

## **The Exchange of the students between China, America and Japan The PEN-International Student Ambassadors visit to China**

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### 1. About PEN-International

In the spring marking the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the director of PEN-International (the Postsecondary Education Network – International), Dr. James DeCaro, proposed an unprecedented plan for a student exchange. He stated that “From Tsukuba College of Technology, I would like you to send three students and 2 faculty members to China as student ambassadors for a student exchange to interact with deaf students and faculty members at Tianjin University of Technology. From the United States, I am going to send six students and 2 faculty members along with 2 interpreters.” PEN-International was established to create an international network of postsecondary educational institutions serving deaf and hard-of-hearing students around the world. In June 2001, PEN-International was launched with funding from The Nippon Foundation of Japan as a 5-year-long project. Tsukuba College of Technology is one of the institutes that is a part of PEN-International, along with Tianjin University of Technology (China) and Bauman Moscow State Technical University (Russia).

### 2. TCT’s application process and orientation plans

Tsukuba College of Technology planned the schedule for the exchange as described below:

May: Started accepting applications from students

June: Deadline for submitting applications

July: Final three candidates were selected, and projects were assigned to each student.

September, October, November: Bi-weekly orientation.

November 25: Departed for China

December 1: Returned to Japan.

I distributed the description of this student exchange to approximately 160 students at TCT; as a result, 7 students applied to the exchange. Three students were selected as student ambassadors through a written examination and an interview. All of them were sophomores and each student had maintained good academic standing in their courses. Two of the three students had passed the second grade of the STEP test (the test of practical English proficiency which is authorized by the Japanese Ministry of Education). Overall, the students had good understanding of English. In addition, two of them had visited the United States prior to the exchange and had experienced communicating in American Sign Language. I assigned the students to develop an English composition to introduce themselves and TCT.

After the summer, on September 11, terrorist attacks on the United States broke out, and the exchange could have been cancelled. However, Dr. DeCaro along with the vice president of NTID, Dr. Davila, visited Tsukuba College of Technology for the Multimedia Lab dedication ceremony. He emphasized the need to overcome the fear of terrorism and continue this project. Therefore, the Japanese PEN Team agreed to continue the project, with the agreement to use Japanese airlines in order to assure safety.

### 3. Language Barrier

A language barrier is a common obstacle for international cultural exchanges, especially for this student exchange, which faced the complications associated with 3 spoken and 3 sign languages. NTID sent two sign language interpreters, along with Dr. Susan Fischer, who is proficient in both spoken Japanese and Japanese Sign Language (Nihon-Shuwa) as well as English/American Sign Language, and Robert Baker, who is responsible for visitation programs at NTID. At Tianjin, there was an English-Chinese interpreter for all preparations and discussions. There were no professional Chinese or Japanese sign language interpreters, so each faculty members interpreted for students by turns. From Japan, Prof. Qingyuan Zhang and I (Midori Matsufuji) were sent to TUT. Prof. Zhang is a Chinese national and fluent in Chinese, Japanese and English. The American and Chinese delegations were able to benefit from his abilities as well.

One of the responsibilities of the student ambassadors was to present about the educational system in their home country. For the first step, I was not sure which language should be spoken or used for the presentation. All three Japanese students are able to speak clearly in spoken Japanese, and I taught them English pronunciation as well. However, I was not able to determine the value of them speaking English in front of the deaf students from other countries. As a result, in discussing with the students and Dr. Fischer, we decided to present our PowerPoint slide shows in both spoken Japanese and Japanese sign language with the slides written in English. We consumed a lot of time in creating the presentation that was translated into English. However, all the students were accustomed to the use of PowerPoint, so I was able to efficiently help them.

For the communication between individual students, it was not necessary for sign language interpreters or multi-sign languages interpreter to help them, since they were communicating with each other on their own. There were two professional interpreters from the United States and so information was clearly delivered to the American students for the tour. On the other hand, there were no professional sign language interpreters provided from Japan, and we had to interpret from foreign languages into Japanese sign language even though we were not professional. I wish we could have been able to provide professional sign language interpreters from Japan, so that the students would have been able to understand better.

#### 4. Understanding of the different cultures

The next concern was the performances and gifts for the exchange. For the tour to the United States, we always had enough people for the performance and presentation. However, there were only three students at this time, so the students decided to perform Japanese traditional dance, called "Mikagura" (meaning "the sacred dance for the harvest" ) since one of the students ambassadors was involved in this kind of dance practice. They spent a lot of time practicing the sacred dance with the folding fans that are used for offering appreciation to the god for the harvest. This dance was performed on the second night on the stage at Tianjin University of Technology, followed by Tianjin deaf

students performing Kung-fu, as well as on the fourth day when we visited Tianjin School for the Deaf.

The students from Tianjin's Kung-fu (Chinese martial arts) performance were excellent. There was an international champion in the performance and his portion was a very powerful one. After that, the Japanese delegation performed the sacred dance without music. However, everyone cheered for us. The fans we borrowed from the school for the deaf added more spice to the dance and it was fairly successful.

For the gifts, we brought keyholders with the name of TCT carved on it and attached netsuke of an ox, the zodiac signs for the year 2002, and buns that have "I Love You" sign on it. For Chinese people, they were able to figure out the meaning of ox, the Chinese mascot for the new year; however, we needed to explain to the American students meaning. Prof. Zhang mentioned that the equivalent meaning of the Chinese phrase "I Love You" is "Will you marry me?", so the students from Japan and U.S learned that it's important to understand the nuance of the sentence itself, not only the words.

These gifts contributed to an understanding of the different cultures. Chinese students' gifts were mostly hand-made such as crafts, stamps and calligraphic work, in contrast with American students' gifts such as factory made mug-cups and caps with NTID logos

##### 5. Future planning and students' reactions.

In conclusion, the Japanese student ambassadors were able to accomplish their responsibilities with a positive reputation -- they were very polite and friendly. Due to the success of the first year of the five year project, this program was officially able to continue for the next four years. Now, we are to discussing the next student exchange; that is, an exchange at NTID with the students from China along with Japanese students. Thanks to PEN-granted scholarships, six students will be sent from TCT to the United States and three students to China or Russia. I hope these exchanges will benefit and enrich students' perspectives in the future.