

International Student Education and International Exchange in the Era of Corporatisation

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Introduction

Following global trends in the privatization and rationalization of higher education, Japanese national universities will be transformed into “independent agencies” (*dokuritsuhoujin*) from April 2004. This corporatisation is expected to have a profound effect on the way Japanese universities operate and there is no reason to expect that education for international students will remain unaffected. In fact, it is very likely that we are going to witness dramatic changes in the ways the then-former national universities recruit and educate international students. In this paper, I want to address a number of issues related to the education of international students and international exchange that need to be overcome in order for the corporatized universities to develop successful international student policies, on the basis of my personal experiences as a international student in a Japanese university and having worked with international students for a number of years as coordinator of the Hiroshima University Study Abroad (HUSA) short-term exchange program.

Present state of International student education In Japan

According to news reports at the end of 2002, the Japanese government will at last attain the goal formulated in former prime-minister Yasuhiro Nakasone’s 1983 “100,000 International Student Plan”, the ambitious plan to have 100,000 international students studying at institutes of higher education in Japan at one given time. ⁱ The attainment of this goal, originally set for 2000, was made possible with a 33% increase of students from the People’s Republic of China, which now account for 61.3% of all international students in Japan. When looking at geographical areas, it becomes clear that despite efforts to attract more students from other developed countries, for example the establishment short-term exchange programs (*tankikoukanryuugaku*), the majority of international students continues to be from developing countries in Asia (91.6%)ⁱⁱ

This make-up of the international student-body in Japanese higher education institutions is

likely to have a profound influence on the way international student policies are to be formulated by Japanese universities.

Of course, it is a cause for celebration having attained this long illusive goal, as many university presidents annually do declaring that their universities have reached a new record number of international students. But in most cases after that there has been silence. Most national universities under the tutelage of the Ministry of Education (*Monbukagakusho*) have never really thought about why they are accepting international students in their midst. When asked, of course the universities will mention lofty goals such as promoting international understanding, establishment of relations of mutual trust and fostering the spirit of cooperation as mentioned in the Ministry's outline on Japan's international student system.ⁱⁱⁱ

But in a more practical sense, why the university accepts international students is usually more difficult to explain. It is surprising to discover that until very recently many, perhaps most, national universities did not even have an international strategy dealing with international students and international exchange. Most universities just assumed that international students would come, whether they would make any efforts or not, and they would merely wait for the allotment of students and scholarships by the Ministry of Education.

And the result with regard to the general support structures at national universities has been accordingly: A haphazard, often ad-hoc support and management structure to fit the general ambivalence regarding the presence of international students and international exchange in general.

A case in point is that most of the larger national universities through their International Student Centers (currently more than 30 have been established) are engaged in the administration of a number international student programs, such as the Japanese Training Course (*Nihongo kenshuu kousu*), Japanese Language and Culture Program (*Nihongo nihonbunka puroguramu*), the Japan-Korea Science and Engineering Common Exchange Program (*Nikkan kyoudou rikoukei gakubusei kousu*) and the Short-term Exchange Program (*Tanki ryuugaku puroguramu*). What these programs have in common is that the Japanese government supports almost all participating students and that substantial layouts are forwarded to International Student Centers to provide Japanese language education to students in these programs.

The Issue of Ownership

A common problem with these programs is that they were initiated top-down. Monbukagakusho was instrumental in helping universities set up these programs by providing generous funds. The result is however that most of the national universities have felt very little ownership towards these programs. They were basically established on the orders of the central government, the universities themselves had very little incentives themselves to invest in these programs and they primarily exists because funds are made available to them.

The increase in the number of International Student Centers has resulted in a large number of very small-scale, highly inefficient programs, mostly isolated from the general business of the university. For example, the Japan-Korea Exchange Program at Hiroshima University offered a full 6-month Intensive Japanese language and preparatory education program for 5 Korean high school graduates in Fall 2002 and will offer one for 3 students in the Fall of 2003. Also quite a few universities are offering programs for short-term exchange programs in English for small groups of students at great cost and effort of devoted individuals, often going beyond the institutional capabilities of the universities in question.

Table 1: In-bound student numbers in short-term exchange Programs: Selected Universities (Year between brackets)

	Students (year)	AIEJ Scholarships
Tsukuba University	46 (2001)	36
Nagoya University	51 (2001)	40
Hiroshima University	38 (2002)	33
Yokohama University	38 (2001)	37
Osaka University	28 (2001)	26
Tokyo University (College of Arts and Sciences)	27 (2001)	23
Tokyo Institute of Technology	25 (2002)	-
Osaka University of Foreign Languages	24 (2001)	20
Ryukyu University	21 (2001)	20
Oita University	17 (2001)	16
Okayama University	14 (2001)	12

Sources: Program homepages and information provide by programs at various occasions.

This mindset, the lack of sense of ownership, spells trouble for the development of international exchange as a whole at national universities during the era of corporatisation.

In particular regional universities have much to fear from the effects of corporatisation on international student education. The programs are almost completely dependent on the availability of Japanese government scholarships. With the continuing decrease of these kinds of scholarships and increasingly allowing scholarships-recipients to enroll into the university of their choice, instead of allocating them proportionately over universities, the trend is that more international students will concentrate into metropolitan areas, following their privately funded peers. Universities there are often perceived to have better programs and possibilities, which is very difficult for regional universities to match.

Another result of the lack of sense of ownership has been the universities' tendency to lay the focus of international student education on the acquisition of Japanese language. International Student Centers have become primarily Japanese language training centers, while the development of competitive internationally attractive international programs was ignored. Also the development of a university-wide support structure for outbound students, i.e. Japanese students who spend part of their (under)graduate studies abroad, remained underdeveloped, due to the focus on Japanese language education.

As a result, under the current circumstances, many Japanese national universities are faced with a situation where only a very select group of international students are able to receive high-quality, intensive Japanese language programs and on the other hand Japanese students are not given the opportunity to acquire the necessary (language) skills to be eligible for study abroad.

The lack of sense of ownership is also clearly visible in the development of the short-term exchange programs. Many of the universities are unable to create attractive programs in terms of course-diversity and content, in order to attract larger numbers of short-term international students. Staff-members who contribute courses to these short-term exchange programs usually do it on a volunteer basis, as universities have been unwilling or unable to provide incentives to teaching staff to teach in English to international students.

As a result, many universities are only able to provide very limited programs, often only focusing on introductory courses on Japanese language and culture or very incoherent programs scattered over a large number of unconnected fields of study. To illustrate this case, for students with an engineering or science major who want to apply for the Short-term exchange Program at Hiroshima University, in the 2003-2004 program year, there are only 4 courses offered in English directly related to their major. We cannot expect that students from these majors will apply for the program if so few courses are available.

In conclusion, one can say that for most universities educating international students have been primarily regarded as something extra, some extra icing on the cake and a nice way to fill university-brochures. However, with the upcoming corporatisation this is likely to change.

International Student Education in the era of Corporatisation

At a reception in the end of 2002, a professor who happened to be the chairman of the international exchange committee at his regional national university told me that his university was planning to increase the number of international students to fifty percent of the total student body. As such, this figure is completely irresponsible and would probably lead to the destruction of the university as international students in that situation would no longer feel they were studying in Japan and Japanese students would no longer feel that they were studying at a Japanese university. But the mere mentioning of such a figure suggests already that the significance of international students in national universities is already changing. Of course, many lower-tier universities are facing a decrease in enrollment numbers of Japanese students, due to the decrease of the total number of students in Japan, and these institutions are desperate to secure their future. But it is unlikely that an increase in the number of international students will solve their problems in this respect. Corporatisation will of course mean smaller government funding, but it will be difficult for regional universities to fill that gap with revenue from international students.

They should keep in mind that many of the privately-funded international students, currently enrolled in Japanese national universities, receive tuition-waivers, and it is unlikely that those waivers, where tuition is instead paid for by the government, will continue on the same scale after the corporatisation of national universities.

In order to attract fee-paying students, Japanese national universities will have to start to make efforts to make their institutions more attractive so that students will come and pay to study here. At the moment, the majority of Japanese higher education institutions are unable to compete with higher education institutions in North America, Western Europe or Australia. While most international students are probably satisfied with the education they receive in Japan, it is very likely that a Japanese university was not their first choice, but that they chose it because they had insufficient English language ability, the availability of scholarships or that they were easier to get into that institutions in other countries.

We should keep in mind that education is essentially a product, just like anything else and that university education is not social welfare. Although some people might disagree with this notion, in the end still somebody needs to pay the bill. The move towards corporatisation of universities can be regarded as one development in the trend to treat education more as an industry.

And with this notion of education as a product comes also the necessity that universities need to do more to sell their product. To be able to sell the product constant improvement of the product and attention to packaging, marketing and delivery of the product is of utmost importance. This is not only to attract international students, but also to attract any kind of student.

Until now, most national universities have done little or none in this respect. Universities are not engaged in international market research. We have international students coming to our universities, but we know very little about their motivations to come to study here, or what they expected to receive when they arrived here. To use business-terms, we do not really know who our international customers are.

Of course, looking at the current composition of international students we can already guess what our main customers will be. They will be young people from China and South Korea, but until now we have done very little to actively attract those people. The majority of national universities offer little or no information in Chinese or Korean. A cursory check of 10 national university homepages reveals that none offer information in other languages than Japanese or English. One could of course argue that English language is sufficient, but even the English information offered lacks in depth and is usually very limited. If universities do want to reach their main customers, they will have to do more in terms of public relations in marketing in their languages. If we only stick to English language information we do not reach them. Students, who have sufficient ability to read this information, probably have enough language ability to secure entry into a university in North-America, Australia or Western Europe.

Therefore in particular the marketing of the product must be flawless and professional. It will therefore be necessary that national universities create a professional organization in charge of marketing and public relations.

Universities who choose to make international exchange a significant part of their activities will have to adopt a new approach towards it. In the era of corporatisation this should involve the following changes.

Firstly, marketing and recruitment should be on the basis of its products, not on the basis of scholarship availability. This will require universities to engage in research of their markets and the developing programs that cater to the needs of potential markets. For example, there is a great demand for business and IT programs in China and South Korea, the main potential markets for Japanese universities. Currently, such well-developed programs are few or non-existent.

Secondly, the creation of a support structure conducive to the development of international exchange and education. This will mean a shift in focus, away from Japanese language education to support of international exchanges, university marketing and student recruitment and international program development.

Thirdly, as the complicated nature of entry procedures prevents further development of international student numbers and international exchanges, universities must do whatever is possible, to simplify entry procedures for international students. Currently, students will have to come to Japan to sit entrance exams and engage in Japanese language study, which is a major hurdle for prospective international students.

Hiroshima University has for example already started with the development of overseas offices, where students can sit entrance examinations. But also entrance requirements need to be streamlined and simplified with clear requirements with regard to Japanese language and academic ability.

Currently, there are many schools and faculties each administer their own set of examinations, which, coupled with lack of clear information, causes major difficulties for prospective students. A more coordinated approach to entrance examinations by universities is therefore necessary.

Thirdly, to be able to attract highly talented international students, the development of quality programs is indispensable. Herein lies a major challenge ahead for national universities. To attract promising students more substantial international (degree) programs need to be developed. To be able to achieve this, universities should also adjust their hiring practices accordingly, one of the solutions might be a more aggressive recruitment of foreign staff for universities, but one could also think of better scouting-systems among international students currently enrolled in Japanese universities. With regard to the latter, at present, talented graduates tend to leave the university to either continue study at US graduate schools or private-sector research facilities. Therefore more opportunities must be created for foreign talent in terms of teaching- and research positions after graduation.

In the case of Hiroshima University there has actually a reversal of the trend in hiring foreign faculty, foreign faculty decreased from 59 in 1996 to 33 in 2002, and accounts for only 1% of the total staff members at the university.

Fourthly, a successful internationalization or international exchange strategy will also require a change of mindset among university-staff. Still too many people working with international students do not possess the language skills or experience to successfully implement such a strategy. Changing this mindset might be one of the biggest hurdles standing in the way of a successful international exchange strategy. Although some universities, including the university to which I am attached, are planning to completely reorganize the support structure for international exchange and international students, these new structures will be not successful, if they do not comprise of people, who have the skills to deliver what is expected.

In particular from administrative staff a new approach towards their activities will be necessary. Currently, they regard their job still too much as one that involves supervision and execution of educational staff activities. In the era of corporatisation, a more pro-active role of administrative staff will be necessary in terms of policy-formulation and its execution and adjustment. This will mean for those who are involved with international student education that they will need to develop the skills that make it possible for them to play this proactive role. This involves not only knowledge of foreign languages in the main markets, but also a higher degree of knowledge about those markets.

It still remains to be seen how much freedom universities will be given regarding personnel matters, regarding administrative staff. But one of the pre-conditions for successful staff-development will have to be abolition of the mandatory job-rotation of administrative staff at all levels, currently common at national universities. This practice might have prevented sectionalism or abuse, but has gone at the cost of professionalism and accountability, much to the detriment of universities.

Conclusion

Finally, what probably needs the most thorough rethinking is what the benefits of international exchange and international education should be for corporatized national universities. As was explained above, national universities treated international exchange with ambivalence, they accepted international students because the central government

told them so, and their created exchange programs and support structures because the Ministry of Education told them to do so or that they did not want to miss financial benefits that came with the establishment of those programs.

In the world of corporatized universities, this will be no longer the case: Involvement in international exchange and international student education will be a choice. Better said, will have to be a consciously made choice by each institution. There will be a strong tendency to continue on the beaten path in the same half-baked manner as before, but that attitude is likely to be punished very quickly: - Talented foreign students will choose those universities which offer what they need, and universities who do not, will end of with international students of lower caliber, many of which will only be coaxed to come if scholarships are available.

It will require universities to weigh the costs and the benefits of international exchange and international student education and requires universities to create structures where they benefit more from the presence of international students at their campuses. It is no longer sufficient to justify the presence of international students for the sake of international understanding or sprit of cooperation. Besides those lofty goals, universities will have to look how to gain more concrete benefits from international exchange and acceptance of international students.

International students can become a substantial source of income for universities, but this will require an excellent product and world-class delivery. If we want international students to pay for studying here, programs must be competitive, both inside and outside of Japan

Universities will need to do more in order to give local students more concrete benefits of international exchange. This means more opportunities to take classes taught by foreign faculty, a systemic approach to preparation for study abroad in terms of language training and strategic development and management of partnerships with overseas universities to increase opportunities for study abroad. Also if the university manages to establish competitive programs, proceeds should be diverted to help support overseas study of local students.

Foreign talent needs to be actively recruited to contribute to the international stature of the university, both in terms of research and education. It is therefore vital that more post-doctoral study posts, lectureships and associate professorships are made available to those talented people.

Only if universities make the deliberate choice to develop an international strategy to

acquire an international presence, the strategy is likely to succeed. This choice will have to come with investments, in resources but especially people. International exchange and education of international students is still too much the responsibility of a limited number of devoted people, while the majority of university is oblivious of it. What universities will have to strive for, by using both stick and carrot, is to make international exchange and education not the domain of a few, but something that involves the organization as a whole.

ⁱ “Foreign students nearing 100.000” The Japan Times, November 17, 2002, pp. 2.

ⁱⁱ 文部科学省、「留学生受け入れの概要（平成14年版）、平成14年11月

http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/14/11/021114.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ 文部科学省、「わが国の留学生制度の概要。受入れ及び派遣」平成12年度 p.3

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