

Nurturing Global Leadership at APU:

“Ba”[場], “Wa”[和] & “Michi”[道]

By Monte CASSIM

Introduction: Defining & Nurturing Global Leadership

Defining leadership is not an easy task. The basic premise in this article is that it is a quality inherent in everyone. The experience of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) is that a living and learning environment enables the stellar qualities of leadership to be drawn out, both in the individual and the collective. Global leadership is sensitive to diverse views emanating from cultural differences and to the transformations in the socioeconomic, political and technological landscapes that lie beyond one's own nation/territory. APU was established by Ritsumeikan Trust in 2000 to nurture leaders who would shape the future. Today, the university draws around half of its student population of 6,000 from 88 countries/territories. This acceptance of diversity is important for a nation that has considered itself to be “homogeneous” up to now. The discussions centering on admitting 300,000 overseas students into Japanese universities and on preparing for an immigrant intake of around 10 million people over the next several decades can draw from APU's experience. Indeed, APU's classroom of today (*Photo 1*) might well reflect a Japanese university classroom around 2020.

For global leadership to flourish, an enabling environment (“ba”) and a higher sense of purpose that transcends the utilitarian is important. The latter at APU is represented by the core values of harmony (“wa”) and an exemplary code of conduct (“michi”), two very Japanese dimensions that build on the universal mission statement of the university. I do hope that this narrative of my own personal observations over the past five years at APU will stimulate the reader to further enquiry. What you will see here is but the tip of the iceberg.

The Enabling Environment: “Ba”[場]

“Ba” (literally “place”) refers to the enabling environment that nurtures and draws out the latent quality of leadership. At APU this includes both

a tangible physical environment and an often virtual network-based environment that transcends geographic space. The latter is reflected in several thousands of social network sites on the Internet which bring APU's community of students, mentors and alumni together. Having 40% of its faculty coming from outside Japan provides the APU student with a broad base of inspiration and experience. A disciplined classroom environment, an enjoyable campus environment, and fulfilling interactions, not just with one's peers and mentors, but also with the local community and the wider international community beyond the shores of Japan, all contribute to this learning environment.

The “Multicultural Weeks” (*Photo 2*), where a particular country or region from where our students come is introduced through a wide range of culinary and cultural events, culminating in a performing arts program, are a joy to behold. I have had the president of a prestigious multinational corporation who saw this program when he came to recruit our students remark to me, “We can skip the interviews. Just introduce me to the core group of students who planned and executed this event. I will have no qualms about hiring them tomorrow!” One such performance brought tears to the eyes of an ambassador of a country who visited the performance as its chief guest. I paraphrase what he said: “I have seen this intricate dance performed by a team of 20-30 artists in my country, but to see 50-60 young people, only half of whom are from my country and all of whom are not professional dancers, perform it so exquisitely, I feel that our arts have come of age in furthering friendship and peace.” Although it started as a student support activity to bring the diverse communities on our campus together, the professionalism of these “Multicultural Weeks” has become the defining standard for a wide range of over 150 club activities and several more individual initiatives. These are now encouraged and supported by a one-stop service center, the Student Activities Station (SAS), which has received a MEXT Good Practice Award (MEXT stands for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).

PHOTO 1

Photo: Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University



APU's classroom today: a taste of 2020?

PHOTO 2

Photo: Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University



APU Multicultural Weeks: Saman dance at Indonesia Week

A Higher Sense of “Wa” [和] & “Michi”[道]

The Japanese concept of “wa” (literally “harmony”) is an inclusive value, which embodies a sense of civility founded on respect for others. “Wa” requires both an immediate and a longer-term perspective, a bird’s-eye view with one’s feet on the ground, so to speak. From this analogy, it follows that one has to stand tall, have a higher sense of purpose, to make the judgments that are conducive to the creation of “wa.” I believe that this sense of purpose is embodied in the university’s mission of fostering freedom, peace and humanism. It has contributed greatly to the conviviality seen in the campus environment at APU, despite the great diversity of views, values and cultural practices. Inclusion is a key value which has spread to student circles and activities as well.

Around 2005, at a time when Japanese diplomatic relations with China, South Korea and Taiwan were strained, students from these four countries/territories organized a day-long symposium, with a Maori mentor from New Zealand as chair, on “Textbooks and Territory” – two disputed domains which had soured relations. There were two sessions. In the first, each nation/territory presented its own perspectives of the problems. In the second, participants discussed the issues after hearing each other’s views. The conclusions drawn were surprisingly mature, considering the age of the organizers and participants. They were ensconced in two questions, presented to a packed audience at the end of the day:

- (1) “When histories are shared among nations/territories, but are interpreted differently, is not there a case for a cooperative endeavor in writing history textbooks?”
- (2) “In an era of globalization, when a territory is in dispute, cannot the parties involved subscribe to its joint development and the equitable sharing of wealth derived from it?”

It is ironic that several years later the powers that be have subscribed to the second question, with the joint development of mineral resources that might lie in the territory disputed by two of the above nations. One can only hope that similar wisdom will eventually prevail in regard to the first question. Indeed, in “the mouths of babes and sucklings...” lies a fount of wisdom.

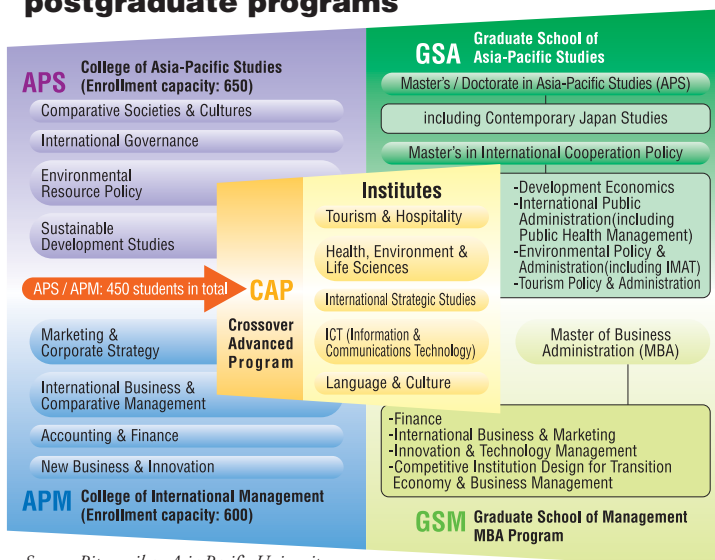
The concept of “michi” literally means the “way (of the master)” and can be read as “do” (pronounced “dough”) when it is a composite of two ideographic characters. It is a code of conduct that continually strives for perfection with both discipline and honor. It is embodied in both the cultural arts (tea ceremony, or “sado”; flower arrangement, “kado”; calligraphy, or “shodo”) and the martial arts (“budo”), such as “judo,” “kendo” and “aikido.” I was once told by a “judo master,” who was lamenting the plight of the art after it was recognized as an Olympic sport: “Now winning has taken precedence over all else. In judo, one does not win...one’s opponent lets one win!” Embodied in his words is the sense of humility with which the victor must face the vanquished. In the activities of APU students too, one senses this sensitivity to the pain of others. Whether it is working for international disaster relief, poverty alleviation or ensuring that families with HIV/AIDS come out of their debilitating entrapment to walk towards self-reliance, all examples of student-initiated voluntary activities at APU, one senses a commitment to help all, even the less fortunate, to walk tall.

Pedagogy & the Global Workplace

Pedagogy is the bridge that enables the transformation of a higher sense of purpose into action. The foundations of education at APU include: (1) a unique dual-language education system in English and Japanese, which develops inter-personal communication skills; (2) an emphasis on IT literacy, which stretches the outreach of such communication into the virtual

CHART

PEDAGOGY AT APU: Undergraduate & postgraduate programs



world, and (3) an understanding of global issues and their relevance to the future of the Asia-Pacific region, which provides a sense of higher purpose. Based upon this, specialist knowledge and skills are imparted at the undergraduate level from 13 pedagogic domains in APU’s two faculties and five institutes and at the post-graduate level in its two graduate schools, offering a range of programs at the master’s and doctoral levels (Chart).

Pedagogy in the classroom at APU is the foundation of a learning environment that goes beyond classrooms, disciplines, territorial boundaries and culturally defined mindsets. This aspect defines APU graduates. Their worth has been recognized by corporate Japan. APU’s job placement success rate for its graduates in Japan has ranged between 96%-100% in this past decade. Today, around 370 blue-chip corporations (five years ago it was fewer than 50) come to this distant campus to recruit our students. Around 70% of all job offers take place through this on-campus recruiting (OCR) system. Even the global recession we are now in does not seem to deter these corporations. This high level of employability is largely because these graduates are perceived to be suited to the global workplace.

Conclusion: Investing in People

The energy one senses at APU tends to make one look toward the future with a great deal of hope. Even as we struggle to come out of the global recession we entered through our mistaken belief that trading in a near-endless succession of financial commodities (including the debt of others!) would create more wealth for all, the higher sense of purpose that APU graduates aspire to becomes all the more important. I do hope the enabling environment we are striving to create at APU will make us look anew at the true nature of wealth. Indeed, as Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founding father of the United Arab Emirates, said: “The real wealth of a nation does not lie in its material wealth, it lies in its people.” People are undoubtedly our best investment for the future. Investing in education lies at the heart of this. At a time when Japan’s per capita investment in higher education rates rather poorly among the league of OECD nations, perhaps a renewed commitment is necessary. **JS**

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