

# Global means making yourself adapt as quickly as possible to changes in the environment

## Boonyada Plangsiri

Faculty of Economics, Class of 2014

### Want to encounter many things that cannot be experienced in my home country of Thailand

Boonyada Plangsiri is an exchange student from Thailand. In her native country, she was raised as the youngest of three sisters by kind parents. Her entire family graduated from Chulalongkorn University, the oldest national university in Thailand, so it was expected that she would attend university in Thailand as well, but that was not to be.

"I had wanted to go abroad ever since I was in high school. Even if I will eventually work in Thailand, first I wanted to encounter many things that cannot be experienced in my own country."

Beyond that, Plangsiri had a clear vision of her future work "eventually in Thailand."

"I want to manage a company in Thailand, but there are many entrepreneurs in the country and people can speak both Thai and English as a matter of course. So what I came up with to make myself stand out in that context was to study management solidly and learn a third language."

The country she chose for overseas study was Japan. There was a Japan boom in Thailand just when Plangsiri was a high school student. "I felt an affinity for Japan through fashion and manga," she says. Then in her third year of high school, together with her friends, Plangsiri took a test and qualified for a Japanese Government (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) scholarship. She thought for a while about going to the U.S., but decided to study in Japan after all because she always thought Japan was a safe and clean country where it would be easy to live.

She says she had previously visited



Japan on a trip with her family, and had a favorable image of the country.

"This was the first time in my life for me to live away from my parents. I thought my parents would also feel secure if I chose Japan."

Plangsiri came to Japan in 2009. First she studied Japanese at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) Japanese Language Center for International Students. While acquiring Japanese language abilities there, she considered which university to enter.

"To begin with, I wanted to remain in Tokyo, so I thought about which national university in Tokyo would be best. I learned that there were around a dozen Thai exchange students at Hitotsubashi University's Faculty of Economics. When I went and heard what they had to say about the program, I decided that I wanted to study there as well."

She studied hard, passed the admissions test, and became a Faculty of Economics student. There are three reasons why she chose the Faculty of Economics. One reason, as noted above, was the presence of students from Thailand.

"The second reason was that I wanted to make use of my strong English and mathemat-



Boonyada Plangsiri together with her family  
At a birthday party for her elder sister



ics skills to study economics. And the third reason... In Thailand, there is a tendency for people who want to go into business in the future to study at faculties of economics. So I also chose the Faculty of Economics."

Plangsiri entered Hitotsubashi University in April 2010, in the spring of her second year after leaving home.

## Made life as an exchange student better by reviewing course contents

Even though Plangsiri had studied Japanese for one year, it was not easy for her to understand university courses taught in Japanese or to live day to day in Japanese.

The courses taught in Japanese were a major hurdle. Her own impression is that at first she only grasped about half of what was presented. "No matter how much I concentrated during classes, it was really difficult with the lectures and textbooks all being in Japanese. I came to study economics, but without understanding the necessary Japanese it would all be for nothing. At first I was completely rushed and flustered."

Plangsiri says she made sure to ask the Japanese students who became her friends at the university about whatever she didn't understand. But when she entered in April, there was little communication even among the Japanese students. The only topic they had in common was how they had studied for Japan's national entrance exam for universities.

"When they talked about the National Center Test for University Admissions, I had nothing to say because I knew nothing about it. But after about two months the conversations turned to current topics like classes and clubs and I was able to participate" (laughs).

Her life changed completely once she became a university student. While she was studying at the Japanese Language Center for International Students she had lived in a dorm and did not feel much concern, but when she entered the university Plangsiri began to live alone in an apartment.

"I lacked confidence at first. I had to arrange the electricity, water and Internet services all by myself even though I couldn't speak Japanese very well. I spoke with my family at home on Skype as often as three or four times a week. They gave me advice and eased my anxiety."

Instead of becoming discouraged, Plangsiri took the initiative to turn things around. "I had to improve my Japanese first or I would not accomplish anything. So I asked my Japanese friends all kinds of questions. I went to used bookstores so I could buy and read the Japanese versions of the manga I had read in Thai translations. I watched Japanese television and thoroughly learned the words used in daily life. My electronic dictionary

was also very helpful. There were no Thai-Japanese versions available, so I learned words via English, moving from Thai to English to Japanese and vice versa."

The problem was the classes. Even if she could understand daily conversation, it was no easy task to grasp the specialized terminology used in class. But she had to try to understand, or there was no point in studying abroad. So Plangsiri made a major resolution.

"I realized I could not possibly get good grades unless I worked twice as hard as the other students. So I decided to review for two to three hours after every single class, and also to study before class whenever time allowed. I was particularly strict about review. I would set a time limit to complete my review of each section. I reviewed the lecture contents almost every day. I studied in various places—at the library, in cafés, in my own room. Looking back over my calendar from that time, my schedule was packed. I was like a nerd" (laughs).

Review and preparation are not the only keys to class work. Plangsiri says it was also great that she was able to receive lots of support from senior Thai students about how to get through courses. "They taught me various things about the best approach,

such as which courses to take in what order to learn economics, with specific advice such as 'You should wait a bit on this class and take it in your second year,' or 'You should take this class now, but the contents are difficult so I'll help you with the parts you don't understand,' and it was a great help to have people giving me advice like that right on campus."

In the summer term of her second year Plangsiri began to feel comfortable with her life in Japan. She says this was the result of her great efforts during the first year.

"I felt more relaxed because my grades were good in the first year, and that also encouraged me. I could then understand about 70 percent of the classes, and I felt I was going to make it."

While Plangsiri modestly says her "grades were good," actually she was a straight A student. Jumping forward,

now that she is about to graduate, Plangsiri has achieved a perfect record of all A's for four consecutive years.

"I've always been good at studying, ever since elementary school. I didn't have any particular pressure from my parents. But the one thing they taught me was to work harder at the things I was naturally good at,



With other Thai students



Eating sushi together with Japanese friends



because you cannot gain anything without constant effort.”

## Club activities, part-time work, and classes in other faculties—time management learned while actively expanding horizons

While Plangsiri spent a great deal of time studying Japanese and reviewing her courses, she was also involved in various activities aside from study. For a start, she participated in the competitive ballroom dance club.

“At university I wanted not just to study but also to experience club activities. I was active in competitive ballroom dancing during high school so I thought I would make use of that experience.”

Her primary motivation was to continue dancing, but after coming to Hitotsubashi, Plangsiri also decided to join the club for other reasons.

“My Japanese friends frequently talked about their club activities. So I felt it was important to experience club activities in Japan and to have a common topic to talk about. Once I actually joined, there was no stress about winning contests at any cost like in my high school days. It was just a place to enjoy the pleasure of dancing. For various reasons I couldn’t continue with the club for long, but I feel it was a valuable experience.”

Plangsiri also took part-time jobs to help cover her living expenses in Japan. She worked as an instructor of



Running a Thai food cart at the university’s Ikkyosai fall festival

Together with 3rd-year seminar students



Thai and English at a cram school and took various other positions. Her strongest memory is of working as a sales clerk at a clothing shop.

“I had gained some facility in speaking Japanese, and I wanted a part-time job in the fashion industry, which I have always liked. What surprised me most after I applied and got hired was the customer service training. The training was very detailed, with instructions on how to greet customers and intonation. It reminded me just how earnest Japanese people are. They are always on time—being late is out of the question—and they have a strong awareness of time management. Along with the regular employees, of course, the part-time workers also think of the customer first. The Japanese service industry is amazing. I want to bring this know-how back to Thailand and start a company.”

In her studies, Plangsiri says she took courses outside the Faculty of Economics at the Faculty of Commerce and Management and the Faculty of Law, making an effort to broaden her viewpoint to fields beyond her specialty. “I asked my friends from the Japanese Language Center for International Students who went to other national universities about their schools, learned they have various restrictions on registering for courses, and realized that they don’t allow as much freedom as Hitotsubashi University. Hitotsubashi was the correct choice for me, since I wanted to broaden my view.”

Looking back on her various experiences Plangsiri says she gained self-management abilities.

“Study, club activities, part-time work, daily life... I had a wealth of experiences after I entered Hitotsubashi University. Through those experiences, I think I came to be able to take responsibility for my own academic performance and life. I set limits and arranged my schedule, and managed my household expenses. Learning to manage myself in this way was a great accomplishment. Back when I was in Thailand, my parents took care of everything for me. I grew far more than I could have ever imagined at that time.”

## Want to learn more about business and expand my network, with an eye to establishing a company in Thailand in about 10 years’ time

Plangsiri’s dream of founding a company in Thailand, which she had before studying at Hitotsubashi University, has not changed at all. It seems she has assembled all the elements as planned for making herself stand out in her future business in Thailand through study abroad in Japan: acquiring a third language (Japanese), learning economics, and experiencing Japan’s highly refined service industry through part-time work.

“I still have a long way to go (laughs). I am thinking of establishing my company in about 10 years’ time. Before that I want to work at an investment bank or other company, to learn about corporate and business structure, and to expand my personal network. I think I need specialized knowledge of finance for those ends.” In fact, Plangsiri has decided to enter the MSc Finance program at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

In closing, we asked Plangsiri what “global” means to her. “In an environment with no barriers of language or nationality, it is important to recognize mutual differences. To do that, I think one must always be sensitive to changes in the environment. For me ‘global’ means to grasp those changes and adapt myself as quickly as possible.”

It is because she left home and learned to manage herself in a completely different environment and use her abilities to the full that Plangsiri was able to attain this realization.

# International Exchange Provides Rowers with Global Insights

## Hitotsubashi University Boat Club

Rowing is a leading sport at prestigious universities all over the world. In England, where the modern sport of rowing originated, the Oxford and Cambridge University Boat Race, generally known simply as “The Boat Race,” is a highlight of the spring sporting calendar that attracts enormous attention, and university sports are an established part of the nation’s culture. Rowing also has a long history in the United States, with thriving competition among Ivy League universities.

Rowing regattas began to flourish in the early 19th century. The Boat Race was first held in 1829, and subsequently attracted interest throughout England. The Henley Royal Regatta, held on the River Thames since 1839, is another prominent event distinguished by its royal patronage. In July 2014 the Hitotsubashi University Boat Club (HUBC) achieved the remarkable goal of competing in this celebrated regatta.

### Second place in intercollegiate competition leads to new opportunity for international exchange

The origins of HUBC date back to 1885, when the Tokyo Commercial School (the forerunner of the present university) acquired a boat belonging to the Tokyo Foreign Language School after absorbing that institution. In 1887 the club took part in a race against the First Higher School, Japan (the predecessor of the University of Tokyo), an event that became a regular feature of the sporting calendar and continues to this day. Many Japanese universities established boat clubs in the early part of the twentieth century, and HUBC gained its first national victory at the second intercollegiate regatta (All-Japan University Championships). After competing in the All-Japan Rowing Championships in 1938, HUBC continued to achieve excellent results at regattas before and after World War II, and developed into one of Japan’s leading boat clubs.

Over its long history HUBC has experienced many overseas tours and has recently stepped up its



Kento Konishi



international activities, including participation in a Spanish regatta and a visit to the University of Melbourne for joint training. Over the last four or five years it has also engaged in exchange with Oxford University’s Oriel College, which dominates the English intercollegiate rowing scene. In 2012 HUBC representatives visited Oriel College at the suggestion of one of its graduates, Professor Jonathan Lewis (Graduate School of Social Sciences, Hitotsubashi University). HUBC chair and delegation head Kento Konishi (3rd year, Faculty of Economics) shared his impressions of the visit.

“We asked Professor Lewis to provide us with an introduction for a visit to Oriel College. Mixing with the Oriel College rowers highlighted many differences. Japanese rowers tend to be stoic in their training, whereas our English counterparts seemed to wholeheartedly enjoy their rowing. In contrast to the team-





Regatta at Oxford University

work of the Japanese, the English rowers displayed individual strength and skill. I thought there is a great deal that Japanese rowers can learn from training with them.”

Following this visit a plan for exchange was drawn up and another trip was scheduled for December 2013, but this was eventually postponed due to concerns about cold weather and short daylight hours. The opportunity to train with overseas rowers would clearly boost HUBC’s performance, and the setback was a major blow for club members. However, the results of

the All-Japan University Championships held in August 2013 changed everything.

“When Hitotsubashi University came second in that event,



The HUBC delegation was invited to a banquet on the final day of a regatta at Oxford University. (L-R) Professor Lewis, Kento Konishi, Manager Shintaro Kito, Head Coach Nomura.



Oriel College, Oxford University

it opened up new opportunities for overseas exchange,” explains Konishi. “The result was announced to great acclaim by Hitotsubashi University alumni, who suggested some kind of overseas tour. Then Head Coach Masahiko Nomura proposed that we should aim to enter the Henley Royal Regatta, and preparations began.”

The door to overseas exchange, which seemed to have closed, opened once again. Lobbying of the Japan Rowing Association by alumni and the head coach brought results, and entry into the Henley Royal Regatta held in July 2014 became a reality. Second place in the intercollegiate competition had secured the recommendation of the Japan Rowing Association, enabling HUBC to enter one of the most renowned regattas in England, the home of rowing.



## Taking up rowing at university leads to the joy of aiming for world-class competition

HUBC is now one of the top university rowing clubs in Japan, and over the past few years it has gained resounding victories in its famed race with the University of Tokyo. Compared to Nihon University, the winners of the intercollegiate competition in 2013, HUBC is unusual in that most of its members only began rowing competitively after enrolling at university. Several members who started as beginners have ended up representing Japan. Baku Hiraki (3rd year, Faculty of Social Sciences; sub-captain), Sumito Nakamura (3rd year, Faculty of Social Sciences), Atsushi Fujita (3rd year, Faculty of Commerce and Management; sub-captain), Shunichi Hirai (2nd year, Faculty of Commerce and Management), Kosuke Nagano (2nd year, Faculty of Commerce and Management), and Takanobu Kajiwara (2nd year, Faculty of Social Sciences) have all passed preliminary selection to represent Japan in the under-23 competition, and Yoshitaka Kamata (3rd year, Faculty of Commerce and Management) has passed preliminary selection for senior competition. Hiraki



Back row (L-R): Sumito Nakamura, Shunichi Hirai, Baku Hiraki  
Front row (L-R): Kosuke Nagano, Takanobu Kajiwara, Atsushi Fujita

tells us that he knew nothing about rowing before enrolling in university.

“The rowing club has a major presence on campus, but before I came to university I knew absolutely nothing about regattas. I joined the club because I liked the

idea that rowers who started after they entered university could aim to compete in the all-Japan championships if they tried hard enough. In fact, some rowers selected as candidates for national representatives were never even in their high school rowing teams. Regattas are a test of endurance, and rather than just relying on physical skills based on explosive power, rowers must work to raise cardiopulmonary function and muscle strength. To this end they need a steady, systematic attitude to training and the strategic skills to win. That's what appeals to me about rowing."



Baku Hiraki

Hiraki decided to join the club in the belief that it was his best chance to aim for the pinnacle of sporting achievement in Japan. Taking part in the rookie competition six months later gave him a real sense of how interesting and fulfilling the sport could be. His team of first- and second-year students came seventh, but the team they fought to a close finish in the semi-finals came second. Although they had lost, aiming for the top no longer seemed impossible. Hiraki told us about his recipe for winning.

"Enhancing your physical capabilities is essential to growing as a rower and achieving good results. Of course technique is also important, for example having the correct grip on the oars as they enter the water and maintaining the forward thrust of the boat as you shift your weight. However, our technique will never be as good as that of rowers who started at high school or junior high. Building up basic strength can compensate for this technical shortfall. This is the thought that drives us as we steadily engage in daily training. Our fast times in the second half of races compared to other universities show that we are not mistaken in our training methods."

Taking part in international competition overseas gives the relatively lightweight team a chance to test itself against foreign rowers who rely more heavily on physique than the Japanese. Hiraki told us what this overseas experience meant to him.

"HUBC comes to competition from a great environment, with tremendous assistance from alumni and other interested parties that support us with boats and other facilities such as boathouses. We are also very grateful to have the opportunity for international exchange and overseas visits. My first overseas trip with HUBC was for the Henley Royal Regatta. Although the visit was difficult to arrange and we risked interfering with preparations for competition in Japan, it was a fantastic experience that more than made up for these

inconveniences."

In his quest to reach the top of his sport, Hiraki now has his sights set on representing Japan. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics will offer the chance to mix with athletes from all over the world, and for Hiraki, who will be at the peak age for a rower by then, this represents an unparalleled opportunity.

## Transforming individual strengths into crew power to attain a shared goal, rowing is the ultimate team sport

Konishi also has high hopes for the benefits of overseas tours. As HUBC chair also, he feels the members' great expectations for such tours.

"Broadening horizons through overseas travel is a big plus for our rowers in all kinds of ways. The experience of international competition boosts their confidence. Vying with stronger rowers than they could ever encounter in Japan motivates them to train even harder. Now that we have fulfilled our dream of taking part in the Henley Royal Regatta, I would like to revive our plans for visiting Oriel College. Since Oriel has the strongest rowing club out of Oxford's 50-odd colleges, I would like to realize regular exchanges and use them to make HUBC even stronger."

Rowing is the ultimate team sport, where crew members breathe in unison while shaving hundredths of a second off their times. Rather than outstanding individual performance, HUBC emphasizes cooperation that pools individual effort. Team members with their own individual characteristics have a clear grasp of their respective roles, and display enormous strengths in combining them to reach a shared goal. HUBC's international exchange activities enable members to experience the joy of conveying this Japanese rowing style on overseas trips and demonstrating the highest levels of sportsmanship.

