

Characteristics, Issues and Prospects of Major Global University Ranking Systems

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During the one-day workshop, as described in the individual sections above, four presentations were made by speakers from China, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan; and comments were made by one from Japan. Furthermore, discussions and debates about the three university ranking systems and implications for Japan were made based on the following common questions:

- What are the benefits and risks of ranking systems?
- What should be improved in the extant ranking systems?
- What have been the factors shaping world-class universities?
- What are the challenges facing Japanese universities in enhancing their international competitiveness and enhancing their rankings?

As mentioned by the speakers from China, the United Kingdom and the United States, major characteristics of the three rankings can be summarized from various perspectives as follows. In terms of who created these rankings, Professor Liu asserted that the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) was developed totally by his colleges and academics from Shanghai Jiaotong University. He emphasized that from the start it has nothing to do with any commercial purpose or activities. In contrast, the QS World University Rankings was developed and launched by a London based company specializing in educational consultancy & research. Similarly, *the U.S. News & World Report's* best Global Universities Rankings was also directly related to

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this American media company. With respect to whom the three rankings were issued, the ARWU was created primarily for policy makers and university leaders. As early as the latter 1990s, both the Chinese government and Professor Liu's university had begun efforts to build world-class universities in China. In a major sense, this encouraged and driven by political factors at both the national and institutional levels. Different from the ARWU, the QS World University Rankings in the United Kingdom seems to be of more relevance and interest to prospective students, academics, prospective partners, scholarship providers, alumni, government, and university leaders. Though there exist minor differences, it appears that *the U.S. News & World Report's* best Global Universities Rankings shares more similarities with the QS rankings, because it pays more attention to mobile and prospective students and universities competing for the best students, academics, and research funding. Concerning the reasons these rankings are created, the primary purpose of the ARWU is to measure the gap of Chinese universities and world class universities and to enhance the standing of Chinese universities in global university ranking systems. The objective of the QS World University Rankings was to enable motivated people around world to achieve their potential by fostering international mobility, educational achievement and career development. While *the U.S. News and World Report's* best Global University Rankings aims at incorporating global & regional trends of research performance, international collaboration and doctoral education into national or institutional context.

Issues concerning the pros and cons of the three rankings were also addressed in the workshop. As for the pros of the ARWU, they are the most objective-based, employing objective indicators obtained from third-party data only. Therefore, it is not influenced by surveys of perceptions of peer-reviewers or external personal opinions. But its cons are characterized by heavy weighting towards research, especially in natural sciences; preference for English language science journals over others; and exclusion of teaching and learning environments, social mission and internationalization. Main features of pros of the QS Ranking concentrate on the degree of internationalization, albeit crudely, of universities, and it is not based solely on research performance. Its cons include more subjective indicators - 50% of the information used to derive the ranking comes from surveys of academics and employers' opinions about universities and more changing indicators over time. The pros of *the U.S. News & World Report's* Ranking are based on data and metrics provided by Thomson Reuters which is methodologically different from the criteria traditionally used by them to rank American universities. It focuses on global

research reputation, publications, and number of highly cited papers. Its cons include the following aspects: they are dominated by factors such as research performance and doctoral education; they are lack indicators of teaching and learning activities; and they may have biases resulting from changing data from Thomson.

Based on the key points mentioned by the three speakers and the panel discussion, the future prospects of the three Rankings was also discussed and argued. For example, will the ARWU continue to be driven by academic factors or will it be possible for it to be gradually influenced by external peer reviewers or commercial activities? As for the QS World University Rankings, should it be more responsive to various stakeholders' perceptions? Regarding *the U.S. News & World Report's* best Global Universities Rankings, will it tend to be more influenced by consumers?

As noted by the speaker from the MEXT, policies and responses of the Japanese government and individual universities include: first, utilizing several global university rankings to improve their international reputation; enhance the degree of internationalization; and assuring and improve the quality of Japanese universities. But it is also true that the changing positions of Japanese universities in several global university rankings has resulted in debates about the international competitiveness and quality of Japanese universities at both the national and institutional levels. Furthermore, because of several fiscal conditions: decreasing budgets for national universities; personnel cost of faculty members; increased numbers of fixed-termed young faculty members; and changing numbers of publications by Japanese researchers, it is difficult to know how to ensure the successful implementation of relevant policies and strategies, and more importantly, to evaluate their effects on improving the internationalization of Japanese universities?

The workshop offers several implications for research, policy and practice. First, there seems to be no perfect rankings or ranking which can measure all aspects of universities. Second, developing stable and unquestionable indicators are key to producing good rankings. Third, university rankings have both positive and negative effects. Fourth, university rankings are mere tools, not ends in themselves. Finally, it appears that there is no universally-acknowledged path to the formation of world class universities, though some similarities can be found in the key characteristics of them from international and comparative perspectives.