

Special Feature

ICU Alumni: Strengths and Weaknesses

Alumni display distinctive characteristics related to the university they graduate from.

Universities arguably have a tremendous effect on forming a student's personality. So what about ICU alumni?

What are they like? This special feature deals with their strengths and weaknesses.

I hope it will benefit alumni in some way, by providing something to reflect on or make future plans.



You Need to Know about Japan and the World to Be Knowledgeable

We interviewed Guest Professor Katsuto Iwai about ICU and its students. He started teaching economics at ICU 3 years ago after a career at the University of Tokyo and at universities abroad.

Eiichiro Kabashima (AN editor, CLA '93), Mikito Morikawa (AN editor, CLA '03)

AN: Could you tell us your personal background?

Iwai: As a child, I was a science buff. My favorite books were Jean Henri Fabre's *Book of Insects*, books by Godo Nakanishi, the founder of the Wild Bird Society of Japan, and classic introductory books on the fundamental principles in science by George Gamow, the proponent of the Big Bang theory. I wanted to become a physicist like Albert Einstein. In junior high school, I started

reading science fiction and got interested in literature. In senior high school I read a lot of novels. When I can't generate new ideas to move my research forward, I go to literature for academic inspiration, so I have written essays with literary motifs. I tell students at ICU to read literature and philosophy. I was interested in both literature and science, so I had a difficult time choosing between them. I added both, divided by two and ended up with economics.

Marxism was all the rage at the time, and a book about the topic made me think that in social science I could be doing both science and literature.

In university, I was in a seminar on Marxism and studied the theory of exploitation and the labor theory of value. It was interesting, but facts were tactfully intertwined with ideals, which I found rather unscientific. I think this was also the effect of structuralism which was critical of Marxism at the time. In the

end, I chose modern economics which was more logical and empirical. In recent years, I have also been doing research in law and thought.

AN: You taught for a long time in the U.S. and at the University of Tokyo. What is your impression of ICU?

Iwai: I've taught here for three years now. It's very comfortable here. The campus is beautiful, my colleagues very friendly and the clerical staff very helpful. I think it is the best environment I have

*1 Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1963)

After graduating from junior high school, Ozu taught at an elementary school as a substitute teacher and joined Shochiku Cinema in 1923. As director there from 1927, he won acclaim for silent movies such as *Daigaku wa detakeredo* (I Graduated But...) (1929), and *Umarete wa mitakeredo* (I Was Born, But...) (1932). After serving in the war, he cultivated his unique style in shooting footage and low-key directing, refined in films with actors such as Setsuko Hara, Chishu Ryu. *Banshun* (Late Spring) (1949) and *Tokyo Monogatari* (Tokyo Story) (1953) are regarded as classics around the world.

2 Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998)

After graduating from junior high school, Kurosawa aspired to become a painter but joined PCL studios (later merging with Toho) instead in 1936. He debuted as a director with *Sanshiro* (1943). He won international recognition at the Venice International Film Festival, where he won the Golden Lion Award for *Rashomon* (1950) and the Silver Lion Award for his signature film, *Seven Samurai* (1954). *Yojimbo* (1961), *Tsubaki Sanshiro* (1962), and *High and Low* (1963) are widely considered to be classics, his profound influence felt in works of directors around the world including George Lucas and Steven Spielberg.

3 Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956)

After graduating from elementary school Mizoguchi designed advertisements, and joined Nikkatsu studios in 1920 and became a director there in 1923. He shot many silent and talkie movies in the prewar days, such as his signature work, *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum* (1939). He created a style of long takes and exotic period dramas through his postwar works. He won international acclaim by winning awards at the Venice International Film Festival for three consecutive years: the International Prize for *The Life of Oharu* in 1952, the Silver Lion Award for *Ugetsu* in 1953, and the Silver Lion Award for *Sansho the Bailiff* in 1954. French directors associated with the nouvelle vague such as Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut have spoken of his influence as he continues to fascinate the world with his cinematography.

worked in. Many universities offered teaching posts when I retired from the University of Tokyo, but I chose ICU for three reasons. The first was the high level of students. I think they have a different attitude to learning compared to students at other institutions. They should ask more questions in class, but the general level is very high. The second was the international environment, and third, the emphasis on liberal arts. A few years ago ICU abolished its divisions following the American liberal arts model. This will be ICU's strength. In Japan, the trend has been to drop liberal arts in lieu of specialized departments. The university's firm stance in the opposite direction is closely related to the essence of globalization.

I taught for a while in the U.S. and in the U.K. at universities such as MIT, UC Berkeley, Yale, Princeton, Pennsylvania and LSE. They emphasize research. On the other hand there are smaller colleges in the U.S. that emphasize liberal arts. When I was a graduate student at MIT, students came from all over the world. A proportion of the Americans were from small liberal arts colleges. They had not specialized in a certain area in their undergraduate course, so they did not stand out at first. But they would catch up very rapidly, many becoming global leaders in the field.

Global and Local Knowledge

AN: What is your idea of a liberal arts education?

Iwai: When I attend international conferences, people joke that Japanese scholars seriously deliver their presentations during the day, but skip the social events in the evening. This is because they cannot carry on a conversation during meals and drinks after dinner. Scholars attending the same academic meeting will have myriad specialties, so it is important to be able to talk about ideas and the arts that everybody around the world is interested in. The international elite read *The Economist*, *The New York Review of Books* and *The New Yorker*, which provide common interest in books, movies and the arts. At UC Berkeley where I was Assistant Professor, my roommate was from Catalonia, Spain, specializing in applied mathematics for economics. A true European connoisseur, he had books on modern thought and the classics on his bookshelf. We spent a lot of time together talking about literature and movies.

Intellectuals around the world know about Japanese literature and movies. Those who aren't specialists in literature would come to talk with me about Japanese film directors Yasujiro Ozu, Akira Kurosawa, and Kenji Mizoguchi. At university, students would organize film shows every week, including works by Ozu. I tell my students to watch classic movies from around the world to become knowledgeable. Literature is also good, but students today are slow readers. You only need an hour and a half or two hours to watch a movie for a good rendering of something that is of global interest. And it's fun! Most intellectuals have seen them so you always have something to talk about if you run out of other things to say. Ozu and Kurosawa are world-class figures. They would be listed among the top ten movie directors in the world. Ozu saw Hollywood movies in Singapore during the war. But he didn't emulate them and cultivated a unique Japanese point of view which expanded the scope of how humans can be depicted. This catapulted him to global status. He polished the Japanese way of expression, which brought him world renown. Kurosawa shot riveting footage when he was looking for pure entertainment: the macaroni westerns rose in response to his works. When he tried to become artistic, he was second rate. These two directors provide contrasting examples in going global. At ICU maybe we should have students see more of these classic Japanese movies.

To be an intellectual in the world, we need to have a bilingual foundation with knowledge about the world and Japan. Being able to read in English would provide you with global knowledge. But English has the largest population of first-language speakers, so you need another language, preferably your mother tongue. Its cultural background will render you unique in processing ideas and information. If English is your second language, the way you express yourself may be more creative. ICU should look at its advantage of being in Japan in Asia.

The advantage of a single department when pursuing your way of life

AN: Some universities in Japan are looking into establishing a liberal arts department. How should ICU react to that?

Iwai: ICU's strength is that it is a single department of liberal arts. It has faculty specializing in diverse disciplines,



Katsuto Iwai

Professor Iwai was born in 1947, and specializes in economic theory. He graduated from the Faculty of Economics, the University of Tokyo and acquired his Ph.D. from MIT. He was Assistant Professor at Yale University, Guest Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and Professor at the University of Tokyo in economics. He serves as senior researcher at The Tokyo Foundation. He received an honorary doctoral degree from Belgrade University in April 2009. He won the Nikkei Economic Cultural Prize Special Award in recognition for his research in disequilibrium dynamics and Suntory Literary Award for "Kaheiron" (Money theory), 2nd Hideo Kobayashi Prize for "Kaisha wa donaruka" (What will Happen to Companies?). He started teaching at ICU as guest professor in April 2010.

so students can study liberal arts and also delve into specialized fields. This dual structure is a great advantage.

The last 20 years in Japan hit the economy hard, but labor efficiency has gone up. Although it is not very high among OECD nations, it is only slightly lower than the U.S. or Europe. As a result, the average standard of living has risen in Japan. Nowadays, students don't have to decide on their line of work immediately after graduation but can take some time making decisions about what to do with their lives. In college you may not know what to major in or which vocation to choose, so you should expand your options. That is the reason why liberal arts should be emphasized in college, as is the case at ICU. I hope you see Ozu and Kurosawa movies. It's not too late for alumni, either.