

Teaching to the Global Standard

Having taught business courses at universities in Kazakhstan, Korea, and the U.S., Assistant Professor of Administrative Sciences Jung-Wan Lee has synthesized his worldly perspective into an elegant aphorism: "Education is a universal."

"Wherever you live, whoever you are as a person," said Lee, "each of us tries to learn something new to attain a better life. Our physical environments may differ, but our needs are the same." For Lee, education is a means to attaining a success that has both material and philosophical qualities, both individual and communal significance.

When tending to matters of electronic commerce and international marketing, he explained, his role as a professor is to enable students "to rise to the complex challenges of the business world in order to be not only competent, but leading, professionals." Yet personal progress should ultimately lead to social betterment. "There is a need for all individuals to leverage their talent in order to contribute to the community in a meaningful way. I teach different subjects, but my underlying philosophy in the classroom is to encourage students to achieve as both professionals and people."

In fact, Lee describes his classroom as a forum for conversation between prospective leaders, which is how he refers to his students. "Most of my students, especially at MET, bring profound experience with them. My goal, and job, is to appreciate and acknowledge their expertise, and to use what I know in order to help them cultivate it into success. It is a privilege to have the chance to work with them, to have an impact on people who will change the world."

And transformation toward a world in which ethical principles drive practices in business, personal life, and culture at large is what he identifies as the final arrival at "the global standard," a term that is often relegated to a much narrower definition hinging on the development of uniform policies and regulations across industries in an international marketplace.

Nevertheless, Lee understands the open market as a vehicle for arriving at a global standard featuring a uniformly high quality of life. Much of his research explores cross-cultural consumer behavior—that is, how people in different countries at differing stages of capitalist development engage with, and benefit from, the market. Where he sees commonality in international motivations for seeking higher education, he documents distinct contrasts between the way consumers in emerging and established capitalist cultures understand and approach the act of purchasing.

In formerly communist Asian markets, Lee observes pleasure in the transaction itself. "Countries just entering into the open market are busy going through the motions of capitalism," he said, "and there is a corresponding emphasis on quantity over quality of goods." The accumulation of products, and especially global products, then, translates into a symbolic identity or status that derives its cachet simply from its affinity with the market.

Americans, on the other hand, argues Lee, are more interested in quality, a phenomenon he thinks is at least partially related to greater investment in the processes of production. The veneration of the American entrepreneur, he suggests, is based on a cultural belief not just in making money, but in making an impact through one's work. It translates, he argues, into a phenomenon of professionalism unique to the U.S. "Americans take pride in whatever kind of work they do," he said, "whether they work in a service role or as executives." As a result, the act of spending money is often more personal and deliberate for the American consumer.

"These are meaningful differences in the practice of capitalism," Lee asserts. Seeing the market as a place to contribute as well as a place to be rewarded for that contribution is precisely the kind of complete vision he instills in his classroom, where, he says, "Once I inspire my students, they begin to aspire to, and then to achieve, a better global standard." 

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