

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

by

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on

**Viswanathan Selvaratnam's**

**THE INTERNATIONAL FLOW OF STUDENTS: A VEHICLE FOR  
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND CROSS-CULTURE UNDERSTANDING**

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It is well known that young people from underdeveloped nations have made great contributions to their countries in such areas as politics, administration, business, industry, education, culture, science and technology after receiving their higher education in the developed countries whose support made their education possible.

It is a characteristics of the latter part of the 20th century that this flow of international students continues. Likewise, an undeniable byproduct of this flow has been the expansion of the territory in which English is spoken. However, it is recognized that there exists a distinctive difference in the politics of the international flow of students between the Western democratic nations and the Oriental communist countries.

In the case of the free world, students enjoy freedom of choice of their academic goals and personal ambitions. They can even obtain a permanent visa and a job in the host country. On the other hand, the international flow of students is strictly controlled on the basis of ideology among the communist-bloc nations. This was clearly revealed by the North Korean students who escaped from East Germany to the Federal Republic of Germany in the late 1950's.

In short, the quantitative international exchange of students since the close of World War II brought about great change in the world as a whole when reviewed from the position of the governments of host countries as well as the country of origin. However, it was not as successful as originally expected.

What does this mean?

Japan launched a new innovative movement through the Meiji Modernization policy in the 1870's. Japan sent many of its students to such countries as England, Germany and France, which were the so-called developed countries at that time. All of these students became great scholars or professionals upon returning to their mother country.

Thus, they modernized their national institutions and military system in line with their national goals and established the University of Tokyo as an institution that

could compete with the leading universities of the West. Only Japan might be considered as a country whose students rendered such a significant contribution in all areas upon returning from overseas training. Through such a policy, Japan was able to progress from being a backward nation to joining the ranks of the developed countries within a period of less than a century. Korea also sent its students abroad at that time, starting about ten years later than Japan.

Unfortunately, however, it was at a time when all foreign countries (China, Russia, Japan, USA, England and France) were continuously interfering with the national policies of Korea and such interference caused a change of political power. Therefore, the Korean government could not pursue a consistent national policy and as a result, the students returning from abroad could not find proper positions. The nations eventually collapsed.

These two examples took place almost 100 years ago and no one paid attention to the lesson. However, these experiences of the two nations can provide great lessons to the more than one-hundred developing countries for their policy of overseas training of their students to be more explicit. The policy of overseas training of the students is able to bring about success in countries with a stable government whereas it may not only fail to contribute to the national development. It may even become a cause of political instability in countries that do not have a stable government.

I agree in general with Dr. Selvaratnam about the results of the analysis of the international flow of students. When reviewed from the standpoint of multi-faceted international cooperation and cultural exchange, the international exchange of students is merely one of many approaches for international exchange. I think Dr. Selvaratnam will agree with me on this point. What should be considered here with regard to the international flow of students is the system that utilizes human resources. As mentioned, the success of Japan compared to Korea's failure is neither a result of a difference in goals nor a result of difference in the quality of human resources. It was the result of the difference in the national system that utilized human resources. The Japanese system succeeded whereas Korea's failed. This seems to be a very important point; this is true even in modern times.

System has a function that controls the characteristics of an organization. In every country there exists a national system that controls the nation as a whole, as well as many distinctive systems which controls an individual agency or organization. We cannot expect that all such systems function completely satisfactorily in any nation. They might have faults somewhere. What is most important is that we should have a system that sustains the cooperative relationship between government, industry and the academic field. We cannot expect to see success in the policy of the international flow of students. It as if any one of the three above mentioned--particularly the government--fails to recognize the need for cooperation and consistency in national policy.

Let's consider the example of Korea. Many students left for the developed countries--mainly the United States--since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Most of these students left Korea freely and without governmental control. The per capita income was less than \$100 at that time. When they left, the nation stimulated a firm will to work hard to contribute to the national development.

But about the time when they would have returned there were two major shifts of political power. In addition, the industrial structure could not provide them with proper jobs. It was only the universities that welcomed their return.

This undesirable situation led them to give up their ideas of returning home and they joined the brain-drain. In fact, Korea was badly in need of those brains! Nonetheless, government, industry, and the academic field were operated separately without a cooperative system that could attract the high-quality brains who eventually had to settle in the countries where they were trained. Even in such situation, the number of students going abroad continued to increase year by year. Now, about 4,000 Korean students go abroad every year and the number of those students currently studying abroad is over 10,000. Many thousands more have already returned home over the last two decades and are actively participating in developmental projects in various fields, but still many such "brains" still remain outside of Korea.

Whatever the situation, no one can deny that Korea is one of the countries which has received the most benefit from the international exchange program. Most of the leaders who are active in politics, economics, industry, science, technology, culture, arts and even in the military consist of those who completed overseas training at least at graduate level. The cooperative system among government, industry and academic society has been greatly improved. Therefore, Korea has a bright perspective in this respect.

On the other hand, Korea is one of those countries which has lost a lot of high-quality brains. This may be attributed to the failure of the international exchange program in Korea. Then, will this failure continue even in the future? What does this experience of failure mean to us?

All of those high-quality brains living abroad still love their homeland. To my understanding, all of them are ready to give up their settled life overseas and return home any time when they are offered a suitable position. It is clear that the electronics industry, for example, has developed considerably due to the resolute investment of the industry sector as well as the active support of the government.

However, what is more important in this line is the result of the return of those who were engaged in the electronics field overseas. They were once criticized as being part of the brain-drain but now they are very actively contributing to the national development. High-quality brains are a great potential that can be effectively utilized any time when they are needed.