

# Sophia University, Tokyo

## An International Institution

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Eighty-seven years ago, when three Jesuits arrived in Tokyo with the intention of establishing a university, the international character of Sophia University was already in evidence. The team of three consisted of an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a German. Eighty-seven years and two world wars later, the international character of Sophia is stronger than ever. There are full-time faculty members from 23 nations, and 750 non-Japanese students representing 61 different nationalities.

Furthermore, Japan today is much more receptive to the idea of a university with an international character than it was eighty-seven years ago, or even twenty years ago. Japan as a nation has been making its presence felt more and more on the international scene, most noticeably in the field of economics, but also in the cultural and political spheres. This international stance has been increasingly reflected within the country itself, as people become increasingly genuinely concerned about the need to have a true international outlook while maintaining their identity as Japanese.

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***Few students or professors from countries outside Japan obtain the minimum Japanese language training necessary for active participation in the academic life of a typical Japanese university.***

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One of the main obstacles to international education in Japan has of course been the language. Few students or professors from countries outside Japan can devote two years to intensive Japanese language training, the bare minimum for active participation in the academic life of a typical Japanese university. And relatively few Japanese academics have the fluency in foreign languages that would enable them to lecture to foreign students in any other language but Japanese. The Faculty of Comparative Culture, one of Sophia's seven faculties, provides a solution by offering a wide variety of courses (200 per semester) taught in English, and giving an education to 1,000 students from

all over the world. Japanese professors with higher degrees from American or European universities, and non-Japanese professors from several countries, lecture to an international *mix* of students on Japanese studies, international business, international relations, and seven other major fields of concentration. Exchange programs with 75 universities around the world keep a steady stream of students arriving every year for a one-year program of study.

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***Japan has never been more receptive to linking the cultures of East and West, and Sophia is attempting to develop such a bridge.***

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Meanwhile in the other six faculties of the university, Japanese students can study the language, literature, religion, history, and art of other countries, as well as the social, political, and economic situation of those countries from professors who are themselves native citizens of the country in question. The foreign Jesuits particularly, but also many other non-Japanese faculty members, are generally fluent enough in the Japanese language to conduct classes in Japanese.

From the beginning, Sophia University has tried to fulfill the function of a bridge linking the cultures of East and West, but Japan has never been more receptive to **this** sort of educational institution than it is now. Sophia has been attempting to respond to the needs of the times through a number of research centers, educational programs, and scholarly publications besides the educational activities touched on above. Perhaps in future issues of this newsletter there will be opportunities to introduce some of these other manifestations of the international character of Sophia University.

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