

# Fostering Cross-Cultural Communication in an English-Medium Remote Collaboration Course Between Japan and Taiwan: Through Tea Sensory Evaluation

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## Abstract

This study focuses on how Taiwanese and Japanese EFL learners in a remote collaborative course enhanced their cross-cultural understanding on each other's tea cultures through sensory evaluation. This project was conducted as part of a Taiwan-Japan remote collaborative course that aims to foster intercultural understanding and improve English skills through group discussions on topics related to their majors. For the first time in our course, we introduced the tasting of teas and sweets. After careful observation, smelling, tasting, and touching of each tea, students filled in the sensory evaluation sheet in English. Through the comparison and discussion of their findings, they were able to deepen their understanding of each other's tea cultures.

## Keywords

remote collaborative course, sensory evaluation, tea culture

## 1 Introduction

Gastronomic Sciences I (hereafter, GSI) is an elective six-month, one-semester English course for students who are in their second year or above at the College of Gastronomy Management, Ritsumeikan University. Since 2019, ten out of fifteen classes (one class lasts 90 minutes) of GSI have been conducted as remote collaboration classes with Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan.

The class format in 2022 consisted of group presentations, online food labs, and final group presentations in the first half, followed by group discussions via Zoom in the second. In addition, students were required to submit a 250-word reflection paper after each session (10

papers in total). For the final group presentation, Japanese students created videos showcasing food tours in the Kansai region, while Taiwanese students proposed new food product development based on these videos. For the final project, each group compiled both the food tour video and food product development proposal into an electronic pamphlet to be submitted as a final project.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the students were able to deepen cross-cultural understanding through tea sensory evaluation, along with words useful for sensory evaluation.

## 2 Online Food Lab

In the GSI course we introduced two types of PBL for the first time in AY2022: Online Food Lab and Food Tour Videos & Digital Pamphlet. In the Online Food Lab, classrooms from both universities were connected via Zoom, allowing students to conduct sensory evaluations of Japanese and Taiwanese teas in real time. After the sensory evaluation, the students paired the teas with different sweets for a group discussion via Zoom.

We conducted the Online Food Lab on three days out of a total of 10 days. Day 1 included the evaluation of Taiwanese green tea and jasmine tea, as well as Japanese *sencha* and *gyokuro*. Students from both universities tasted and evaluated the teas according to the sensory evaluation sheet. They also opened the tea bags with scissors, examined the tea leaves, and noted the differences in texture and aroma. A few weeks earlier, teachers from both universities had exchanged the teas, sweets and snacks between the two countries. On this day, the

students tasted *rakugan* from Japan and *Longan yokan* from Taiwan.

The following day, Day 2, the students conducted sensory evaluations for *hojicha* from Japan and oolong tea from Taiwan, accompanied by *sobabouro* from Japan and pineapple cakes from Taiwan.

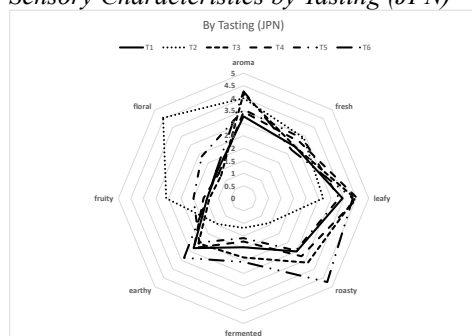
On the final day, Day 3, students tasted the snacks they had voted for several weeks in advance using the online tool Padlet. In the second half of the day, students shared their opinions on which teas they preferred, which snacks they enjoyed, and which combinations of teas and snacks worked well together.

### 3 Results of Tea Sensory Evaluation

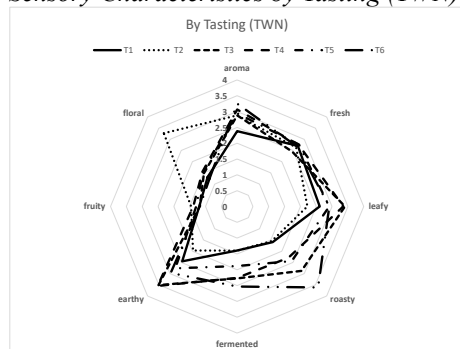
#### 3.1 Sensory Characteristics

In the Online Food Lab, both Japanese and Taiwanese students evaluated teas, using the sensory evaluation sheet to assess 8 items by sniffing and 14 items by tasting. Both students evaluated 6 types of tea, namely, green tea (T1, TW), jasmine tea (T2, TW), sencha (T3, JPN), gyokuro (T4, JPN), oolong tea (T5, TW), and hojicha (T6, JPN). The sensory characteristics of 6 types of tea in terms of tasting by both groups are shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively.

**Figure 1**  
*Sensory Characteristics by Tasting (JPN)*



**Figure 2**  
*Sensory Characteristics by Tasting (TWN)*



#### 3.2 Keyness Analysis of Reflection Papers

Through each sensory evaluation, the Japanese students learned to speak and write about their sensory evaluations using specialized vocabulary. The keyness analysis of three days' worth of reflection papers submitted after the Online Food Lab, using AntConc 4.2.0 (Anthony, 2022), is presented in Table 1. The highlighted words, in particular, are among the frequently used ones in their reflection papers on tea sensory evaluations.

**Table 1**  
*Keyness Rankings of Words Used in Reflection Papers on Sensory Evaluation*

Rank	Type	Freq. in sensory eval.	Freq. in other topics	Keyness (Likelihood)	Rank	Type	Freq. in sensory eval.	Freq. in other topics	Keyness (Likelihood)
1	tea	317	181	238.00	11	bitter	33	3	60.23
2	snacks	98	11	170.84	12	drank	28	1	58.80
3	taste	89	17	131.55	13	feh	56	27	48.43
4	pineapple	50	0	119.34	14	jasmine	20	0	47.69
5	oolong	58	13	80.23	15	chocolate	26	3	44.89
6	green	46	7	73.45	16	umami	18	0	42.92
7	cake	40	5	67.65	17	bitterness	21	1	42.66
8	strong	34	2	67.10	17	aroma	21	1	42.66
9	hojicha	35	3	64.67	19	astringency	17	0	40.53
10	sweets	41	10	60.46	20	boro	16	0	38.15

#### 3.3 Student Comments on Teas

In their reflection papers, some students wrote that they were surprised to learn that the color of Taiwanese oolong tea is yellowish unlike in Japan. Some of them, who said that they always drink it cold, wrote that hot oolong tea tastes good. As for the gyokuro tea, some students seemed a little surprised by its bitterness, but they seemed to be able to feel its aroma and umami aftertaste.

### 4 Conclusion

Two findings can be drawn from this study. First, in terms of cross-cultural understanding, the students deepened their understanding of each other's tea cultures through real-time online sensory evaluation. Second, they were also able to learn and use English words for sensory evaluation in writing and speaking.

### References

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