graduate programmes

In 2002, 32.6 per cent of all international students in Japan were studying in the Social Science field. (National Science Foundation Tokyo, 2002) Further, 53,845 international students were on undergraduate programmes and 26,825 were on graduate programmes. (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2003)

Generally, the Faculty of Economics at Shiga University attracts more graduate international students than undergraduate students. In 2002, 35.5 per cent of its international students were on undergraduate programmes, while 62.8 per cent were on graduate programmes, the small minority of 1.6 students were categorised as ‘special students’ on pre-entrance to undergraduate or graduate programmes.

The results of the survey found that 56.8 per cent of students were on graduate programmes (Masters, PhD, research), 38.5 per cent of students were on the undergraduate programme, and 4.6 per cent of students were on ‘pre-entrance’ programmes to either undergraduate or graduate programmes at Shiga University.

The students confirmed that most of the programmes were at least two years long as in the Masters programmes or three or more years long (undergraduate and/or PhD). The majority of students also noted that they began their programmes at the beginning of the academic year in April (92.3 per cent); only a minority (6.8 per cent) began their programmes in October at the beginning of the second semester.

### **3. Preparation for life in Japan**

*“The thing I enjoyed the most about Japan in the beginning was when I passed the entrance examination for Shiga University.”*

*“At first, on arrival at Japan, since it maybe due to my ignorance of Japanese language, I thought that Japanese people were cold. But recently, being accustomed, I have found there are so many good persons here.”*



a) Previous visits to Japan, courses taken on Japanese culture

Students were asked a number of questions concerning how they prepared for life as international students in Japan. Firstly, it should be noted that 72.2 per cent of the students stated they had never been to Japan before, whereas 13.6 per cent had visited on vacation, 6.8 per cent came for work-related purposes, 4.5 per cent stated 'other reasons', and 2.3 per cent had previously studied in Japan.

*"I gathered all the information on my own."*

Students were asked if they had ever taken a course on Japanese culture or one which prepared them for life in Japan. Over one third of students (38.6 per cent) said they had taken a Japanese culture course prior to arrival, whereas 61.1 per cent had not taken any such course.

*"I was the first person from my country to come to Shiga University so I couldn't ask anybody how life would really be for me."*

Students were further asked if they had participated in any meeting with current or past international students at Shiga University from their home country where they could ask their advice and information about being an international student at this university. A majority of students (65.9 per cent) had participated in such a meeting. However, 34.1 per cent did not have such a meeting, in part because in some situations, they had been the first person from their country to attend Shiga University. Three quarters of students (75.0 per cent) stated they thought that this meeting was helpful to them as new students, 11.4 per cent said it was "maybe" helpful, 6.8 said they did not know if it was helpful, while 6.8 per cent said it was not helpful at all.

b) Japanese Language preparation

Language ability is a dominant issue for international students. Previous research showed that many students on Japanese government scholarships have never studied Japanese

before and only when they attended the mandatory language course in Japan did they begin to learn Japanese. (Lee-Cunin, 2004)

Students were asked their first language and this correlated with the results of their home countries, 76.7 per cent stated Chinese was their first language, while 9.4 per cent said Spanish or Portuguese, 7.0 per cent said Bengali, 2.3 per cent said Taiwanese, 2.3 per cent said Malayan, and 2.3 per cent said Sinhara.

Students were then asked about their Japanese language ability. A large number of students (70.5 per cent) stated they had studied Japanese in their home country, confirming a prior interest in Japan, whereas 29.5 per cent said that they had not studied Japanese before. Further, on arrival in Japan, 71.4 per cent of students stated they took a Japanese language course; this figure included those students who had previously studied Japanese in their home countries. Only 28.6 per cent of students said they did not take a language course when they arrived in Japan.

In general, some students from China study Japanese prior to their arrival in Japan. However, the majority come to Japan to study Japanese at private language schools on courses that last from six months to a year. A significant proportion of them prepare for the Japanese university entrance examinations at undergraduate or graduate level while studying Japanese. (Otake, 2004) It appeared that many Chinese students at Shiga University had also adopted this route. The results showed 43.8 per cent of students stated their Japanese language course was more than one year long, 25.0 per cent said it lasted one year, and 25.0 said their course was only six months long. Further, 45.7 per cent of students stated taking a six-month language course on arrival in Japan was either part of the *Monbukagakushō* scholarship requirements or part of the university's requirements. However, 54.3 per cent of students said that their language course was not linked to any requirement and this figure was largely represented by those students who had studied at language schools prior to entering Shiga University.

The students were asked to give their impressions on their language classes. Their comments were largely divided into two categories: comments from students who studied at private language schools before entering Shiga University and comments from students who took the language programme at designated universities in connection with either the *Monbukagakushō* or other scholarship requirement. In the case of *Monbukagakushō*

scholarship students at Shiga University, the designated universities for their language courses were one of the following three: Osaka University for Foreign Studies, Kyoto University or Nagoya University.

Overall, the majority of the students' comments were positive with respect to their language classes. Students stated they learned much from their 'kind and helpful' teachers. However, it should be noted that the very positive comments tended to come from students who had studied at private language schools and who were often paying expensive school fees. Therefore, the teaching service they received tended to be very good. It should be noted that many private language schools in Japan catered particularly for Chinese students. (Otake, 2004)

*"As expected, I thought how much better than Chinese teachers the Japanese language teachers were."*

*"Teachers were kind and 99% of classmates were Chinese."*

In previous research on international students in Japan, *Monbukagakushō* students were noted to be more critical of their mandatory language classes at university. (Lee-Cunin, 2004a) This was also reflected in this survey where students who attended the language courses in connection with a Japanese scholarship complained of inappropriate teaching styles, such as the 'cramming method' and the rapid rate at which the course proceeded.

*"It was difficult in the beginning to learn the grammar and Kanji, but the classes were very fun and interesting, I really enjoyed learning Japanese with many other foreign students enrolled in the same scholarship program."*

*"The way to teach in Japanese class is not too active. I felt strongly this cramming style of education in it. I don't quite agree with it in learning language."*

*"Too much information in too short time and I'm too tired, one hour and half for each class; 2 or 3 lectures per day with a short break."*

*"The level of students' ability in Japanese is low. Teachers aren't earnest."*

#### **4. Arrival at Shiga University**

*“Perhaps, because all the instructions were in Japanese, it was difficult to get all the information I needed.”*

Students were asked about their arrival process at the Faculty of Economics. Over three-quarters of the students (79.1 per cent) participated in the orientation programme for international students at Shiga University, while 20.9 per cent of students did not participate. A further 38.5 per cent of these students stated they received sufficient information at the orientation regarding academic study and accommodation in Hikone. However, 38.5 per cent of students said they did not receive enough information and that this was partly because the orientation was in Japanese only and not in Japanese and English as they expected. Despite studying Japanese for at least six months, some students said they still did not have a sufficient level of Japanese to understand what was being said at the orientation. Students also commented that the information on accommodation and general life in Hikone was insufficient. One student wanted to know about part-time jobs as he said he needed a job in order to be a student in Japan.

*“The orientation was all in Japanese. I thought it would be part in English.”*

*“I want the study program to be written in English. I couldn’t understand everything but I thought I could at least read the information after.”*

*“I didn’t get informed about accommodation at all.”*

*“I want to know in detail about how to get a part-time job for international students.”*

*“I think information about the daily life environment in Hikone and about study in general is insufficient.”*

*“I need to know about hospital address and dental services in Hikone.”*

*“Though I asked some teachers how to connect Internet, not one teacher helped me to do so.”*

## **5. Academic experiences**

*“I wanted to study and understand Japan’s economy and the reasons for its high success. Even the reasons it has financial difficulties now is important to study. It is necessary for me to understand these issues because my home country has similar situations.”*

*“I want to study about the Japanese ways of management. Japan has great success in this area.”*

#### a) Reasons for study in Japan

The survey results found the largest reason for students wanting to come to study in Japan was because they wanted to study Japanese management systems and/or Japanese economic processes. This response was largely favourable to Shiga University, as it has the largest Economics faculty in Japan. Therefore, these students appeared to be both academically interested in Economics, as well as appeared to specifically choose Shiga University as a place in which to study.

The students’ second reason for studying in Japan was to learn the Japanese language (26.5 per cent). This was followed by 13.2 per cent of students who stated ‘other reasons’ for wanting to study in Japan. These reasons included wanting the experience of studying abroad, having a general interest in other countries, or wanting to specialise in a particular field. The other reasons that students stated for wanting to study in Japan concerned either receiving a scholarship or specifically choosing to live in Japan: a) receiving a *Monbukagakushō* scholarship (11.8 per cent); b) wanting to specifically live in Japan (5.9 per cent); c) did not want to live in home country (4.4 per cent); and d) receiving another Japanese scholarship (1.5 per cent).

*“I wanted to understand the nation of ‘Japan’.”*

*“Because I wanted to study at a Japanese University.”*

*“I wanted to specifically study the Japanese social and work culture.”*

*“I wanted to have experience of studying abroad and to learn a lot of knowledge.”*

*“I got a scholarship and didn't want to live in my home country.”*

#### b) Reasons to study at Shiga University

*“I was informed that Shiga University was placed near Kyoto, as well as had a good Economics faculty that had many courses and it was one of the national universities.”*

Students gave multiple reasons as to why they chose to attend Shiga University. The majority of students stated they chose Shiga University because a) they knew former students of Shiga University (26.7 per cent); b) Shiga University’s website convinced them it was a good place in which to study (15.6 per cent); c) they had direct contacts with a professor(s) at Shiga University (15.6 per cent); or d) they asked to study with a particular professor who happened to be based at Shiga University (4.4 per cent). The other reasons for studying at Shiga University included students who stated the *Monbukagakushō* (4.4 per cent), the Japanese Embassy (8.6 per cent), or their previous university in their home country (4.4 per cent) recommended the university to them. Lastly, the students who stated “other reasons” (20.0 per cent) included students who had been designated to Shiga University by the *Monbukagakushō* or their language school. It should be noted that international students who are in receipt of a *Monbukagakushō* scholarship and have not specified a university that they wish to attend will be designated a national university by the *Monbukagakushō* based on their research field or general academic interest.

c) Lack of information about Shiga University

Prior to attending Shiga University, 63.3 per cent of students stated they did not receive all the information they required about Shiga University, while 33.3 per cent said they had received sufficient information about the university. When they were asked about the specific information they required, the majority of students noted that they would have liked more information on the support services that were specifically available for international students, such as university facilities, activities and organizations. They also mentioned they wanted more information on accommodation for international students, as well as general information concerning the location of visa offices and other immigration matters for students. Further, students asked for more academic information, such as entrance information to various academic programmes at Shiga University, academic courses offered at the faculty, and biographies of teaching faculty including

their publications and research interests. It should be noted that some of this academic information is available but it is only in Japanese and not always listed on the university website, which is where a significant number of international students searched for their information.

*“Information about choice of classes and introduction to facilities. Also organizations for supporting international students. These should be on the website.”*

*“Studies by teaching staff, papers and theses published by the teaching staff and so on, in English.”*

*“Specific field of professors, their research interests in English. Do they have web pages?”*

*“For example, information on international students' lives given by the International Student House is only available when you get here, not before.”*

*“Information about accommodation and study concerning international students' life.”*

#### d) Rate of coming to university

Students stated they came to university either 4 days a week (14.0 per cent), 5 days a week (41.9 per cent), 6 days a week (18.6 per cent), or 7 days a week (14.0 per cent); only 11.6 per cent of students came to the university between 1-3 days a week. Students who came more than 5 days a week to campus tended to be graduate students who had 24-hour access to their research rooms. Therefore, it is suggested the campus environment was very important to the lives of many of these students.

#### e) Forms of teaching experienced

Students were asked what forms of teaching they experienced in their classroom environment. Thirty-two point three per cent of students said lectures, 25.6 per cent said seminars, 15.0 per cent said written examinations, 8.3 per cent had oral examinations, and a further 8.3 per cent had practical courses. It should be noted that undergraduate students regularly had lecture sessions, fewer seminars, and sat written examinations. Graduate students tended to have very few or no lectures at all, but more seminar sessions, presentations, practical courses, and some written and oral examinations.

f) Level of difficulty for various forms of teaching

All of the students were asked which forms of teaching they found easy or difficult. The results showed only 15.6 per cent found the lectures easy to understand, 64.4 per cent found them “not so easy”, while 17.8 per cent found them difficult. The results for the seminar form showed 26.7 per cent of students stating they found the seminars easy to understand, 40.0 per cent found them “not so easy”, 15.6 said difficult, while 4.4 per cent stated seminars were very difficult to understand. Only a small number of students took practical courses and only 6.7 per cent said they found these courses easy, 28.9 per cent said they found them “not so easy”, and 15.6 said they found them difficult. For written examinations, only 4.4 per cent of students stated they were easy, while 33.3 per cent said they were “not so easy” and 28.9 per cent said they were difficult. Similarly, oral examinations found 6.7 per cent of students stating that they were easy, while 33.3 per cent said they were “not so easy”, and 11.1 per cent said they were difficult.

g) First impressions of courses

*“Everyone has been very kind to me.”*

*“Uninteresting. Teachers are cold, and the staff are the same, especially in the educational affairs section.”*

The students were asked about their first impressions of their classes at Shiga University. Research on Japanese students and the Japanese higher education in general, has noted that there needed to be a great improvement in some academic areas, such as course structure and teaching methods. (Lee-Cunin, 2004b) The survey results showed the students’ comments were varied between neutral and negative comments, with positive comments being in the minority.

*“It was excellent.”*

*“Everyone was quiet, especially in class.”*

*“Japanese students study less than I expected.”*



*“There is no atmosphere at Shiga to study.”*

*“As a foreign student, I am somewhat different from Japanese students. I feel to be somehow out of tune with everything. Teachers also treat us differently.”*

*“Perhaps it seems that the international students are a problem, but teachers don't have any skills either and so international students then don't have any vitality. Both of them are doing the same thing, students study to graduate and teachers teach to let them graduate.”*

*“I am not impressed with the university. Japanese graduate school has no classes.”*

*“When my professors speak in English the classes are really interesting, but when I have classes in Japanese, I cannot understand.”*

*“The Japanese students have weak desires to express their opinions in a class. They study negatively.”*

*“Most of the classes are in Japanese and it's difficult to understand. And the teaching pattern is also different from my own country.”*

*“The technical language was difficult to understand. The Japanese people around Hikone were friendly and helpful.”*

#### h) Reasons for choosing courses

*“I chose my courses on the face of what they seemed to be about. I didn't understand things well when I arrived.”*

The majority of students (60.3 per cent) stated they chose their courses on their own, 25.4 per cent said they took courses because they were compulsory, and 14.3 per cent stated “other reasons”. These “other reasons” were divided into two groups: students who had been recommended to take a particular course by their supervisor and students who had been recommended to take a particular course by their friends or seniors.

*“I refer to the advice of senior students as well.”*

*“The courses were recommended by my academic supervisor.”*

Those students who stated that they chose courses ‘on their own’ were asked the reasons that they chose them. The results showed that 27.5 per cent said they chose the course because they were interested in it, 23.3 per cent said they thought the course would be good for their future employment, 14.2 per cent said the course was important for their research, whereas a minority of students said they chose the course because a) they thought it would help them improve their Japanese language skills (8.3 per cent); b) they liked the professor (7.5 per cent); c) it was recommended by a faculty member (6.7 per cent); d) it was an “easy to pass” course (5.8 per cent); or e) they had some prior knowledge about the topic in the course (5.0 per cent).

It is interesting to note that graduate students tended to state they chose a course because they were personally interested in it or thought it would assist them in their research. The reasons such as taking a class because it was “easy to pass” or because they liked the professor tended to come from undergraduate students. It should be noted that those undergraduate reasons for choosing courses have also been cited by Japanese undergraduate students in previous research. (Lee-Cunin, 2004b)

#### i) Course satisfaction

The results to how satisfied the students were with the courses they were taking, found that while 22.7 per cent rated their satisfaction as over 75 per cent, over half the students (52.3 per cent) rated their satisfaction between 50–70 per cent, while approximately one fifth (22.7 per cent) said their satisfaction rating was between 20-50 per cent; 21.3 per cent said their rating was less than 20 per cent.

The positive reasons that students gave for their satisfaction rating included students believing that the courses they took would be of some use to them in the future, and that the courses were interesting. However, negatively, students complained that they tended to spend a lot of time learning technical terms in Japanese rather than concentrating on the course content. They also noted that in some courses the level was too difficult, that they needed more fundamental knowledge or that some courses were different to what they expected. These latter comments were also mirrored in research carried out on Japanese students regarding course satisfaction. (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 1995; Lee-Cunin, 2004b)

*“I have learned a lot of Japanese, but all my time goes for learning new terms and find less time to learn my main topic.”*

*“My fundamental knowledge is insufficient.”*

*“I am sure that these courses will be useful someday.”*

*“Because I can study what I want to study and I get to know what I didn't know before.”*

*“Because in most of the classes instead of its high logicality, there are few examples of relevance to actual conditions or development and application of this logic in the future.”*

*“Because the courses are different from what I imagined.”*

*“The courses are not up to the expected standards.”*

*“Because many courses were in Japanese and I couldn't understand them.”*

*“I would be 100% satisfied if my University had a better infrastructure for experiments.”*

*“I don't know whether these courses will be useful after 4 years because the world changes.”*

The students were specifically asked whether it would have helped them to have some foundation courses to give them a general understanding of their major or field. The results showed that 62.6 per cent of them stated yes, while 18.6 per cent said maybe, 14.0 per cent said they didn't know, and only 4.7 per cent said no. It should be noted that both graduate and undergraduate students commented on their need for more foundation courses.

*“I feel the importance of needing to know the fundamental knowledge right now.”*

*“The more we master the foundations; the deeper we can study our majors.”*

*“It is knowing the theoretical knowledge, which is sometimes different from the facts and sometimes useful.”*

*“I wasn't taught in details because it was only a basic course and then I only roughly understood it and failed to make it completely.”*

*“Perhaps in my case there are no problems with language, but because I have little professional knowledge, I would be most obliged if I could have a chance to take a course that gives me fundamental knowledge.”*

*“There may be some things that are different from the contents that I studied in my home country even in the same fields that I majored in.”*

*“In fact, all the courses available offer almost all foundations for Economics and Management.”*

*“Japanese Ph.D. in Medicine program does not include a lot of extensive basic courses, they go straight to practice, but I believe if they were more basic courses it would increase the quality of research that is done.”*

*“Yes I am more or less satisfied with the courses if some English is also used in the class. If it is totally in Japanese then I think it is only a language study course not an academic course.”*

#### j) Course comprehension

The results on the comprehension of courses also correlated with some of the students' reasons for course satisfaction as 79.5 per cent stated they found their courses 'not so easy' to understand, 15.9 per cent said they were difficult, and only 4.5 per cent said they found their courses 'easy to understand'. Language difficulty was a significant factor in comprehension, but also some courses seemed to have conducted at high or specific levels and seemed not to consider the majority of the students' previous academic knowledge. Further, issues around the students' own responsibility in how long they spent studying for a course should also be considered in this context.

*“The courses are not so easy to understand because I don't understand the Japanese language that much.”*

#### k) Course grades

Although the students stated that they found their courses as well as some forms of teaching “not so easy” to understand, when asked what grades they had received so far, the overwhelming majority (86.8 per cent) said they received A's and B's; 50.0 per cent said they got all or almost all A's; only a few students said they had not received any grades at all. The conflicting combination of high grades and low levels of course

comprehension has been noted to be one of the failings of Japanese university education. (McVeigh, 2002)

*“I didn’t understand a lot of my courses but I still passed them even with my poor Japanese.”*

*“I am attending my classes just to learn and improve myself. I’m not interested in the exams.”*

#### 1) Students’ personal study time

The issue of student responsibility must be considered in any discussion concerning course comprehension. The students were asked about the length of time that they spent in personal study. The results showed that just over half of the students (52.3 per cent) stated they spent more than 20 hours a week studying, reading, doing research, doing homework, or going to the library for their studies. However, 15.9 per cent of students said that they spent only 1-4 hours a week carrying out these activities, a further 15.9 per cent said they spent 5-10 hours a week, and 15.9 per cent said they spent 11-20 hours a week.

These results also appeared to be related to the students’ status. Overall, graduate students stated they spent more time studying than undergraduate students, which was to be expected. For example, 77.3 per cent of students on the Masters programme and 66.7 per cent on the doctoral programme stated they spent 20 or more hours a week studying, while only 28.6 per cent of first-year undergraduates said they spent the same amount of time. Interestingly, fourth-year undergraduates spent the least amount of time in personal study out of all the undergraduate students (100.0 per cent spent between 1-4 hours studying). Two related reasons are suggested for this. Firstly, undergraduates in Japan traditionally spend much of their fourth year attending job interviews and carrying out other job-seeking requirements. Secondly, fourth-year students aimed to complete most of their undergraduate courses in three years so that they could use their fourth year to look for a full-time job. Some international students also appeared to be following a similar pattern hoping to secure full-time employment in Japan. Additionally, those international students who did not intend to stay in Japan after graduation stated they

simply endeavoured to complete their undergraduate courses before their fourth year so that they could be free to work full-time hours at their part-time jobs; thereby saving some money with which to return to their home country.

m) Completion of undergraduate courses within four years

In the survey, undergraduate students were specifically asked whether they thought they could complete their course requirements before the end of the fourth year of their degree. The results showed that 50.0 per cent said they would definitely complete their academic work earlier than their fourth year, 25.0 per cent said they did not know, 10.0 per cent said maybe, and 15.0 per cent said no. The reasons they gave were firstly, because they felt it was not too difficult to graduate in Japan, which pointed to issues of university course structure, and secondly, because they wanted to work in their last year.

*“It’s not difficult to complete the courses to graduate in Japan.”*

*“I want to graduate early so I can earn more money.”*

*“If I finish my courses earlier, I can do more of my part-time job.”*

n) Different teaching styles

Students were asked whether Japanese education and teaching styles were similar to their own educational experiences in their home countries. The questions were divided into undergraduate and graduate responses. Only 6.5 per cent of undergraduates said that the education and teaching styles were similar to their home countries, 35.5 per cent thought they were not, and 58.1 per cent said that the education and teaching styles were ‘a little similar’. Undergraduate students who answered “no” or “a little similar” were asked to state the ways in which the Japanese education and teaching styles were new for them. They noted that in Japan the facilities were advanced, they could elect some courses by themselves, the courses were well structured but the professors did not seem to communicate much with the students, or that professors did not seem to be concerned with their students’ level of comprehension.

*“Facilities are ahead. There is more information about America.”*

*“There is little communication or interactions in class between the professors and students.”*

*“Teachers don't bother that much about the understanding of the students during the class. Many students sleep in the class. Teachers just finish their targets in every class. But of course, teachers are well prepared before coming to class and try to supply all types of materials for that course.”*

*“I can elect classes suitable for me by myself.”*

*“The level of requirement for fundamental knowledge is low in Japan. They are generous in marking. We can't learn knowledge thoroughly at university. On the other hand, the difficult information is not taught step by step, we seem to be crammed for a time and we can't understand.”*

Graduate students were also asked if Japanese graduate education and Japanese styles of research were similar to their own educational experiences in their home countries. Only 16.1 per cent thought they were similar, 25.8 per cent said they were not, and 58.1 per cent said they were “a little similar”. The students who commented were mainly from China and they noted that in Japan, there were opportunities to do oral presentations whereas in China, they were not. Further, that in Japan, they were able to choose their courses rather than take compulsory ones.

*“It is different from the style of studying as an undergraduate in the faculty. It is important to raise the ability of studying in the graduate school.”*

*“Japanese teaching style is centred on students; Chinese teaching style is centred on teachers.”*

*“In my country, there is little participation of students and they only listen to the professor and do little by them.”*

*“Japanese researchers are mainly continuing previous work. Most of the research is experimental and related to real life problems. Also Japanese researchers work in a group, rather than individually. In my country, there are many theoretical and individual works.”*

*“There is seldom a style of giving presentations in China.”*

o) Japanese language issues while at university

*“Seminars are very difficult for me. Even when I listen to a presentation of an English paper, they present it in Japanese.”*

Despite a large number of students previously commenting favourably on their language classes before attending Shiga University, when students were asked whether their language courses adequately prepared them for their academic studies, only 40.6 per cent said yes, while 59.4 per cent said no. Those students who stated they were adequately able to manage their academic studies said they were specifically prepared at their language school for study at university. However, the vast majority of students noted their Japanese language training had prepared them for daily living in Japan, but not for academic study at either the undergraduate or graduate level.

*“Because for two years I had attended from the beginners' class to the advanced class, so I was taught from pronunciation to how to write a report and how to read a novel comprehensively.”*

*“There was a unique excellent teacher who trained us before entrance into university, in things such as how to write a report, how to attend a lecture and so on, in order that we could study easily after entrance into a university.”*

*“My purpose of studying in Japan is to master an advanced method of management and administration, but we were only taught Japanese language in Japanese language school.”*

*“Since Japanese language in daily life was learned in Japanese language school and was not enough for me, I had a little ability to speak; I was in a terribly bad way after entrance into graduate school.”*

*“No, in this course I only obtained some basic knowledge in Japanese, which helped me to communicate in daily life but not in study. For study in Japanese I need to know both reading and writing of kanji and that is not possible to learn in this short course.”*



*“Because of this course I can speak everyday talk, but I think my study in technical terms is not enough.”*

Students were further asked how they rated their Japanese language skills. Regarding their speaking and listening skills, 67.5 per cent stated their abilities were “fair to good”. Approximately, one fifth of students said they were fluent, while less than one fifth said that their abilities in speaking and listening were weak. In reading skills, 55.8 per cent said they were “fair to good”, while 27.9 per cent said they were fluent, and 16.8 per cent said they were weak. Writing skills found that 71.5 per cent had “fair to good” abilities, and equal numbers of 14.3 per cent said they were either fluent or weak. It should be noted that students from China or Taiwan had an obvious advantage in the reading and writing skill areas because of the use of Chinese characters (*kanji*) in Japanese.

The results also found that 68.3 per cent of students stated they no longer took Japanese lessons while at Shiga University, whereas 31.7 per cent said they continued to take language lessons while they were at university because they felt their language level was still not good enough to cope with academic work and/or daily living matters. The majority of those students (68.8 per cent) took Shiga University’s Japanese language courses, 18.8 per cent took private lessons, and 12.6 per cent took free language lessons that were given by Hikone city council or by other volunteer groups in the city. It should be noted that 22.2 per cent of students said they found the language course at Shiga University to be easy, 26.7 per cent said it was “not so easy”, and 6.7 per cent said it was difficult.

The results also showed that 30.8 per cent of all students studied Japanese for less than 1 hour a week, 43.6 per cent studied between 1- 4 hours, and 25.7 per cent studied from 5-20 or more hours a week. It should be noted that 55.6 per cent of students on the Masters programme spent up to 4 hours a week studying Japanese, and only 22.2 per cent of them spent over 20 hours studying Japanese. This partially explained why many graduate students stated that they had experienced language difficulties. Also graduate students tended to spend much longer hours studying their research fields and it is suggested that Japanese language study was much less of a priority for them.

Similarly, a majority of undergraduate students also tended to study Japanese for no more than 4 hours a week. However, it should be noted that 34.3 per cent of undergraduates stated they were fluent in spoken Japanese and 74.3 per cent said they were fluent in reading skills. This was in comparison to 18.2 per cent of graduate students who said they were fluent in spoken Japanese and 36.4 per cent who said they were fluent in reading skills.

Students were further asked specific questions concerning their language comprehension in the classroom. The results concerning oral and listening comprehension showed that 42.2 per cent of students had no difficulty understanding the speech of professors and Japanese students, whereas 48.9 per cent had a little difficulty. With respect to understanding long sentences, 28.9 per cent of students stated they had no difficulty at all in comprehension, whereas 53.3 per cent had a little difficulty, and 15.6 per cent had a lot of difficulty. Thirty-one point one per cent of students stated they had no difficulty in understanding the content of what professors and Japanese students said, while 62.2 per cent said they had a little difficulty, and only 6.7 per cent said they had a lot of difficulty. Students were also asked if they had difficulties participating in discussions in the classroom, perhaps because of poor vocabulary or feeling shy because of poor language ability. The results found that 13.3 per cent of students said they had no difficulty in participating in discussions, 51.1 per cent said they had a little difficulty, 31.1 per cent said they found it quite difficult, and 2.2 per cent of students said they could not understand anything in discussion sessions.

*“I can’t understand the courses at all when they are in Japanese.”*

Graduate students were asked in what language(s) they were studying and the results found 22.2 per cent said they were studying in Japanese, 13.3 per cent said they were studying in English, and 17.8 per cent said a mix of both of those languages. They were also asked about their written skills and the language in which they wrote. The results found 42.2 per cent of graduate students had written research papers for their professors/courses and 13.3 per cent had not. A further 37.8 per cent said they wrote or

would write their papers in Japanese, while 15.6 per cent said they wrote or would write in English.

*“I use English for writing and sometimes, I use Japanese when I speak with my professor.”*

p) Faculty-international student relationship

*“Everyone is very kind, that will do.”*

*“It seems to be a matter of if the teaching and official staff are personally interested in international students or not.”*

*“Professors who studied in other countries or have relationship with other countries for research are very friendly to international students. But many professors have Japanese thinking about foreign people I think.”*

Students stated they had a very good (25.6 per cent) relationship with faculty members, a good relationship with them (39.5 per cent), or an average one (34.9 per cent). These results were somewhat affected by the ratio of graduate to undergraduate students in the survey, as graduate students outnumbered undergraduate students. Graduate students had greater opportunities to establish more personal relationships with faculty members, as each one was assigned a faculty member as his/her supervisor.

Overall, however, both graduate and undergraduate students noted that a) faculty appeared to be generally uninterested in international students and their lives; b) faculty appeared to give special treatment to international students by positively giving them high grades or negatively ignoring them in classroom discussion; c) faculty members needed to improve their teaching skills and course content; d) there needed to be faculty members who could support international students in non-academic ways; e) that students would have preferred more communication between faculty and international students, perhaps through more extra-curricular activities; and interestingly, f) faculty members who had studied abroad usually had good relationships with international students.

*“I think that teaching/official staffs of university who have been abroad for a long time can usually make good relationships with foreign students.”*

*“Maybe there could be somebody or a group of professors (could include foreign professors) who the international students could count on for advice, orientation and real help be like a go-between when there are relationship problems with the Japanese.”*

*“Professors and international students should hold an exchange meeting periodically.”*

*“I think the relationship between international students and faculty members is good. I think Shiga University is very kind to international students. But it is not so good for international students that the requirements for study are too lenient. I take it for granted that students should study knowledge and think that we shouldn't study not to graduate. I hope that it had better be strict for studying as, for example, if we understand economy, we must learn the foundation of Economics.”*

*“I want teachers to understand that international students that they should not be given special treatment, such as being generous in marking or not calling on us in discussions.”*

*“I want professors of Shiga University to perform higher level of academic research activities and lectures with responsibility. Though students' levels are all different, I think that it is better to require them to teach properly and strictly.”*

*“It is the best thing to make a place for communication.”*

*“Professors should be more open, helpful friendly and make their classes attractive to the  
“They should have two-ways exchanging of information.”*

*“I want them to speak Japanese more slowly.”*

## **6. Non-academic experiences**

International students encountered a number of difficulties in relation to their non-academic lives in Japan. Previous research and reports noted that accommodation, the high cost of living, and cultural adjustments issues were some of the major factors affecting international students. (Shimoyachi, 2002; Matsubara, 2003; Lee-Cunin, 2004a) Therefore, students were asked a number of questions concerning their non-academic experiences at Shiga University.

a) Practical matters on campus

Students were asked if they had any difficulties in dealing with practical matters at the university when they first arrived. The two main areas they listed were accommodation (25.5 per cent) and health services (23.5 per cent). Both of these are essential areas for international students. Other difficulties that the students experienced were in computer services (15.7 per cent) and library services (13.7 per cent), and generally finding their way around the university campus (9.8 per cent). Language ability seemed to be a main factor underlying all of these areas. However, it should be noted that regardless of language ability, students considered there was a general lack of support for them as international students on campus. Students said they felt that there was no official person(s) who was prepared to help them in the variety of initial issues that they faced. This was despite the existence of an office for international student affairs, as well as other staff members who were designated to assist international students. In general, it would appear they had to negotiate the health services, accommodation matters, and university facilities as best as they could, relying on assistance from their friends.

*“The official staff in the student section treat foreign students with a haughty attitude!”*

*“Even the staff who are supposed to help international students do not help us in things that are important for us like where to find a dentist or how to phone the electric company.”*

*“I do not know who to ask when I don’t understand something. Then I have to ask with bad Japanese and they do not understand me.”*

*“I feel ignored by Shiga University.”*

*“Actually, in the beginning it was very hard as no one speaks in English to the foreign students. But, somehow I am able to learn many things and ask my friends in lab for the things I do not understand how to do.”*

*“It is only the new international students that can use the exchange house. Though it is of course that the first grade students should be preferred, what I mean is that those who haven't used that residence should be given a chance to use it if there are some unoccupied rooms, shouldn't they?”*

*“I felt it was so painful, when, for example, because of difference between cultures, I was misunderstood at the place where I did my part-time job, or when I was frustrated in communicating at university as I was not fluent in Japanese.”*

b) Support services

The students were asked whether they were aware of any university services aimed at assisting international students or students in general, such as the help desk at Shiga University and/or the committee for sexual harassment. The results showed that 83.3 per cent stated that they were not aware of any such services or assistance. The 16.7 per cent of students who did know of such services stated the international students’ office and the counselling service, which was available at the health centre.

*“I know of only the staff in charge of international students.”*

*“I know of the counselling room.”*

c) Accommodation

Nationally, the majority of international students live in private apartments (73.1 per cent), while only 15.2 per cent live in university residences specifically for international students. A further 7.5 per cent live in international students’ dormitories run by public corporations and 4.2 per cent live in university general dormitories for all students. (National Science Foundation, 2002)

International students at Shiga University also lived in a variety of accommodation. The results showed that the majority (34.0 per cent) lived on their own in private accommodation, 27.9 per cent lived in a home-stay arrangement with a family, 18.6 per cent lived in a hall of residence specifically for international students, 14.0 per cent lived in halls of residence outside of the campus, and small minority shared an apartment with a friend.

*“The university coop introduced me to an apartment owner. I paid 5000 yen to them. The coop is cruel to do this.”*

*“My tutor also helped me to look for a place. Before this apartment, I lived in the university dormitory.”*

i) University assistance in accommodation matters

The survey results also showed that 32.6 per cent of students received assistance from Shiga University in finding their accommodation, and the majority of the 21.7 per cent of students who stated “Other help” stated the university coop (student services) gave them assistance. Students also stated a) their friends helped them (17.4 per cent); b) they went to an estate agency (17.4 per cent); c) their professors helped them (4.3 per cent); d) an international student’s organisation helped them (4.3 per cent); and e) they received help from other organisation in Japan (2.2 per cent).

It should be noted that university assistance took various forms in that 51.0 per cent of students said the university gave them lists of places they could rent, 24.5 per cent said the university personally introduced them to landlord/landladies, 14.3 per cent had their key money or deposit paid on their behalf, 10.2 said they got other help from the university, such as a map.

ii) Refusal of accommodation

There have been many reports noting how difficult it is for international students and foreign people in general, to rent apartments in Japan. (Shimoyachi, 2002) The main difficulty usually concerned a refusal to rent to a foreigner. Just under a third of the students (30.8 per cent) stated that they had applied for accommodation and been refused, whereas 69.2 per cent said they had not encountered this situation. When the students were asked why they felt they had been refused accommodation, the overwhelming majority stated it was because they were foreigners. One student said s/he was refused because s/he could not afford the key money and rent, and another said there were many applicants that wanted to rent the apartment.

*“The owners of the house have little understanding about foreign students. They seem to misunderstand us.”*

*“I was refused because I am a foreigner.”*

*“Only one reason because he realised that I was a foreign person.”*

*“Because of cultural differences and this can imply lots of discrimination.”*

*“Because they were a lot of applicants for that place.”*

### iii) Rent issues

Students were also asked about the cost of their rent. Hikone is not a very expensive area in comparison to the larger cities of Kyoto, Osaka or Nagoya so rents were slightly lower. The 23.3 per cent of students who stated they paid 10,000 yen or less per month for their rent were all living in either the international student house of Shiga University or another student hall of residence. A further 23.3 per cent of students said they paid between 11,000-20,000 yen per month for rent, 39.5 per cent of students said they paid between 25,000-33,000 yen per month, and 13.9 per cent said they paid between 40,000-42,000 yen per month. It should be noted that higher amounts of rent did not necessarily equate with larger apartments or more quality apartments. Rather, it was seen as a concession to landlords for accepting foreigners in their apartments.

*“Because I was desperate to find an apartment, the landlord said to my friend that he doesn’t like to rent to foreigners but he will rent to me. But he made the rent more. My other friend told me this is normal. If we didn’t pay higher rent, we have no place to live.”*

The results found 57.1 per cent paid for their rent with their own money, 31.0 per cent said they paid with their scholarship money, and the remaining 11.9 per cent of students specifically stated they paid for their rent through earnings from their part-time job. When asked if they thought that their accommodation costs were reasonable, 34.1 per cent said they were, 34.1 per cent said they probably were, but 22.7 said probably not, and 9.1 per cent said definitely not. These results corresponded to the amount of rent that students paid; that is, the students who paid the most rent did not think their accommodation was reasonable for the amount they paid.

### iv) Accommodation satisfaction



Students were asked if they found their accommodation satisfactory and 70.4 per cent said yes or “it’s okay”. They noted that accommodations in close proximity to the university were important, as well as a low monthly rent. The minority of students said they were “not really satisfied” or “not satisfied at all” with the accommodations (29.5 per cent). These students also tended to pay a higher amount of rent. Other reasons given for the students’ lack of satisfaction with their accommodation concerned the size of room and noise from student-neighbours.

*“I can stay here at the International house for a year even though I study on a two-year course. In the second year, it is hard for me to look for my new accommodation and to have to pay such money as a deposit for it - it is waste money!”*

*“The accommodation I live in now is low-priced but small and I can't stay there more than a year (International house). I must look for a private apartment. It is impossible to rent the same apartment that Japanese students rent. I can move into a room for about 20,000 yen at least.”*

*“I can't be satisfied at all with the accommodation in comparison with my home country. But I am barely satisfied for this rent in Japan.”*

*“I am somehow satisfied because the rent is not so expensive and it is near the school. I am little dissatisfied with the room being too small.”*

*“It is noisy and the room is small, that isn't the environment for study. But it is the only place where I can sleep.”*

*“The rent is expensive and the room is small and it is hard to use gas in the shower room because it is dangerous. In winter, it's very cold in the washroom and the kitchen has no hot water available.”*

*“I pay a very cheap price for my room, so I do not expect to have a very comfortable and quiet place to live. I had to get used to live with other foreign students.”*

*“My rent is too high for this one room with no heat but I cannot change my place as I said I would live there for a year.”*

d) Transportation issues

The majority of the students lived locally, therefore, the results showed that 32.7 per cent walked to the university, 61.2 per cent rode their bikes, and only 6.1 per cent took a train. The majority of the students (85.7 per cent) took between 5-15 minutes to get from their home to the university, while only 9.5 per cent said their journey was between 30 minutes to an hour and 30 minutes. Transportation costs were understandably low with 64.5 per cent stating they used their personal funds to pay for transport (buying their bicycle was the main cost), while 12.9 per cent used the funds from their scholarship. Similarly, 64.6 per cent of students said they thought their transportation costs were reasonable or “probably reasonable”, whereas 35.5 per cent said their transportation costs were probably not reasonable or definitely not reasonable.

The final questions on transportation asked the students if they had difficulties getting around Hikone and nearby towns and cities when they first arrived. Forty-six point three per cent said they did have difficulties and 53.7 per cent said they had no difficulties. Students also confirmed that 60.0 per cent of them were not told by the university or other staff involved in assisting international students where they could buy bus and/or train tickets, as well as train/bus passes that would be economically cheaper; although 40.0 per cent of students said they were told by university staff.

*“Why don’t the staff who are supposed to help us tell us where to buy cheap train tickets? I was always paying high amounts and I didn’t know that sometimes I could get a discount.”*

#### e) Part-time employment

Part-time employment is very important for many international students in Japan, as the majority of them are self-funding and need to support themselves in matters of rent, utility bills, food, and other personal expenses. The majority (84.1 per cent) of students in the survey stated they had a part-time job, only 15.9 per cent said they did not. With respect to their student status, all of the undergraduate students and 66.8 per cent of students on Masters programmes had part-time jobs.

#### i) Reasons for working in a part-time job

The students gave the following reasons for working part-time; a) to assist them with their living expenses (28.0 per cent); b) to have more interaction with the Japanese community (17.8 per cent); c) to improve their Japanese language (15.3 per cent); d) to gain more work experience (13.6 per cent); and e) to make new friends from Japan (11.9 per cent). Others reasons for having a part-time job were a) to occupy time (6.8 per cent); b) to be with friends who worked at the same workplace (2.5 per cent); and c) to make friends from their home countries (2.5 per cent).

#### ii) Finding employment

Over half of the students found their part-time jobs through their friends (56.8 per cent), while 18.2 per cent found jobs through the university, and 9.1 per cent found jobs through the newspapers. Students also mentioned 'other ways', such as through job agencies (4.5 per cent), through voluntary organisations (4.5 per cent), and through simply looking for job advertisements in shop windows (1.7 per cent).

#### iii) Working hours

The majority of students worked between 5-15 hours per week (68.5 per cent), 14.3 per cent worked for less than 5 hours, while 17.2 per cent worked from 16-20 or more hours a week. The results for hours of work were crossed against hours spent on study and it was noted that students who studied for the least amount of time, that of 1-4 hours, did not necessarily spend more hours working at a part-time job. However, there was some correlation between long hours of study and fairly long hours of part-time work, as the majority of students (40.0 per cent) stated they studied for more than 20 hours a week and also worked between 11-15 hours at their part-time jobs.

It should also be noted that over half of the students (51.1 per cent) worked between the hours of 6pm-10pm, 14.9 per cent worked between 12pm-6pm, and a similar number of 14.9 per cent worked between 8.30am-12pm. Only a small number of students worked very unsocial hours of between 10pm-1am (6.4 per cent) or between 1am-8.30am (6.4 per cent). Students worked during the week in the evenings or on weekends.

#### iv) Rates of pay

The results concerning rates of pay found 5.6 per cent of students earned between 500-700 yen, 61.1 per cent earned between 700-900 yen per hour, 22.2 per cent earned between 900-1,100 yen, and 11.1 per cent earned over 1,100 yen per hour. It is suggested that the majority of students were receiving the average rate of pay for part-time jobs in Hikone. It should also be noted that working unsocial hours of 1am-8.30am did not necessarily bring higher rates of pay. Higher rates of pay tended to be given to students who were employed as private language tutors, as opposed to working in a service sector job.

v) Other benefits from working

The final question on part-time employment asked students whether they received any other benefits from their part-time jobs other than their salary. The majority of students stated they were better able to understand Japanese society through their part-time jobs and also that they were able to improve their Japanese language skills.

*“If I work I think I will learn how the Japan progressed in such a short time, also I would learn Japanese faster and naturally, with no tension while I’m learning it.”*

*“I could study Japanese food culture and how to cook as I work in a Japanese restaurant, and hearing the Japanese speaking, I could also study Japanese society.”*

*“I could better understand the way of living in Japanese society and I am happy to be accepted by Japanese society.”*

*“I was able to speak Japanese more fluently than before.”*

*“I have gained a lot of social experiments since I have working at my part-time job.”*

*“It is the best way to deepen the exchange with Japanese people, I think.”*

*“I am getting to understand Japanese smaller enterprises to some extent.”*

f) Friendships

*“I think communication among different cultures is important.”*

*“Most of the Japanese students like to enjoy themselves with each other. I believe this is due to the language and cultural gap.”*

*“Since the classes aren't fixed, students' flexibility is high whether they come or not to the university. So it is very difficult to make a friend.”*

Friendships are very important in the student world as they can be a major determinant as to the overall perceptions that students have of their university lives. (Lee-Cunin, 2004b) Students were asked where they met their friends and who their friends tended to be. The results showed that just over half the students (52.8 per cent) met their friends at the university or at their place of residence (20.8 per cent). The other main place cited for meeting friends was at their part-time job (16.7 per cent). Students also stated they met their friends through other friends (5.6 per cent), at parties or organisations (2.8 per cent), or at a bar (1.4 per cent). Further, students noted that they often (35.7 per cent) or sometimes (35.7 per cent) studied and socialised with the same group of friends.

i) Japanese or international friends?

Students were then asked if their friends were Japanese or other international students. The results showed that only 9.3 per cent said they had many Japanese friends, while 7.1 per cent had none at all. The majority of students said they either had some (55.8 per cent) or “not so many” (34.9 per cent) Japanese friends. The reasons for this were varied. Many undergraduate students said they made a specific effort to establish friendships with Japanese students and that often they were studying with Japanese students in the same classes. However, graduate students tended to note that the language barrier was a disadvantage to establishing friendships with Japanese students. Students also spoke of their perceptions of the cultural differences between the Japanese people and the foreign community.

*“My Japanese friends are my classmates. They are very helpful. Usually it's difficult to make friendship with Japanese students because of language and culture differences.”*

*“Since I have come on purpose to study in Japan, I want to have a good time studying abroad and to be willing to exchange Japanese youths.”*

*“If I spoke and made a mistake, the Japanese students would not speak to me again.”*

*“Naturally it is difficult for me to make friends because of something different such as our ages and cultural background between Japanese students of Shiga University and me.”*

*“What reason is it necessary to make friends?”*

*“Because I feel foreign or alien.”*

*“Japanese are very reluctant to communicate with foreigners.”*

*“I can't understand Japanese thoughts.”*

However, on the contrary, when students were asked if they had Japanese friends who were not connected with the university, the results were more positive with 4.7 per cent stating they had many Japanese friends, 60.5 per cent saying they had some friends, 27.9 per cent saying they did not have many friends, and 7.9 per cent saying they had none. The overwhelming majority of these students said they met these friends at their part-time jobs, as well as at inter-cultural organisations and classes, such as Aikido or Japanese lessons.

*“Many Japanese people want to talk to foreign students; they are interested in cultural exchange.”*

*“With a person whom I see frequently at my part-time job and who is tender and interested in me, it is easy for me to become their friend.”*

*“At my part-time job, a former Japanese teacher, a Japanese person whom I knew in China.”*

*“Most of them I met in the parties arranged by this volunteer club and a few I came to know one, through one of my Japanese friends who's my brother's friend and can speak Hindi. He learned it as foreign language.”*

Students also stated they had many (20.9 per cent) or some (41.9 per cent) friends from their home country or other countries other than Japan, while 25.6 per cent said they did not have many friends from their home country or other countries, and 11.6 per cent said they had none. Their reasons for these friendships were generally concerned with either speaking the same language, sharing similar experiences and/or problems of being a

foreign person in Japan, as well as being interested in establishing friendships with students from other countries.

*“This friendship is very useful since we share almost the same types of problems living in Japan. In fact one foreign student becomes close to another foreign student because of same sense of feeling that both of them are foreigners in Japan.”*

*“Because I want to learn and know about foreign countries.”*

*“Very simple. All of the foreigners have some or the other similar problems in Japan and all can speak a common language of English.”*

*“Because I have a little chance to meet foreign people (except Chinese and Japanese), I have a few or no reasons to make foreign friends.”*

Students stated they used either their native language when communicating with friends from their home country, a mix of Japanese or English when communicating with friends from other countries, and mostly Japanese with their Japanese friends.

*“I use Japanese and in cases, when I do not know particular words in Japanese, I use English words.”*

With respect to amount of time that students spent with their friends, the majority said they either spent time with friends on a daily basis (33.3 per cent) or all weekend (30.8 per cent). The reason for spending time with their friends on a daily basis was generally that they were studying together in the same classes and/or they lived in the same place of residence. Twenty-three point one per cent of students spent every three to four days with their friends, and 12.8 per cent spent every two days with their friends.

g) Daily living matters

*“Senior students helped me.”*

*“I did everything with the help of my friends and other students.”*

i) Alien registration card, health insurance

Students were asked how they managed to organise their daily lives when they first arrived in Japan and what university assistance they received in these matters.

An immediate and important concern for international students when residing in Japan is obtaining their alien registration cards. It should be noted that many students who participated in this survey were likely to have already obtained their alien registration cards when they first arrived in Japan to take their language courses. However, when they arrived in Hikone, they would have had to renew their cards at the city hall and register their new addresses and any other new additional information. The results of the survey found 47.7 per cent of the students obtained both their alien registration card and their health insurance on their own, 31.8 per cent said that they obtained these documents with the help of friends or other students, 6.8 per cent said with the help of their professor, and another 6.8 per cent said with the help of the university.

*“I did not realise that I had to do something new with my alien registration card. I thought that everyone was okay because I had one.”*

*“I did not know where the city hall was as I did not know Hikone at all. I think maybe the university could tell us this information in the beginning and where to do to renew our visa as well.”*

ii) Utility bills

Students were also asked about how organised their utility bills (gas, electric, water, telephone). The results found over half of the students (52.3 per cent) organised their utility bills on their own, 29.5 per cent said their friends or other students helped them, 11.4 per cent said the university helped them, and 6.8 per cent said their landlord or dormitory helped organise their bills for them.

*“I needed to help to call the companies as I did not have good Japanese.”*

*“I didn’t know where to call and thought I would have no electric for the first night. But I eventually met another student who helped me.”*



### iii) Communicative problems

Students were also asked to name the situations where they had particular communication problems. Twenty per cent of students said they had problems at the doctors or dentists, a further 20.0 per cent had problems at the hairdressers, 18.7 per cent had problems at the railway/bus station or when travelling on the train/bus, 12.0 per cent had problems in shops, and 9.3 per cent had problems at the post office. The minority of students had problems at the university cafeteria (6.7 per cent), at eating places in Hikone (5.3 per cent) or at the travel agents (2.7 per cent). Students were then asked what type of help they would have liked in those situations. The majority said they lacked the technical language or special words that would have assisted them in matters concerning transportation, hospitals, and/or in personal services. In general, they said they needed more guidelines and leaflets in English in such non-academic matters.

*“I need an interpreter almost everywhere.”*

*“I went to the hairdressers and I showed them a picture but the hairdresser said they did not speak English. I don’t think you need English in this matter, but they refused to cut my hair. I went to another place and used Japanese, but they still said no even though I had the picture. I went to Kyoto to get it cut because they accepted foreigners more.”*

*“When I go to the hairdressers, I always have to go with a Japanese person because even though I explain in Japanese what I want, the man does not want to understand what I am saying, even though it is not difficult because I am a man so I don’t have a difficult hair style but I give up going by myself.”*

*“I went to Osaka and at midnight I was told that the trains stopped at 12 and I had to wait outside the station. That was the most terrifying situation when I spent all night on the roadside. I should have known this fact as in my country, railway stations are open 24 hours and we can get common transportation to reach our required destination. So I never guessed this situation.”*

*“When I’m having dinner, I can’t understand what the dishes are, even when I see the menu. In using the trains, I can’t understand where I am able to change trains.”*

*“Information, introduction and appointment system about the hospital that foreign people can use.”*

*“Pamphlets and information in English.”*

iv) Banking services

Students were also asked about their experiences with the banking services, as this was frequently mentioned as a problematic area for them in informal discussions. The results showed that students encountered language difficulties when withdrawing money at the counter and at the cash machine (24.0 per cent), when they opened a bank account (20.0 per cent), when they exchanged money (20.0 per cent), when they sent money abroad, tried to obtain a credit card, or learn about the general banking structure (14.0 per cent), when paying bills at the cash machine (10.0 per cent), and when using a credit card or cash card (10.0 per cent).

*“I would like to have a list of basic vocabulary or phrases about banking and someone to say roughly how it works in Japan.”*

*“I need help in sending money abroad or exchanging foreign money. I want help to calculate charges or loss for exchanging foreign money or do its procedure.”*

*“Every time I learned some Japanese when I went to the bank but I still had my friend tell me how to fill in the forms where only Japanese is written.”*

*“At first, I didn’t know anything about the banking structure. It is different in my country.”*

*“Maybe I need the help of my guarantor to guarantee that I am not a criminal gai-jin so there's no need to deny my credit card application.”*

Students further noted that they would have liked to learn how to access the banking facilities with some simple instructions written in English.<sup>2</sup> Some noted that the bank staff were very kind when they asked for their assistance.

*“It is OK if you should ask a bank clerk about service. They are gentle, you can ask anything.”*

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that since 2003, the banks and post offices in Hikone installed new ATM machines that all have an English language section for withdrawals, deposits, balance enquiries, and updating passbooks.

*“They should have some guidelines written in English because they have customers who speak English.”*

*“I think the international students office should have a booklet with basic instructions on which bank is the best to help international students, how to make bank transfer as sometimes we have to pay the university by this way and I always have to ask the bank staff to help me. Maybe if the international office made a connection with a person at a bank in Hikone then we could always ask them for help and they will know we are students at Shiga University.”*

## **7. Overall experiences**

*“I was able to learn Japanese culture and language.”*

*“I was able to fulfil my dream of coming to Japan.”*

*“I thought Shiga University would be a more international university as they are studying Economics and so they would be more international in thinking. Also they would communicate in many different languages because of their business mind.”*

### **a) Overall impressions of Shiga University**

In the final section of questions, students were asked about their overall impressions of Japan and Shiga University’s Faculty of Economics. The majority of their responses are listed. Overall, 48.8 per cent of students liked Shiga University, 16.3 per cent really liked it, and the remaining 38.9 per cent adopted a neutral attitude. It should be noted that more graduate students stated they were neutral toward Shiga University, while more undergraduate students tended to have more positive responses about the university.

The students stated the following advantages to being international students at Shiga University: a) they were able to use university facilities in Japan (33.0 per cent); b) they were able to receive student discounts or benefits in accommodation matters (16.0 per cent); c) they were able to receive a stable scholarship while studying in Japan (16.0 per cent); and d) they were able to receive a student visa for living in Japan (11.0 per cent). Other reasons were they were able to work while studying in Japan (9.9 per cent), they received student discounts for entertainment and leisure activities, and they were able to

study at a national university or attain their dream of studying in Japan (4.4 per cent). Fifty per cent of students said they would recommend Shiga University to other students in their home country, 31.8 per cent said they would “maybe” recommend the university, and only 18.2 per cent said they would not recommend the university.

Students also gave their general opinion on the facilities provided for international students at the university. Their opinions largely centred on accommodation issues.

*“It would be good if all of the foreign students could get international residence as living in apartment alone is very lonely and I don’t like to go home most of the time. Also we could do some entertainment, like have some indoor games and get a phone booth in the residence. All the foreign students have to make calls at different times depending on the timings that match their countries. It is very inconvenient to go out at 3am in the winter or during the rain to make a call to home.”*

*“I think that the place where to live is the most important for international students. But, we are put out as the international house is not enough for everyone, although there are many international students in Shiga University.”*

*“There should be more rooms at the international dormitory, it's not enough and many foreign students have to rent their apartments by themselves.”*

*“I want to make the international residence house larger.”*

*“I cannot say that it is a good environment because litter is scattered around and cigarette ends are thrown out of the standing ashtray.”*

*“There is no public telephone in the international house.”*

*“The facilities are weak in these areas - accommodation, job information, no counselling is given in English. There is also little information about scholarships, visas, work permits, problems related to the visa.”*

#### b) Most enjoyable experiences in Japan

The students were asked what they had enjoyed the most so far about Japan. The majority of responses concerned the natural environment of Japan, the politeness of the people, the convenience of daily life in Japan, the ability for them to travel and sightsee, as well as being able to communicate with people in Japanese.

*“The Japanese environment is very beautiful and nice.”*

*“When I can talk well with Japanese people and when I got my salary for the first time (though it was very little).”*

*“It is study by observation and travel.”*

*“To be with my children, with my family in Japan.”*

*“The food and kindness of people.”*

*“Safety, nature, culture and people.”*

*“The four seasons: Sea and beach in the summer, coloured leaf in the fall, ski in the winter and Hanami in the spring. Onsen (spa), the fire works (Hanabi) and many other things.”*

*“Talking to shougakusei on my way to school. One children’s school is on my way to the university. I see the small children looking at me because of simple reason that I am a foreigner. Also I really like and enjoy hot springs and the college tour. Now since I can speak in Japanese, I love talking my lab mates and my Japanese friends.”*

### c) Least enjoyable experiences in Japan

Students were also asked what they least enjoyed so far in Japan and the majority stated loneliness, cultural differences, and/or discrimination. The cost of living was also mentioned and having to work at a part-time job in order to be a student in Japan.

*“When I can't make myself understood.”*

*“The loneliness.”*

*“Japanese new year because I am lonely.”*

*“There are few places where I can go to socialize.”*

*“It is that Japanese people seldom express their intention clearly.”*

*“Cultural differences. It is thought that "Chinese people are worthless" by Japanese.”*

*“I am feeling like a Chinese person now I am here. Not a student, just Chinese.”*

*“The prejudiced and arrogant view of many Japanese that they are international and they understand the way the foreigners think only because they know a bit of the*

*language and went to that country. They should be more open and have the willingness to learn and observe like their ancestors in Meiji period.”*

*“When I first got here the Japanese students and staff were ignorant of my presence and did not share their conversation with other students, now we all are very friendly but in the beginning it was very hard.”*

*“If the Japanese say that it is delicious for example, it is a problem whether it is true.”*

*“I sometimes feel somehow horrible, for example, at my part-time job because of how people treat me.”*

*“When I underwent an oral test for part-time job, I was refused because I was a foreigner.”*

*“The fact that Japanese people are not so sincere. But that is because they have to follow general cultural rules.”*

*“I cannot be too open or friendly.”*

*“Prices are expensive.”*

*“I have no money.”*

*“The thing I don’t like in Japan is Japanese television programmes.”*

#### d) Discrimination issues at the university

*“In various ways...but I don’t want to write them here.”*

*“I have not noticed any unequal treatment.”*

Students were further asked whether they had ever noticed unequal treatment at Shiga University because they or other students were from other countries. The majority (78.6 per cent) stated they never noticed any discrimination, but 21.4 per cent stated they had. Most of these students commented on their classroom experiences and some professors’ behaviour towards international students. They also spoke of what they perceived to be the differing treatment by the Japanese towards Asians and westerners.

*“The Japanese look down upon us.”*

*“Students from US and Europe are treated better than the rest (Asians).”*

*“In the class of management and information, being a foreigner I was naturally thought of a poor report writer and when the teacher made discussions, I was skipped over in spite of it being the turn of international students.”*

*“I am ignored in the class by teachers and students. Only I hear my name when the teacher takes attendance.”*

e) Most surprising experiences in Japan

Students were also asked what surprised them most about life in Japan and their answers varied from the fact that English was not as widely spoken as they expected to the social behaviour of Japanese youth and the high numbers of people who smoke. The experience of earthquakes was also mentioned, as well as the materialism of the society and the high cost of living.

*“English is not as widely spoken as I thought. The fashion. The generation gap. The view they have about US, America, themselves and patriotism. How little they give respect for many traditions and cultural values.”*

*“I am surprised at the low level of English of the people. I thought they would be more fluent because they are a developed country.”*

*“I think some Asian countries like mine are more developed than Japan when it comes to university education and learning other languages. I didn't think this before I came here. Many students don't know about international issues and they can't say one thing in English after they have studied English for so long.”*

*“Japanese students' self-supporting tendency is so high that a 15 years old junior high school student does a part-time job, too.”*

*“Japanese junior-high and high school students have no manners.”*

*“The relationship between senior and junior students. Sempai and kohai.”*

*“Junior high school students also smoke cigarettes.”*

*“Japanese girl high school students are wearing skirts in the face of being cold in winter.”*

*“That all Japanese students don't like to study.”*

*“There were many women among those who smoke cigarettes.”*

*“There are many unsavoury business shops.”*

*“Japanese people are not as clever as I expected.”*

*“Japanese people’s principles are different from their actual intentions.”*

*“The Japanese people have a working spirit.”*

*“The overall professional organization in government, transportation, society.”*

*“The high price of goods and in Japan and the Japanese never saying 'No' directly.”*

*“The good things are services in general (travel agencies, city hall, etc). The bad thing is Japanese society is materialist.”*

*“When Japanese wives call their husbands ‘rubbish of large size’.”*

*“That some men urinate in the street.”*

*“That there is a common bathing system (without any clothes).”*

*“Sex discrimination.”*

*“In Japan, the attitude is ‘ladies last’ not first.”*

*“Earthquakes!”*

*“Eating raw liver.”*

*“The snow!”*

Students were asked if they had ever found themselves in a situation that was embarrassing or funny because they broke a Japanese cultural convention. Thirty-eight point one per cent said they had such experiences, while 61.9 per cent said they did not have any such experience.

*“I went into the onsen with my shorts on. I didn’t know you had to take all the clothes off.”*

*“Listening to music loudly in my room. The Japanese style rooms have walls of paper...I didn’t know it was so loud.”*

*“Once eating outside, I used chopsticks to cut some big pieces into small ones and was told by a friend that the way I was handling my chopsticks looked as if I were trying to murder the food. Another one is that I asked for the Japanese translation of “please”. I was told it is “doozo” and for “give”, it was “kudasai”. I went to the shop and asked the shopkeeper “pan wo doozo kudasai.” Every time I used this phrase, people used to smile*



*at me. I was thinking that maybe my pronunciation was not perfect. I kept using this phrase for more than four months until I was checked by one of my friends that it was wrong.”*

## **8. The Future**

*“A qualification from Japan is one page of my beautiful life.”*

a) Are Japanese qualifications advantageous?

Students were asked how a qualification in Japanese would assist them in their future career and the results divided fairly equally between those who thought it would greatly help them to those who felt that it would not have significant importance in their future working lives.

*“It may be easy to get a job in a foreign-affiliated firm.”*

*“I expect it has fairly good influence on getting a job.”*

*“It is a certificate that proves that I studied at a national university; probably I think it to be useful when I will get a job.”*

*“It is not very important.”*

*“I think that the fact that I have studied abroad is more important than the qualification.”*

*“I think educational background is important in every country.”*

*“It will allow me to apply for jobs at a higher level.”*

*“It will be helpful but it would have been more helpful if I could my degree in English.”*

*“My major topic of study is very much related with my job at home. So, it will help me to attain skills to perform better for my country.”*

The issue of translating the students’ degree qualifications into English was also raised in a question as it was noted to be a problematic issue for former international students. The results showed that 24.4 per cent said that it mattered that their qualifications were only written in Japanese, 41.5 per cent said it did not matter, 9.8 per cent stated “maybe” and

24.4 per cent said they did not know. For those students who stated that it mattered to them, their main concern was that when they returned to their home country, employers and institutions had little way of understanding what qualification these students had obtained while in Japan.

*“I think at least some translated sentences are necessary if this degree is going to be certified in my home country.”*

*“It had better written in English too because some people in my home country can’t understand the Japanese language.”*

*“As English is still spoken all over the world, it isn’t sufficient to write only Japanese.”*

*“Japanese is a minor language in the world and a translated version in English is necessary.”*

*“In my country almost nobody speaks Japanese. So, if my qualifications are written in Japanese then people in my country will not understand my degree or what level I have attained, and hence I cannot be evaluated.”*

*“Because in China, Japanese language is not available everywhere. There is no reason for it.”*

#### b) Future employment in Japan

*“Practically speaking, I think that most international students want to work in Japan after they graduate from a Japanese university, so guidance for obtaining various licenses and the presentation of information about how to get a job is very useful for international students, I think. I want Shiga University to show such support for international students’ future jobs.”*

It is often assumed that international students, particularly those from Asian countries, prefer to work in Japan after graduating from university. (Japan Times, January 28, 2004; Johnston, 2004) Therefore, the students were asked if they would like to continue to work in Japan after the completion of their education here. The results showed that 36.8 per cent wanted to work here, while 52.6 per cent said they did not want to work here.

*"I want to work for about 2 or 3 years if I can."*

*"If I had a chance, I want to work but I think that there are a few chances probably."*

*"Maybe, just for enrich my curriculum and improve my Japanese communication."*

*"No, I want to go back and be with my relatives and teach my students."*

*"I don't want to work in Japan not for a long time after my study but I want to work right now (part-time job) for a few hours to learn more about Japan and its work culture, this is my intense desire. But I wish to go back to my home country and work as teacher."*

*"I don't think about that as yet as I am the first year now."*

c) Advice to new international students

The final question asked what information or advice would they give to new international students. Most of the answers concerned learning some Japanese prior to arrival in Japan and learning something about Japanese culture.

*"Learn Japanese Language if you live here for a long period."*

*"It's better to learn Japanese in order to live in Japan in a happy and enjoyable atmosphere."*

*"You should study Japanese and English properly in your home country."*

*"It's good to know all the cultural rules in Japan, but you don't need to follow them all."*

*"Be punctual for everything, every appointment."*

*"Japanese people are not so sincere, so take care. That does not mean they are false, that's just their culture, do not get angry with a non-sincere Japanese."*

*"Try to understand about the cultural gap."*

*"Try to have more socialization between Japanese and foreign students."*

*"Always have a smile."*

*"Check the internet for information."*

*"International phone calls and air tickets to anywhere in the world are cheap from Japan."*

*"If you are looking for a place to stay, it is more convenient to leave it to university coop."*

*“Find out all the information on entrance examination for the Japanese national university for international students.”*

*“Try to contact international students who are living in Japan. There are homepages of international students associations that can give you useful information.”*

*“Get an English map of cities and all important phone numbers in English.”*

*“In growing China there are lots of chances to get a job. They should make sure that studying abroad is the correct first step to do this.”*

*“They should know about the 100 yen shop, supermarket and the time when food becomes cheaper. Information about bus timings such as on holidays there are less buses available and timings are different and there are no bus after 8, about the trains that between 12 to 4 am railway stations are closed and no one is allowed to stay inside the station.”*

Students were asked to write six phrases they thought would have been useful for them to know before coming to Japan. The majority listed general greetings and introductions, apologetic phrases, how to ask for the price of something, how to say that they did not understand Japanese, and how to ask someone to say something in English. Interestingly, students who had not previously studied Japanese in their home country, stated they did not always consider learning a few phrases of basic Japanese before they arrived here, which exemplified an issue of student responsibility.

*“I thought I would come to Japan and learn Japanese through the course but now I think I should have studied how to ask for things before I came here.”*

*“Because I had studied Japanese language for some years before I came to Japan, I haven't thought of this problem.”*

*“Ohayo gozaimasu, Konnichiwa, Itadakimasu, Sumimasen, Gomen nasai, Hajimemashite, Yoroshiku onegai shimasu, O-ikura desu ka, Domo arigato gozaimasu, Nihongo ga wakaranai, Eigo de oshiete kudasai, Wakarimashita, Onegai shimasu, Doko desu ka, Nan desu ka”*

d) Students were also asked for any final comments regarding their experiences as international students at Shiga University.

*“If Shiga University introduces full English education in all subjects then more qualified foreign students will come here and they can receive better education than now they are receiving.”*

*“I love Japan and Japanese, but I wish to ask the Japanese students to please do us a favour by talking to us in English in the beginning of our settlement in Japan.”*

*“Shiga University needs to improve its website for international students.”*

*“Even though I think it is, of course, that I must study by and for myself, teachers in charge should also teach as well, it’s their responsibility, isn’t it? I was admitted into Shiga University’s pre-entrance to undergraduate programs and already paid the school fees but I never took part in a class, even once for a year. I regret this very much.”*

*“I need port 1900 to be open in the university so that I can do voice chat with my parents. It is 231 yen per min when I use phone card. I do not have my family in Japan and everything is entirely different so sometimes I need to talk to my family. It is not wrong to be homesick when you live alone for long time! Everybody wants to have a connection with family and friends. Also when I do not get some books or materials for my studies, I ask my family to send things or sometimes we need to discuss some of daily problems in Japan like not liking the food, for example.”*

*“Reduction and exemption of school fees and who receives a scholarship should be decided through a more open, fairer, and more just way. I think the way that these are decided now is almost like a black hole and it is never good. I want them to show clear criterion, not just a case of connection, but by results. Because I don't receive any scholarships, it is hard for me to live now.”*

*“The scholarship is little. I don’t like to pay for school fees. Students should be exempt from charges.”*

*“The graduation certificate must be standardized. There is no provision for official English transcript at Shiga University and there is no graduation gown at Shiga University.”*

*“I will make an effort to have happy days as an international student.”*

*“I think it is a very good initiative to know the real situation of international students living in Japan. I hope this questionnaire will help to the improvement in the quality of life and study of foreign people in Japan, and also to contribute to the cultural exchange between Japanese people and foreigners. Good luck in your research!”*

*“Thank you for your time and the interest in our student's life!”*

## **9. Concluding comments**

International students at the Faculty of Economics at Shiga University seemed to have a variety of experiences while studying here. It was noted the majority of students originated from China and were self-funding. Further, there were more international graduate students at the Faculty of Economics than undergraduates. Therefore, such distinctions seemed to create divisions in the general experiences of students, such as between Chinese and non-Chinese students, undergraduate and graduate experiences, and/or self-funding students and scholarship holders. There was also an overall division between students' academic experience and the non-academic one.

The majority of students had not been to Japan before but had studied the Japanese language in their home country and continued to study Japanese when they first arrived in Japan. However, many of the students had not taken a course concerning Japanese culture or society. Therefore, while many students noted that their language skills were “fair to good”, this was not always sufficient enough to prepare them for academic life as students in Japan.

Their arrival at Shiga University found many students stating they did not receive as much information as they would have liked about the university and about life in Hikone. They had relied on informal sources about the university, such as recommendations from former students in their home country, and had also relied on the internet as one of their main sources of information about the university. They felt that more information about accommodation matters, facilities available to them as international students, and organisations assisting international students in the local area could have been offered to them during the orientation process and throughout their initial weeks at the university. Many of the students noted that because of their weak language skills they were unable to

access such information during the orientation process or from staff at the university. Some students specifically stated the orientation sessions should be conducted in both Japanese and English.

Most of the students stated they had wanted to study at an Economics faculty so were positive about wanting to be at Shiga University in the largest Economics faculty in the country. Their first impressions of classes were divided between undergraduate experiences and graduate ones. Undergraduate international students seemed to have a similar educational experience to Japanese undergraduates. They felt there could be more improvements in course structures and that faculty members could be more positive in their teaching responsibilities. However, they also did not spend as much time studying outside of the classroom and seemed to choose courses that they perceived to be “easy to pass”, as well as because they liked the professor. A significant number of these undergraduate students also thought they would be able to complete their degree requirements before their fourth year, after which they hoped to work in their part-time jobs for more hours in order to earn as well as save more money.

Graduate students tended to be a more positive about their academic experiences and courses, as most were seminar style, as opposed to lectures, so they had interaction with faculty members and other Japanese graduate students. Students from China positively commented they were able to choose the courses in which they were interested and give presentations in class; both experiences were considered rare in their home country.

Both graduate and undergraduate students noted they would liked to have more foundation courses in their subject areas, as their previous education did not always cover the information which they were expected to know in their courses. Moreover, all of the students stated they had language difficulties which impeded their comprehension of their courses. They continuously noted that their previous Japanese language courses did not adequately prepare them for academic study and that although they were able to cope with average communication required in daily life matters, they were still weak in academic terminology. However, after entering Shiga University, students did not seem to spend a lot of time studying Japanese. Graduate students preferred to spend their time on their research and undergraduate students who had higher levels of oral fluency

seemed to study less overall, regardless of whether it was Japanese or their general courses.

The final area of academic experiences concerned the faculty and international student relationship. Again, the students' experiences were divided between undergraduate experiences and graduate ones. Undergraduate students had similar experiences to Japanese students in that the faculty-student relationship was either distant or strained. They stated they wanted more opportunities to make more positive relationships with faculty members. On the contrary, graduate students tended to have fairly good relationships with faculty members as they had more opportunities to have frequent discussions with professors in the seminar sessions and individually, with their supervisors. However, both groups of students still stated there was room for improvement in the relationship.

Language issues and perceptions of cultural difference were very significant in the non-academic experiences of international students. Students with poor Japanese language skills had difficulties negotiating the various services at the university. They said they could not make themselves understood and further believed that as many staff members did not understand English or Chinese, there was no official person(s) who could help them in non-academic matters concerning health services, accommodation matters, and general daily life concerns, such as sorting out their utility services.

The lack of accommodation for international students was the chief complaint from students. However, the university and its student services assisted most students in various ways concerning accommodation from giving them lists of places that they could rent to paying their key money finding and introducing them to landlords.

The majority of students lived alone in private one-room apartments, paid low rents, and stated they were satisfied with their apartments as they were close to the university so did not need to incur transportation costs. However, a minority of students paid fairly high rents and were not satisfied with their accommodation; some believed their high rents were related to their foreign status in Japan. The main request from all the students was for the university to provide more accommodation similar to the present Shiga University's International House, which was a modern student residence, but one which could only house 25 international students.



Part-time employment was another significant experience in the lives of international students. The majority of students in the survey had part-time jobs; all the undergraduates and a large proportion of the graduate students worked part-time. The main reasons they gave for working was to upkeep themselves, to have interaction with the Japanese community, to improve their language skills, and to make friends. The majority worked between 11-15 hours a week and their average rate of pay was between 700-900 yen an hour. Their working hours and rates of pay seemed to be fairly average for student employment in Hikone. They also noted that apart from receiving a salary, the main benefit of their part-time jobs was that it gave them an opportunity to better understand Japanese society.

Friendships were important to international students. However, as other research has shown, international students did not seem to have many Japanese friends and they noted that language and culture were the main barriers to establishing friendships with Japanese students. However, the survey found more international students stating they made Japanese friends at their part-time jobs. Overall, international students tended to have more friends from their home countries or from other countries. The reasons they gave for this were sharing a common language or culture, as well as sharing similar experiences of being an international student in Japan.

In other areas of their non-academic lives, international students seemed to do most things on their own or with the help of their friends. The university did not seem to assist them much with explanations or physical help, such as renewing their alien registration card, contacting the utility services when they first moved into their apartments, and suggesting health or other services in the area not provided by the university, such as a dental service. Students stated they had the most communication problems in areas such as hairdressers, health services, transportation, and banking services. Many students felt that the international student office should have given advice or assistance with some or all of these matters.

Overall, the majority of students stated they liked or really liked Shiga University, and the remaining took a neutral attitude. Further, about 50 per cent of students said they would recommend Shiga University to other students in their home countries. They further noted they enjoyed the nature and environment of Japan, as well as the

convenience and safety of daily living. However, the least enjoyable aspects concerned the prejudice and discrimination they experienced from Japanese society. They felt that the country was not particularly open to people from other countries, particularly Asian countries. Although the students said there was not much direct discrimination at the university, their general feeling was that no one was particularly interested in them as a student group and that the university did not seem to welcome international students into its community. Therefore, their perceptions were that because they were foreign, they were generally ignored or isolated by most of the faculty, administrative staff, and Japanese students. The majority said that their main advice to new students coming to study in Japan would be to learn some Japanese before arrival and to understand Japanese culture.

With respect to their futures, some students felt Japanese degrees would greatly enhance their resumes and impress future employers in their home countries, while others did not see that it would do anything more for them than if they studied in their home country. Some students also requested for their qualifications be written in English, as they felt future employers would not be able to sufficiently assess the level of education that they attained in Japan. It was further noted that about a third of the students stated they would like to work in Japan after graduation, but the majority wished to return to their home countries.

In conclusion, students at the Faculty of Economics at Shiga University seemed to maintain overall positive views about their experiences so far. However, more academic language courses for international students would greatly enhance their experience of courses and contribute to an overall improvement in their academic experiences. Further, it appeared that there was a general lack of official university support in the non-academic lives of international students, and perhaps if this issue was better addressed, international students would be more inclined to feel included within the university environment. At present, it seems that international students still believe that they are on the outside of both the university campus and Japanese society at large.

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