**Operation Strategy of Asian Community course in Consideration of Regional Characteristics in Kazakhstan**

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**Introduction**

The civilization of humankind has accelerated its development beyond comparison with the past, and many countries present on the earth are the democratic polities heading for humanism that values the basic values of human dignity, freedom and equality. From this perspective, human beings seem to have achieved the most ideal world in which they enjoy unprecedented material affluence. Behind this appearance, however, we are confronting the dark side of inconvenient truths that threaten the human existence.

According to a research report of *Science Advances* in June 2015, the history of the earth has now entered into the sixth mass-extinction of animals: while the mass-extinctions to the fifth were due to natural disasters, this sixth extinction is due to the human beings (from climate change, deforestation, overfishing, poaching, and the like). The report warned that the speed of extinction has increased as 110 times as that due to the natural disasters, and 75% of animal species could disappear within two generations (60 years) including the human species. As the civilization has highly developed, human beings have pursued material-based values with all things converted into and treated as economic values, so that the earthly environment has easily destroyed. This ultimately brings about the weakening of community consciousness for all humankind, who themselves disrupt their own base of survivals. Besides, the global order is governed by the logic of power, causing inequality, conflict, and schism.

The vision of establishing Asian Community is to reflect on ourselves who have been falling into this vulnerable condition and to explore coexistence as a community of common destiny. Thanks to the exceptional support of the One Asia Foundation, the participants in this One Asia project are actively operating with the dedicated vision of making a great momentum for the sustainable community of humankind through the harmony and coexistence between Asians and people around the world. The writers also share the vision of One Asia, with great pride in taking charge of the One Asia course of a university.

This paper is to analyze our experience of the One Asia course operated for three years since the academic year 2012/2013 in Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (hereafter called Al-Farabi KazNU), Kazakhstan, and to investigate what should be considered to efficiently operate the course as fit for the regional characteristics.

**Overview of course operation**

Al-Farabi KazNU located in Almaty, the former capital, was founded in 1934, and now consists of 98 departments, 20 scientific research institutes and centers, with over two thousand faculty members and over 18 thousand students. For the recent several years, this university has made a series of innovations in the fields of education and research, upgrading its global status more. It was announced on its official website that: “Al-Farabi Kazakh National University is the best one among the universities of Kazakhstan, and occupies third place among CIS universities and 305th place according to the world university ranking of the rating QS.”

The One Asia course opened with the beginning of the academic year 2012/2013; during the first two years, it proceeded at the Department of Political Sciences in the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Sciences; and in the 2013 spring semester, it extended to the students in the Faculty of Oriental Studies. Every year, there was a fierce competition between two departments – Political Sciences and Korean Studies – in order to take this project. We preferred to choose a more active and enthusiastic department to conduct the course. In the third year, finally, we were able to settle the course as one subject with two credits at the Department of Korean and Japanese Studies in the Faculty of Oriental Studies. (This year, the department was renamed as the Department of Far Eastern Studies which comprises a wider range of regions and countries in Asia such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines.) The table below shows the basic feature of the One Asia course for the three years.

**Yearly status of Asian Community course**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Academic**  **year** | **2012/2013** | **2013/2014** | **2014/2015** |
| **Number of student** | **Fall semester : 59**  **Spring semester: 36**  Registered: 49/30  Non-registered and exchange program: 10/6 | **Spring semester: 56**  Registered: 37  Non-registered and exchange program: 19 | **Spring semester: 84**  Registered: 54  Non-registered  and exchange program: 19  External organizations personnel: 11 |
| **Course type** | Open special | Open special | Open special  2 credits |
| **Responsible Department** | Political Sciences | Political Sciences | Korean Studies |

**Course strategies and characteristics**

1. Invitation of various experts, diversification of themes

Taking advantage of the omnibus course, we attempted to invite experts from various professional fields in every lecture to meet the course objectives and principles for one Asian Community. The domestic cultural scientists, archeologists, historians, linguists, journalists, socio-political scientists and philosophers, who are prominently active in the international relationship and network with their academic fields, and the foreign professors as natural and social scientists from Korea, China, Japan, and Turkey, contributed to the course, helping audience have a balanced view of the Asian world in many perspectives.

The first-week lectures of this course dealt with the idea and purpose of Asian Community, the services and functions of the One Asia Foundation, the activities and roles of participants from around the world, and the like. Particularly, the life and philosophy of Yoji Sato, the founder and chairman of the One Asia Foundation, were introduced with the focus on the understanding and necessity of One Asia. The lecture themes by local professors included such pending issues in and out of country as the political/economic relationships and collaborations between Central and Northeast Asian states; Eastern philosophy; Central Asian resource strategies; ethnic conflicts between Central Asian states; the indigenous ego recovery from the wounded tradition and cultural identity under the former Soviet regime; excavation of the ancient archaeological history of Central Asia; social integration as a multiethnic state; Islam as an indigenous religion and extremism; and conflicts between Russia and Ukraine. The lectures by the foreign visiting professors included the future and strategies of nano science and technology in Asia, the Asian strategies of regional energy diplomacy, and the regional integrations in the East Asia, receiving enthusiastic reactions and inspiring vitality into the course. These lectures stressed the importance of win-win collaborations, co-prosperity, and mutual mature partnership between the Central Asia with ample resources and the Asian states and corporations with high technologies.

1. Flexibility of open lectures, application of credit system

The One Asia course for the first two years was operated as an open course with no credit so as to let undergraduates and master's course students take freely, inciting their curiosity and raising their recognition on this course. As the course director of One Asia as well as that of Regional Studies in every seasonal session for Korean students, we relate the lectures of Regional Studies with the One Asia course by making it obligatory for the attendees of Regional Studies to take a lecture of One Asia, assigning to them a task on Asian Community so that they may participate in discussions about it. For this open course, we also organized the flexible list of attendees covering the students and faculty of both Philosophy and Political Sciences, and Oriental Studies as well as exchange students. Keeping its open course, we give two credits to the attendees from this third year, while extending the publicity effects of One Asia by inviting a wider range of attendees from external institutions in Almaty such as Institute of Oriental Studies named after Suleimanov, Goryeoin Association, Goryeo Daily, Goreyo Theater, Kazradio, Goryeoin Youth Association, and Institute of Art and Literature named after Auezhov.

1. Rewarding for achievement, motivation for active participation

Evaluating the attendance and task performance of each attendee and providing proper rewards for them constituted the power of leading active participation of students in the One Asia course. In the final lecture, particularly, a professor and staff dispatched from the One Asia Foundation gave a presentation ceremony so that the students who had worked hard could feel a special sense of reward and accomplishment.

The evaluation of students reflected not only the attendance and task performance of students, but also the performance of presentation which was contested for the task theme on a request basis. The presentation contest was seriously conducted, through which students were able to have time of ruminating, studying, and discussing by themselves, while the jury consisted of the head of Department and the One Asia lecturers. The attending professors were encouraged to submit their pieces of research related to the lecture themes, with each of them supported for publication and promoted as an academic outcome.

**Problems, and strategic considerations by regional characteristics**

We have endeavored to operate as most effectively as we could in our own way by strategic use of available resources in the university environment, but there still remain the unsatisfactory problems below. Although our efforts are basically limited, such problems as the intramural lack of interest and the systemic difficulty in adopting the credit of subject seem to be related mostly to the historical, social, and economic contexts as well as the overall social system. We analyzed the root causes of these problems so as to consider them for strategic operation.

1. Low interest in One Asia

One of the obstacles to the enthusiastic participation in the vision of one Asian Community goes beyond this university: the fact that many intellectuals and students in Kazakhstan follow the West as the disciplinary as well as politico-economic model of development. For the Central Asia located between Europe and Asia, they emphasize its European aspect while the Kazakhs, particularly, find their national origin in Europe. The present-day Central Asian indigenes (except the Tajiks who belong linguistically to Persian) belong nationally to the Mongol-Turks and linguistically to Turkic. However, as a Kazakh professor of authority suggested, many Kazakhs believe they are now 70% European-blooded since the European race inhabited the ancient Central Asian area although they have experienced racial mixtures repeatedly. It seems that they believe their nation is closer to the European race and aspire after the West as a result of complex factors such as the Orientalism from the long history of domination and repression by the white race, the nationalism prominent in the process of ego recovery after independence, the discourse of development into an advanced society along with globalization and westernization, and the wariness and counter-extremism against Islamic fundamentalism in solidarity with the West.

In Kazakhstan, the most developed amongst the Central Asian states, the President and the mainstream social group of intellectuals have recently agreed to change the state name into Kazakh eli (meaning the land where the Kazakhs live). This issue of changing the state name occurred because the Arabic or Central Asian states whose names include the suffix '-stan' are considered strongly to be underdeveloped countries. The renaming of Kazakhstan was to assert its national status as differentiated from those '-stan' countries, putting a stronger value as its model on the West which is considered to have better advanced democratization or industrialization. Although the CIS system has been organized for solidarity between the Central Asian republics upon independence, the various kinds of schismatic seeds left behind the former Soviet Union, such as national conflicts, the issue of water resources, and boundary issues, are remaining chronic antagonisms. In order to recognize they belong to a community of common destiny as a means of overcoming the difficulties of symbiosis and harmony between neighboring states in the Central Asia, continuous efforts should be needed to have a convinced vision of Asian Community.

1. The problem of adopting a credit system: the lack of curricular flexibility

We believe the purpose of this One Asia project is to make it adopted as a regular subject of the university and maintain such a status. For the first two years, we attempted to make the course credited although it was not easy. In the third year, we moved the responsible department for this course from the Department of Political Sciences to the Department of Korean and Japanese Studies which showed a strong will to credit recognition. Thus, the students who enrolled in the One Asia course came to achieve two credits as an additional subject, though it was not a regular subject.

It is difficult to reflect this course as a regular subject because the formal distinction between compulsory and elective subjects of the university curriculum allows no free choice of subjects by students so that all subjects are no other than compulsory ones; also, it is difficult to supplement a new subject by changing the curriculum of the Faculty of Oriental Studies which is organized comprehensively within the faculty frame by majors and scholastic years. Besides, the number of students by majors in each department is small and the courses are divided again into Russian- and Kazakh-speaking classes. For this reason, this course was operated as an additional subject with two credits open to all students regardless of their grades or majors, as the best means of overcoming the problem that it was not adopted as a regular course due to the lack of students and curricular flexibility.

1. Formal meritocracy and bureaucracy of university administration

The effects and results of the One Asia course would be different by the abilities, responsibilities, and enthusiasm of the operation chief and the collaborators. Besides, the rational support system and flexibility of the university administration work so importantly. The process of operating this course could be characterized as the red-tapism and meritocracy of operation collaborators in the faculty or department, as well as the bureaucracy and authoritarianism of the support system of university administration.

It is considered a large achievement that a faculty or department takes an academic project. The University policy leads to the fierce competition between those departments or faculties by often publicizing the results of comparative analysis on the quantified values of goal achievement between faculties and departments in the fields of education, research, and social activities through the weekly committees of division chiefs to achieve the university's goal of leaping forward to the world university ranking. In this competitive mechanism, one may have a chance to select the department to support more actively and responsibly as a participant in the One Asia project. Once a department takes the project, however, it tends to be satisfied with the documented performances based on data rather than the content. For example, people from external institutions enrolled with the promise of participation to vitalize the One Asia course, but only to show the low participation actually with the paperwork just left as the performance of the department.

Amongst the difficulties experienced by the course operator, there are many administrative procedures and documented demands until receiving the research grant for operating the course sent from the One Asia Foundation to the university. Particularly, as the Kazakhstani economic situation worsened and the university entered into fiscal austerity, we now should follow the more difficult procedure to receive the project research grant, and managed to receive it almost by the end of the semester. The deduction of money from the grant by the university also differed every time. The authoritative administrative system of the university stresses principles and rules, but actually lacks transparency. The One Asia project itself involves the external business like inviting foreign professors and necessitates swift collaboration, but the authoritative and bureaucratic attitude of the administrative division do not help lead the project to a success, but only to cause damage to the image and status of the university.

This problem is not just of a university but related to the deep corruption over the whole Kazakhstani society. According to the announcement of Transparency International (TI) in December 2013, the CPI (corruption perception index) of Kazakhstan is the 133th place amongst 176 countries, with Russia and the CIS countries recognized as 'utterly' intransparent, unacceptable, and prevalently corrupted. The CIS countries liberated from the former Soviet Union introduced the market economy system, but such ills as concentrated wealth to the power, severe gap between haves and have-nots, inflation, corruption, and the trend of mutual distrust are prevailing in the privatization process. Here are the obstacles to entering into a transparent society, based on such structural contradictions as impersonal and inefficient operation of bureaucracy inherited from the Soviet practice, the lack of an independent organization to monitor corruptions, and the limited freedom of speech.

**Conclusions**

The One Asia course of Al-Farabi KazNU has taken root to some extent for the three years. However, the several problems confronted in the process of operation are about structural ones related mainly to the remnants of the former Soviet system.

In the condition of inefficient administrative system, we as the responsible team of the One Asia project have taken advantage of the open lecture in its own way and done best to operate the course by utilizing available resources enough based on the harmonious human relationships and trust in the university. Since it is an advantage of the One Asia course that enables multidisciplinary approaches, it was useful to invite experts not only from humanities or social sciences but also from natural sciences. Also in future, this course will intend to excavate and invite professional experts from various fields such as policy-makers, diplomats, and entrepreneurs. This is because it is necessary to consider various aspects of actual and functional approaches for one Asian Community.

The lack of interest in the Asian Community and the delay of administrative procedure are what have appeared in historical contexts, but considered to be resolved somewhat by the deliberate efforts to approach the collaborators of each division in more various aspects. For the problem of credit system, there are not enough students even if the course were reflected as a specific subject in the university curriculum, so that there arises difficulty in operating a unified class in which a number of students would participate. Thus, we think the best option is to maintain it like now as an open course with two credits which anyone can attend regardless of grades and majors in the department.

According to our experience of operating the One Asia course to carry out the project in this Central Asian region including Kazakhstan, we would stress that including the historical and social contexts of this area the strategic considerations as follows should be understood and persistently approached.

In the process of course operation of the One Asia in Kazakhstan, we were able to experience the overall prevalence of structural problems in society such as the lack of experienced democratic governance, the conflicts and schisms between the independent states, their return to nationalism, the preference of kinship and regionalism to abilities, the remnants of unproductive Soviet bureaucracy, and the prevalence of corruption. The lack of flexibility, red-tapism, the short-term immediate interests, and the concentration of division chiefs on their personal achievement led to their inactive attitudes and waste of time for administrative procedure in the support and collaboration for the course operation, ultimately serving dysfunctionally against the efficient operation of the One Asia course.

The conditions identified above seem dysfunctional elements in the process of constituting a future Asian Community, but suggesting the philosophy and vision of One Asia will be the impetus and chance to recognize these problems by ourselves and explore the way of coexistence in the lack of post-Soviet philosophy and ideology as well as in the schismatic and conflictive situation between neighboring countries. For the One Asia course as an omnibus type can become the power to awaken that we are in a common destiny since it leads participants to strictly analyze what effects could be made by several problems of the Central Asian states including Kazakhstan on individual, social, and national units, and further on the global human community.

Kazakhstan has made continuous government-led efforts of scraping out corruption and is appreciated from outside for its formation of comparatively smooth and stable environment to invest, particularly with positive elements such as having broadened the eyes of youth and giving them challenging and open experiences with the radical policies to foster the global talent. The history of humankind suggests the lesson that any group in disharmony with neighboring countries cannot guarantee its destiny, let alone its own exclusive prosperity, which is against the universal value. It should be necessary to take various positive elements of Kazakhstan as nutrients, and being

aware that we all are in a common destiny and important partners for each other, to strive for making 'One Central Asia' by inducing regional harmony. From the perspective of one Asian Community, these efforts are believed to become a process of going beyond a regional community toward a global community.

What could be positive and negative factors for human-oriented society in Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

For reference, the course director of One Asia has been operating the course of Regional Studies and seasonal sessions for Korean collegiate students every semester for the recent four years, sending as many students in our university as possible to Korea by exploring the chances of scholarship and exchange students programs or the seasonal sessions. He focuses on these activities because his purpose is to make up mutually beneficial environment and foster the students into the future experts with the mind of win-win partnership by providing the chances of learning and experiencing different societies and cultures. His activities of education and exchange are based on and endeavoring to practice the philosophy and idea of One Asia.