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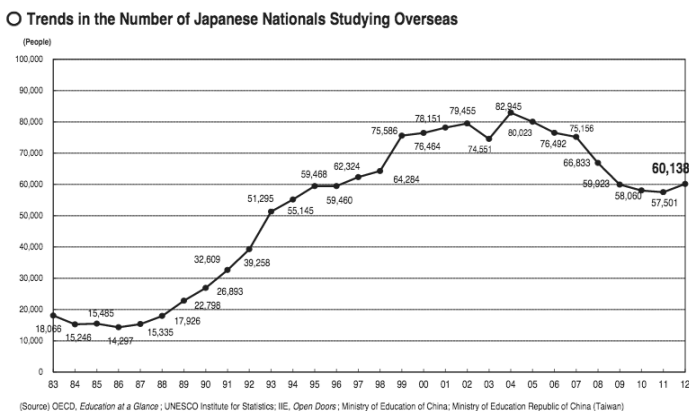
Abstract

Since 2003, Thai majors at Kanda University of International Studies have joined a study tour to Thailand during the break between their first and second years. They take classes in Thai language and culture at a Thai university and board with local families. By immersing students in Thai society, the study tour consolidates language learned during the first year and encourages students to communicate with native speakers. The aspects of everyday Thai life that students encounter provide insight into the culture as well as a rich background and context for future language acquisition. When students return home, they have greater self-awareness and frequently re-evaluate their plans for future studies and careers. This paper describes the goals and design of the study tour and offers suggestions for future study tours in Thailand or other countries.

Introduction

How should Japanese university students prepare to join a global workforce in an interconnected, interdependent world? This is a question of increasing concern to Japanese academics and business leaders. On the one hand, more global businesses are organizing their human resources into global teams in which Japanese members may work and communicate with team members located in Singapore, Bangkok, Shanghai

or Sidney. The standard language of communication tends to be English, and team members are expected to be not only linguistically proficient but also culturally flexible (Neely, 2012). On the other hand, fewer young Japanese are prepared to work in such positions (Lewis and Tabeta, 2016). According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan (2015), the number of Japanese going abroad for university study is decreasing even though studying abroad is well-understood as an experience that improves language and intercultural proficiency (Harris, 2010). In fact, Japanese studying abroad peaked at 82,945 in 2004, but the number has since declined by 27.5% (MEXT, 2015).



Source: MEXT, 2015

Harris (2010) discusses several reasons for this decline, such as declining interest in going abroad, conflicts with looking for employment, or the stagnation in the Japanese economy. These issues may factor into why, according to MEXT (2015), 80%

of all Japanese studying overseas in 2013 spent less than six months abroad with 58% staying less than one month. On the other hand, short study tours, if designed well, can achieve significant pedagogical goals. Sakurai (2012) described how, in a study tour program for first and second year business majors, students improved English communication skills, cultivated a deeper interest in the countries they visited and became more pro-active learners. Harris (2010) also reported on the remarkable change in attitude toward learning and increased motivation as a result of a short study tour. Shorter study tours can be offered early in students' university careers, are relatively inexpensive, and are not likely to conflict with such activities as job hunting.

This paper describes the study tour program for Thai majors at Kanda University of International Studies. Offered at the end of their first year, the program provides intensive language classes, lessons in arts and culture, trips to popular sights and opportunities for relationships with Thai students and teachers and host families. The program allows students to use and consolidate language learned during their first year, acquire new language, and communicate meaningfully to accomplish real tasks. Similar to the effects reported by Harris (2010), students not only make solid gains in Thai language proficiency as measured by pre- and post-tests but improve their attitudes toward learning and even modify their plans for future study.

Kanda's Thai Language Program

Kanda University's Thai language program was started in 2001, and so far 12 cohorts have graduated. As double majors in Thai and English, students study Thai for 90 minutes a day, five days a week, during their first and second years. They study reading, writing, speaking, and listening with two native Thai teachers and grammar with a teacher who is Japanese. In their third and fourth years, students may take elective subjects taught in Thai, such as Thai news, Thai music, Debate and Thai

Folktales. Students can also choose other subjects related to Thai that are taught in Japanese, such as Minorities, Culture & Society, and Economics.

Study Tour

An important component of the Thai major is the “study tour,” a three-week intensive program in language and culture that takes place at a Thai university in February, just after the first year. Students board with Thai families during the three-week program, which consists of 72 class hours, divided evenly between language and cultural activity classes. Students can earn two credits by participating in the program. For the past three years, students have been awarded with JASSO scholarships that cover about half the cost. One teacher from Kanda accompanies the group to ensure the trip proceeds according to plan and to be able to respond to emergencies.

Goals of the Study Tour Program

As with most intensive language study programs, the goal is to improve the “four skills;” however, it is expected that, by immersing students in the Thai environment and culture, their learning will be enhanced during the program and long into the future. As noted by Allen and Young (1997, p. 169), “...learning occurs more readily when students are able to experience (i.e., see, smell, taste, hear, feel) stimuli and actively participate in the education process.” By spending their days and nights in a Thai environment, students receive natural input, acquire knowledge and communicate in Thai throughout the day. New knowledge and deeper awareness of Thai culture also provides a richer context for learning in the future. When students return to Japan, they have background knowledge – or “schema” (Carrel and Eisterholt, 1983) – for things, places, people and activities that they otherwise would have to imagine. Students also develop intercultural skills through the home-stay experience, which helps broaden

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their worldview and increases tolerance toward people in other cultures. Finally, the study tour increases motivation to learn, and students return home with a clearer view of their future. Harrison (2006) noted that his short study tour participants continued to study global issues on return, thereby improving their career prospects. Likewise, after the Thai study tour, students often express determination to return to Thailand as exchange students or to attend a half-year intensive program. Others decide to aim on establishing a career working in Thailand. At the very least, study tour participants want to study harder to be able to communicate with Thai people.

History of the Program

According to a survey by JASSO (FY2013), Thailand is the ninth-most popular destination of university and college students for overseas study, with 2,249 students visiting in 2013 (out of a total number of 69,869 going abroad to study). Kanda's first study tour, in 2003, took ten students to stay in a rural village in Rayong province. The students boarded with local families in traditional homes, and classes were held in a durian orchard. While students at first could not get any credit, the program was shortly deemed an elective subject worth two credits. Following the first year, the program has since been jointly organized between Kanda and a Thai university, either Burapha University in Cholburi or Chiangmai University in Chiangmai, both of which have an MOU with Kanda. Classes are now taught by university instructors and make use of facilities on campus. Students stay with Thai host families. Because of the relationship Kanda has with the universities, the study tour offers some additional advantages to both study tour participants and Thai university students. Participants who later return as exchange students will be familiar with their campus, and Thai students who come to Kanda as exchange students find they have friends among those who came on the study tour.

Language Learning in the Program

During the study tour, a total of 36 hours of study are devoted to Thai language. Classes focusing on the four skills are held in the mornings from 9:00 – 12:00, with the universities providing the textbooks. Students are also required to keep a daily diary in Thai. The teachers at both Burapha and Chiangmai universities are full-time native Thai teachers with experience in teaching Thai to Japanese or other foreign students. Students take a pre- and post-test in order to assess their language proficiency and improvement over the course.

Culture Learning in the Program

The culture component of the study tour consists of classes in a variety of Thai arts and crafts. Taught in Thai by either university teachers or local professionals, the classes provide insight into Thai culture while also requiring students to communicate in order to carry out specific tasks. Students follow instructions, solve problems and receive feedback on their efforts while engaged in creative activities. The culture classes, therefore, constitute task-based learning (Nunan, 1991, p. 279) in which students focus on interacting in the target language instead of merely studying the language. The culture classes are taught in the afternoons from 13:00 to 16:00. Instructors provide the materials or equipment needed for the activities. There are 12 culture activity classes, totaling 36 hours. These activities include cooking, vegetable and fruit carving, Thai boxing, Thai massage, and traditional music and dance.

While lessons in arts and crafts might be considered part of the “explicit” realm of cultural experience (Shaules, 2007), the overall study tour clearly impacts students at the deeper level of norms and values as well. For example, students have registered surprise at seeing shop clerks standing behind a counter and chatting or texting on their smartphones. Such encounters challenge Japanese values in relation to work and service

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culture. Another significant cultural difference concerns bathing. Japanese typically take a hot bath once a day in the evening while Thais take two or more (often cold) showers a day. Japanese students have been surprised to arrive a friend's house in the afternoon and be invited to take a shower; however, it is normal that a Thai host may wish to offer a guest the chance to clean up and cool off in the middle of the day.

Cultural Experiences: Home-stay

A key component of the program is boarding with Thai families, which allows students to use Thai even after school and provides deeper insight into Thai culture and society. Families are selected carefully to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the students. For example, families that own cars are preferred so that students may travel to and from school safely. Each family receives a token payment to help with meal and gasoline expenses. Most families have children interested in Japan or who are learning Japanese, and some families have hosted students for many years. Students have reported being surprised to learn that Thai fathers do more housework and cook more than Japanese fathers and that most Thai mothers have jobs and prefer eating out to cooking at home. They are also impressed at the kindness Thai families show them as well as the attitudes of respect Thai children show their parents. On the negative side, students have complained that some host parents want them to eat too much or that they are not as punctual as they would expect. Students also notice the wide income gaps among Thai families. Some students can sleep in their own rooms and receive such amenities as cellphones, while others live in homes with only a Thai-style water basin and a scoop instead of a hot water shower. In order to prepare students for the realities of Thai family life, the program provides students with informative orientation materials.

Weekend Trips and a Visit to Bangkok

On weekends, students take excursions to experience such things as a Thai cultural show and elephant performance, the Thai floating market or even the beach. Before the program ends, students visit Bangkok for two nights, staying at a hotel together and visiting temples or other famous sites. At night, students are allowed out if they remain in groups of at least three and return before a 10:00 p.m. curfew. These rules help ensure safety. Recently, in order to engage in cultural exchange and learn more about the socially underprivileged in Thailand, the students visited a kindergarten in the slum known as “Klong Tuey.” In addition to donating some toys, the students performed the Japanese children’s story, “Momotaro,” in Thai for the children. The students took this visit seriously and began preparing the play before leaving Japan and rehearsed after school while at Burapha.

Lessons Learned: How the Program has Improved

After 15 years, the program has become more efficient. One area often requiring attention concerns the host families. Sometimes students have difficulty adapting to certain host families, such as those that are less prosperous or living in a more rural area. A questionnaire was developed to help match family circumstances with student personalities. Students who are more flexible can be placed with the less well-off families. Social networking through Facebook or Line allows students to contact their host families and prepare for the experience. Another problem has been finding enough families to host all students. February exams as well as Chinese New Year limits some families’ willingness to take in a boarder. Having to drive students to school and back is yet another burden. It is therefore important to recruit families early and hold on to the ones who work out well by listening and responding to their concerns. For example,

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students need to be reminded to help out and avoid making a bad impression. In recent years, some families have been asked to take in two students.

Safety is an area where the program has made improvements following some unpleasant incidents. Students are now forbidden to go out late at night on motorcycles with their host sisters or brothers, play with stray dogs or feed wild monkeys. They must be cautioned against eating raw vegetables, which may cause illness, or losing track of personal belongings. Distributing a list of dos and don'ts and tips for dealing with culture shock also helps students become aware of cultural differences before they arrive. Because simple misunderstandings can lead to conflict, students are informed of what may be acceptable in Japan but taboo in Thai culture.

At the end of the program both students and host families write evaluations about their experiences in order to help improve the program. Some concerns that have been mentioned in the students' evaluations include:

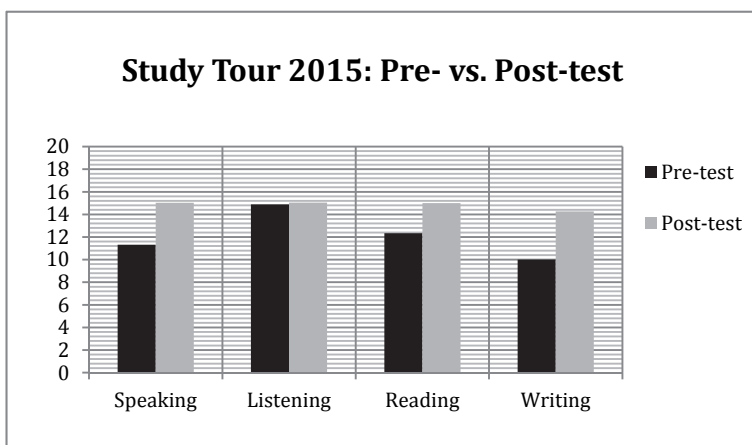
- Thai host families vary widely in terms of incomes and status.
- Bathrooms are unfamiliar and may only have cold water.
- The air conditioning is too cold at night.
- Mothers have fulltime jobs.
- Families tend to eat out every night.
- When Thai hosts encourage eating too much food, it is hard to refuse them.
- Students are asked to go out too much and have no time to rest.
- The Thai attitude toward time is more flexible than that of the Japanese.

Host families' evaluations have mentioned the following issues concerning students:

- Spending too much time in their room
- Not participating enough in activities with the host family.

- Not being able to communicate well and having to frequently use a dictionary
- Eating too little
- Spending too much time with friends
- Not introducing Japan or cooking Japanese food
- Not cleaning their rooms
- Families desiring more information about the student before she/he arrives

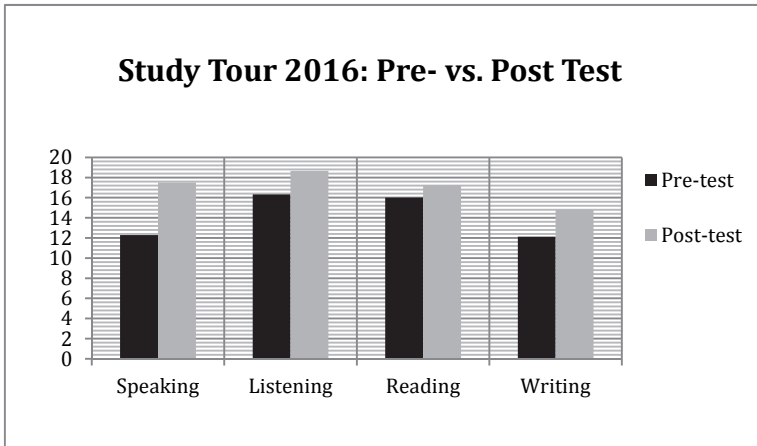
Assessment



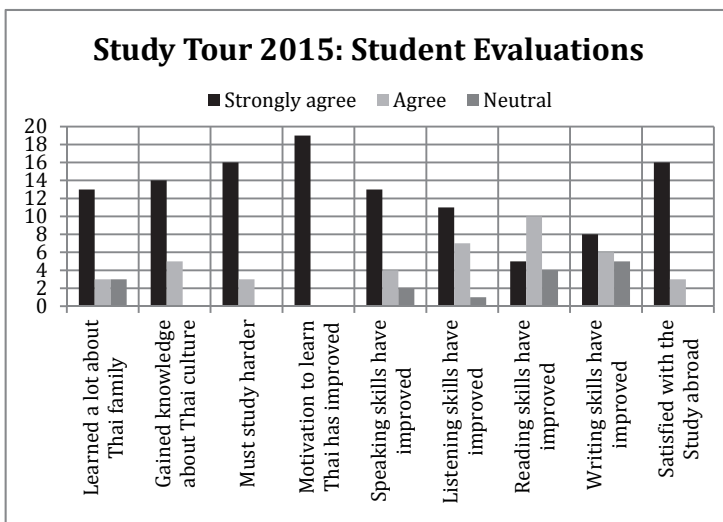
Every year, the students are tested before and after the program in order to assess learning in speaking, listening, reading and writing. A test designed by the host university is taken by students at both the start and end of the program. In 2015, the post-test showed improvement in all four skills, with writing being the skill that improved most. The second-highest change was in speaking and the third was reading.

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The post-test for listening showed little change, which was surprising given the high amount of listening that students encountered during the study tour.



In 2016, the post-test also showed an overall improvement in all skills. However, the greatest change was in speaking. Listening and writing also showed improvement while reading was the skill that improved least among the four skills.

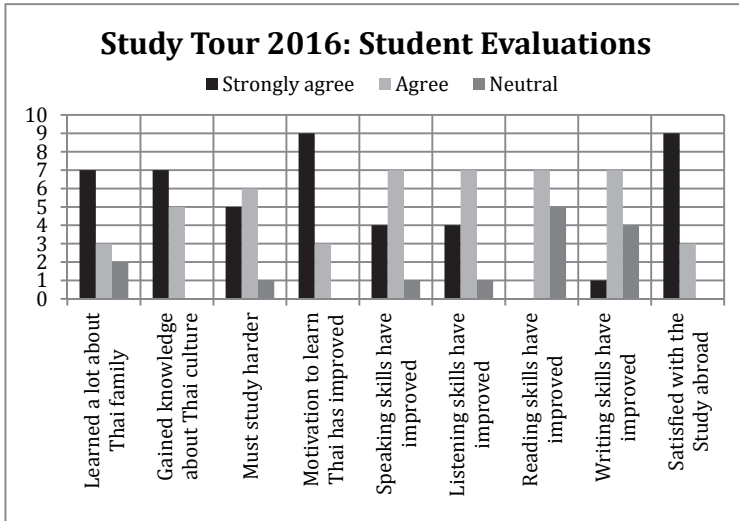


In addition to taking a pre- and post-test, the students' attitudes were also assessed with a questionnaire at the end of the study tour. In 2015, all 19 students strongly agreed that their "Motivation to learn Thai" had improved. 16 students strongly agreed and 3 students agreed with the attitudes "Must study harder" and "Satisfied with the Study abroad program." The survey results aligned with those of Harris (2010), who also found positive changes in motivation to study language and was led to conclude that short-term study programs have great validity.

In conversations with students, they noted the difficulty they had in communicating with their host families and friends and believed they would need to study harder when they returned to Japan. Students felt satisfied with the program because their language ability improved, especially in speaking and listening, and they appreciated learning so much about Thai families and Thai culture. Several noted they

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would not have been able to learn as much in just three weeks had they travelled on their own.



In 2016, all 12 students marked “strongly agree” or “agree” in reaction to “Motivation to learn Thai has improved” and “Satisfied with the Study abroad.” Other statements that overwhelmingly received “strongly agree” were “Gained knowledge about Thai culture” and “Learned a lot about Thai family.” As for improving language, students thought their speaking and listening skills improved the most.

Influence on Students

Participating on the study tour can lead students to change the direction of their studies. Ten students who studied in Thailand during their third year were asked if the

study tour had influenced their decisions. Three students strongly agreed, five students agreed, one student had no opinion and one student disagreed. The student who disagreed said that she had planned to study in Thailand even before she entered the university. Some students stated that the activities experienced on the study tour influenced them. For example, one student said that listening to and playing Thai traditional music in the activity class made him want to study Thai music more deeply as an exchange student. Four students strongly agreed and four students agreed that the study tour helped them feel at ease on their return to Thailand. Two students had no opinion on this matter.

In May 2017, six students will go to Thailand as exchange students. They were asked if the study tour influenced their decision. Five of them strongly agreed and one agreed. They were also asked if the activities they experienced during the study tour supported their decision to study in Thailand; four strongly agreed and two agreed with this. As for feeling at ease about going to Thailand, three students strongly agreed, one student agreed and two students had no opinion.

Recommendations

After nearly 15 years, a few recommendations can be suggested for designing and operating a study tour to Thailand. However, the recommendations may be applicable for study tours to other countries as well.

- 1) Design the study tour so that it helps students achieve goals set by their major or by their university.
- 2) Work with the host university by suggesting activities that best suit the students' needs and interests. Seek student input on such matters through surveys or discussions.

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- 3) Select a study tour period that does not conflict with exams at the host university. The arrival day should be near the weekend so students can rest and spend time with host families before classes start.
- 4) On sightseeing trips, try to book hotels that are not expensive but in good locations with regard to student safety and sightseeing.
- 5) Book transport in Thailand with a reliable company that employs drivers who are careful and punctual.
- 6) The university should help with buying air tickets and insurance and collecting the fees from students before departure.
- 7) Provide an orientation about Thai culture dos and don'ts.
- 8) Provide host families and students with a means of contacting each other, such as email or social media, so that they can get to know each other.
- 9) Match students and host families by looking at the records of repeating host families or use a profile of host families to fit student personalities and habits.
- 10) Prepare in advance (before departure) any performances, such as for the thank you party at the host university or for the children at the slum school in Bangkok.
- 11) Select a leader and sub-leader who will be responsible throughout the trip. The accompanying instructor should then only communicate through the leader and sub-leader. For example, when staying at a Bangkok hotel, the leader and sub-leader should ensure that students obey curfews and report problems to the teacher.
- 12) A native teacher who knows the students should accompany the study tour in order to coordinate activities and respond to issues such as illness or disagreements between students and their host families.
- 13) Organize an orientation meeting on the arrival day with host families in order to discuss such items as food, safety and cultural differences.

- 14) Talk with host university teachers from time to time in case students have learning or behavioral issues that need to be addressed.
- 15) Talk to students regularly about their adjustment to life with host families and their environment.
- 16) Participate in all culture activities and weekend trips to make sure everything runs smoothly and to better understand the students' particular assessments of these activities.
- 17) Have students present talks about their experiences in class after they return to Japan.

Conclusion

Like the experiences reported on by Harris (2010) and Sakurai (2012), the students who participated in Kanda's study tours made measurable improvements in language proficiency, gained useful knowledge about the country, deepened their own intercultural awareness, became intellectually stimulated, improved their attitudes toward study, and developed a more mature outlook toward their future careers. Because it is short, the study tour is also affordable and easy to organize during a term break when students have time to travel. Since 2003, less than 5% of all Thai majors have opted not to join the Study Tour. As for design, Kanda's experience suggests that going just after the end of the first year is optimal. Students have acquired enough Thai to be able to learn from and engage with teachers, host families and Thai friends; additionally, the experience boosts their abilities enough to accelerate their learning throughout the rest of their university studies. Another advantage is that it allows the class to cohere as a group.

In February 2017, another group of first year students will embark upon the 15th study tour. With all that students gain, there is no reason to imagine that the program

will cease anytime soon. On the other hand, each year – by assessing the experience and taking into account the character of a particular group of students – changes are considered and implemented. For example, it may become necessary to board students in dormitories if host families become scarce. However, whatever happens, every effort will be made to ensure that students encounter and engage in an experience with impact that lasts a lifetime.

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