Japanese Higher Education
Internationalization Policy: 1983-2003
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In 1983 the Japanese government set itself the goal of having 100,000 foreign students enrolled in its universities by the year 2000 as part of a broader "internationalization" scheme. This paper will examine the motivation for such a policy, as well as the efforts made in the following four areas: 1) student enrollment, 2) teacher hiring, 3) curriculum, and 4) international programs. The paper will conclude by looking at how successful these efforts have been, and explore how policy was adapted in the 1990s when it appeared that the goal would not be reached.

Introduction

On November 13, 2003 the headline in the Asahi Daily News read, "Foreign Students hit the 100,000 mark – The goal reached, institutions are urged to keep a closer check on their charges". The goal of 100,000 foreign students was set for the year 2000 in 1983 as a major feature in the government's broader internationalization policy. The headline cited above hints that this policy change has not been free of difficulties. In fact, it appears that its policymakers are somewhat ambivalent about the need to internationalize. Japan has traditionally had isolationist tendencies, however, first, the Mieji restoration in the 19th century and then the economic expansion at the end of the second war lead to greater openness to foreign cultures and economies. The recent interest in internationalization is also largely the result of external phenomena, the development of the global economy in which Japan wants to play an active role.

Japanese higher education is characterized by two apparently conflicting characteristics, 1) high participation of private universities in higher education, and 2) strong national governmental control of higher education. The Mombugakusho (The Ministry of Education, Culture Sports, Science and Technology) is the main policy making body overseeing both public and private universities, and has been actively involved with the movement to internationalize higher education. Emery (1993) states that a policy "usually seeks to produce a change in the social environment" and is "typically one step removed from direct pursuit of an objective". Increasing the number

of foreign students is only one aspect of Japan's broader higher education internationalization policy that also includes increasing foreign teachers, increasing the numbers of international programs, and making the curriculum more international in scope. This paper will look at how policy has developed in each of these four areas in the past 20 years.

Motivation for Internationalization

The internationalization of higher education in Japan fits within the general trend seen in many countries during the late 1900s to create conditions for successful participation in the global economy. The Liberal Democratic Party sees educational reform as being inseparable from reform in five other areas, 1) government administration, 2) economic structure, 3) financial systems, 4) social welfare system and 5) fiscal structure. What is unique about this policy is the strong role the government has played in leading this push towards internationalization.

In the 1980's when this internationalization policy first arose, the yen was becoming stronger, markets were becoming increasingly globalized, and a lot of Japanese manufacturing was increasingly being moved abroad. This made it necessary for Japanese to work abroad as supervisors, as well as deal with greater numbers of foreigners here in Japan. The stronger yen also lead to greater numbers of Japanese traveling abroad. There was an increasing sense of Japan wanting to become more involved with the world, but many found that they lacked the language and cross-cultural skills necessary to deal effectively with foreigners abroad or in Japan. A general

sense arose that Japan's education system needed to work harder to produce kokusaijin, "international people", as they were called.

Another main reason for the move towards internationalization was that within Japan, worrisome demographic trends were beginning to loom. Several demographic trends have been working together to produce a rapidly ageing society. One trend is that high post war birth rates lead to a baby boom and then a baby boom echo which peaked in 1992, with the numbers of 18 year olds at 2.0 million declining to 1.2 million in 2008 where it should stabilize. Another tendency influencing this trend is the longevity of Japanese people. Also, a trend that Japan shares with several developing countries (Italy, Spain, etc.) is its declining birthrate. Japan's birthrate has been falling since 1977 and is the lowest in Asia, at 1.3 children per woman per lifetime (Suvendrini, 2002). By 2010, 21% of Japanese will be over 65 years of age (compared to America at 13%), and by 2025 Japan is projected to have the highest average age in the world. These trends have major implications for industries in need of employees and for older people on pensions. In fact all Japanese will be affected, as there is currently talk of raising the sales tax to 10% from 5% in order to make up for the projected shortfall. Another idea is to raise the retirement age to 77. One United Nations scenario shows that if Japan wanted to maintain its 2005 population levels with its current birth rate it would have to allow 331,000 immigrants into the country every year to do so (Curtain, J., 2002) . As these trends were becoming clear 20 years ago, an obvious solution was to try to encourage more foreign students to come to Japan, who upon graduation could enter the workforce.

It should also be noted that another general motivation to internationalize is the desire to bring Japanese education up to international standards. Increased foreign student participation would add a sense of legitimacy to the Japanese higher education process which is often criticized by Japanese themselves for being less than rigorous. In addition, Japan, has the world's second largest economy, and officially the plan is touted as a way to not only increase global competitiveness, but to also increase international understanding of Japan within non-Japanese.

Internationalization Policies

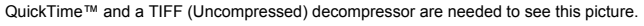
Foreign Students

Japan's motivation for increasing the numbers of foreign students appears to be mainly economic. Companies in the 1980s were increasingly in need of workers who could work overseas or here in Japan with foreign workers. In addition it became clear that foreign workers were going to be necessary in the future to make up for demographic shortfalls. One possible solution to these problems was to attract more students to come to Japan. Umakoshi (1997) and others comment that the uniqueness of these efforts was the extent to which the government itself worked to craft policy that encouraged this change. Looking at Table 1 it can be seen that in 1983 the number of foreign students was 12,410, and the Ministry of Education set an ad hoc committee that devised the "100,000 foreign students by 2000 Plan". To achieve this goal, which was an important

aspect of the overall internationalization policy, the Ministry of Education took several steps.

One step was to set goals for levels of increase at 16% annually until 1992 and then at 12% annually after that until 2000. Another important move was the decision to gradually increase the number of scholarships from 2,000 in 1983 to 10,000 in 2000 (Horie, 2002). Very importantly, a bill was passed allowing students to work while studying on a student visa, which hadn't been possible before 1983. Finally, opportunities to study Japanese at Japanese universities were to be increased in order to better prepare students for study, and dormitories were built to provide low cost housing for students that often found housing difficult to obtain because of Japanese reluctance to rent to foreigners.

Table 1 – Foreign Students 1983 - 2001



Looking at Table 1 it can be seen that the policy was successful until 1992, and in fact, the foreign student population increased more than was projected, at about 20% per year. From 1992 to 1995 the numbers of foreign students were fairly stable and then in 1996 the number decreased for two years before stabilizing and starting to climb again. Horei (2002) cites two main reasons for the slow growth and decreases between 1993 and 1998. He states that the main cause was the recession that began in Japan in 1992 and took away some of the allure of Japan that had slowly grown during Japan's "Bubble economy". The recession also would have made finding part-time employment more difficult, which is arguably one of the main reasons foreigners come to Japan to

study. Horie also mentions the difficulties many foreigners were having adjusting to Japanese culture.

After seeming to be heading for success, the slow growth in the numbers of foreign students during the mid 1990s lead to the formation of two ad hoc committees, and their reports lead to several adjustments in educational policy in regards to internationalization. One reform measure was the establishment in national universities of a Center for International Students which was to coordinate orientation programs, etc.. In addition, the Ministry of Education required newly established schools and departments to set foreign student quotas. An important change was that visa requirements were relaxed in 2000 making it possible for students to apply for a student visa from their home country. Restrictions on student's work were also loosened and greater accessibility to scholarships was provided. Entrance exams for foreigners were also simplified, and it became possible to take the exams in the home country twice a year instead of having to come to Japan to take the annual test.

Clearly the failure to reach 100,000 students by 2000 inspired quite a bit of analysis and reform in order to get the numbers increasing again, and the goal of 100,000 foreign students was reached in May of 2003 after three years of rapid advances. These advances were undoubtedly caused to some extent by the reforms in the system of recruitment and support that were established after 1998, and hence,it can be said that the government's ability to adjust its procedures to better achieve its goals is admirable, though, they were rather slow in doing so.

There may be other factors involved in the rapid recent increases. The recovery of Asian economies and in particular the growing demand in China for higher education is one big influence. Asian students accounted for 86% of foreign students, with Chinese students accounting for nearly 60% alone in 2001(Yomiuri Daily News, 2001). Without Chinese students, many smaller schools would be experiencing even greater financial strains caused by the falling numbers of 18 year olds. The growth in numbers of foreign students during this period helped ease this fall.

To conclude, the government's efforts to create and adjust policy in the face of changing external conditions were successful. Changing economic conditions in Asia, particularly China, have also been a factor in reaching of the goal set in 1983 to have 100,000 foreign students in Japan. Chinese students, from a country where the average salary is $1/20^{th}$ that of Japan, may be strongly motivated to come to Japan to work rather than study and have caused trouble for several schools by working more than their visas permit. In December of 2001, 200 students enrolled at Sakata Junior College were found to be living nowhere near the school, and instead, living and working in Tokyo. Overall the balance between visiting foreign students and Japanese studying outside of Japan is still negative, as Japanese students abroad numbered 198,779 in 2002.(MEXT website). The total of 100,000 foreign students is about 3% of all university students, which is rather low compared to 16.7% in Britain and 5.9% in the US (Trends in Japan).

Faculty

Japan's internationalization policy is much more focused on increasing the numbers of foreign students than on increasing the numbers foreign faculty. Prior to

1982, public universities were not allowed to hire full-time professors because this would conflict with laws against foreigners working as public servants, however, in keeping with the move towards internationalization, in 1982 a bill was submitted and passed making it possible to hire foreigners for full-time employment at public universities. In fact, most were still offered 3-year renewable contracts, which are only offered to foreigners. Japanese, on the other hand, typically receive tenure upon being hired. Private schools have always tended to employ more foreign faculty full-time, but the numbers are quite low compared to American universities. Looking at private and public schools together, full and part-time the number grew from 1,168 in 1983 to 3,152 in 1996. In 1996 this number accounted for 2.97% of all full-time professors. Foreigners accounted for 5.82% of part-time instructors in the same year, and a large percentage of these teach foreign language classes to undergraduates

In 1995, the Ministry of Education circulated a directive to all public universities asking them to not renew the contracts of all the foreign professors on 3-year contracts over 50 years of age as they were becoming too expensive. Many of these professors had been given verbal promises that their contracts were a mere formality, and that they would be able renew them until retirement. Although there was quite a bit of newspaper coverage of the problem, and a high profile meeting with American Ambassador Walter Mondale, in the end the government was able to let the teachers go and hire younger and cheaper Japanese in their place. Currently, the practice of offering limited term contracts to foreign professors only is becoming more prevalent in Japan.

Thankfully, many private universities continue to employ foreign instructors under the same conditions as their Japanese colleagues.

Curriculum and Programs

During the 1980s and 90s policy reform was also undertaken to make curriculum more "international". Changes occurred both in the curriculum offered as well as kinds of departments and schools that were opened. In the case of the national universities, the Ministry of Education decides what schools and departments are opened, however, with private universities, it controls the accreditation process and approves or rejects proposals made by private universities, and "typically evaluates the social need for the graduates of a proposed program…and clearly favored international departments during this period."(Umakoshi). Between 1980 and 1995, six international universities were established as well as 33 new faculty and 55 new departments all using the word "international" in their name. In addition, many schools have international study agreements with universities abroad, and these agreements grew in number from 763 in 1984 to 3,377 in 1996. This number indicates that each school would have an average of seven agreements, but larger research universities may have more than 20 whereas smaller universities between one and three (Umakoshi).

In Japan "internationalization" is often equated with language study, and in particular, study of the English language. Also strong in the Japan is the idea that the foreign culture should be a major part of foreign language study. To this end there is a strong push to get students to go on summer abroad programs overseas. Just in the last 3 years restrictions were lifted making it easier for students to get credits for study

abroad. Previously, many students studying abroad for the junior year had to come back and do a junior year in the Japanese university.

In fact, many English classes in Japanese universities give little attention to developing practical English skills, in spite of reform measures introduced in 1993 and 2003, because Japanese English teachers are often literature or linguistics based in their orientation, however, the increasing numbers of foreign teachers in Japan have been a major force for change in this respect. Regarding culture, it is interesting to see that some view foreign language classes and studies of other cultures as a way of teaching about Japanese culture. For example, in the Ministry of Education's latest 2003 "Strategic Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities", states that the 6th of 7 goals is to "Cultivate the ability to express and understand oneself in Japanese". To some it seems odd to have such a goal in a list of ways to achieve English proficiency. Also, the name of the new action plan itself seems to emphasize the fact that although English abilities will be attained, students will maintain their Japanese identity. It appears that perhaps to some in the Ministry of Education, English study is seen as a threat to the development of students' Japanese cultural identity.

Another example of the focus on understanding Japanese culture within a policy of internationalization can be found in the major policy reform of the 1990s, The New Course of Study, presented in 1993. The 4th of four guiding principles was to foster "Respect for culture and traditions and promotion of international understanding". Whose culture and whose traditions were explained further on in this policy statement,

"Priority will be given to fostering respect for Japanese culture and traditions". (MEXT, 1995, p. 18).

Discussion

So far in this paper I have described how the Japanese Ministry of Education implemented policies between 1983 and 2003 to internationalize higher education. These policies were part of a broader plan to internationalize all areas of education. The question arises as to what extent the internationalization policy was successful. "Internationalization" is a fairly intangible quality and questionnaires or other forms of formal research were not used to determine whether students were becoming more international in their thinking. Emery (1993) describes policy as trying to bring about "changes in the social environment such that certain kinds of ends are more or less easier to achieve", and the government did set one very tangible goal for student's social environment: an increase to 100,000 international student. The Ministry also made concerted efforts to increase the numbers of programs where international curriculum was being offered. Looking at the increases in numbers of foreign students and international programs, it can be said that some degree of success was attained.

However, it should be recognized that changes in the social environment, may not translate into changes in attitudes and beliefs of individuals if "mental models" keep them from interacting with those in their social environment in meaningful ways. Senge (1992) describes mental models as being, "assumptions", "theories", "deeply held

images of how the world works", and "images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and activity". It is the case that many Japanese view their culture as being homogenous, however, one of the consequences of this view is that foreigners may seem quite different from them. When observing foreign students on Japanese campuses one does not get the sense that they are very well integrated into university life. Some foreign students are older and many work in their free time, but in part, the problem seems to lie more with the Japanese that have been socialized in their schools, families and society at large to feel quite a bit of cultural distance from people from other countries. In fact, one goal of the government's internationalization policy is to work against this very tendency, but more needs to be done to bring about real change in attitudes.

If true internationalization is to take place, more than merely bringing foreign students to Japanese campuses needs to be done. Now that the goal of 100,000 students has been reached, it will become important to help foreign students integrate more fully into campus life. For example, they could be strongly encouraged to join campus organizations or clubs. Japanese students could be assigned to act as guides or "buddies" in the first year on campus. In addition, more needs to be done to attract students from non-Asian countries to provide a more balanced international influence. Language study could be provided to students on campus like the ELI programs common in the US that get students prepared for university level work, and classes could be provided to undergraduates in English like is being done at Ritsumeikan International University and Sophia University.

Taking Lynn's simple premise that policy is the output of government (Lynn, 1987, cited in Hughes), it is difficult to understand the process by which the Japanese government has developed its internationalization policy. Although Japanese leadership is not known for transparency in its decision making processes, it appears there are conflicting points of view within the government as to the usefulness of internationalization and how to best achieve it so that Japan can benefit from participation in the global economy, while at the same time maintaining its cultural identity. On November 11th, 2003 the headline in the Daily Yomiuri newspaper read, "Gov't to toughen immigration checks on foreign students", and it describes how the Ministry of Justice has decided to do tougher checks on potential student's finances and Japanese ability due to the "increase in the number and severity of crimes committed by visa overstayers resulting in deterioration of safety in the nation.". A law like this, if properly enforced, could effectively put the brakes on the recent rapid growth in the numbers of international students.

The Japanese impulse towards trying to maintain a strong national identity in the face of the onslaught of globalization is understandable. Many countries face this same dilemma of wanting to hold on to a solid national identity, while also desiring to become increasingly involved with the global economy and enjoy the financial benefits that this entails. It is like driving a car down a hill with one foot tapping on the brake. This is a careful way to drive, but if one hits the brake too hard it can be very unsettling for the passengers. The next few years will provide a good opportunity for schools to work to improve the quality of their international programs, after four years of rapid

growth in international student number. Hopefully, the government will not tap too hard on the brakes.

Epilogue

This paper was written in the winter of 2003, and as it now goes to press it appears that the brakes have been firmly applied to the internationalization process. On May 7, 2004 the Yomiuri Daily News ran an article entitled "Student Visas drop by 50%: Tighter screening measures put squeeze on applicants". In this article it was reported that the Immigration Bureau had granted certificates of eligibility to 46% of applicants during March. This was down form 79% the year before in the same month. The percentage of Chinese admissions dropped sharply from 74% to 27 %. An article in the Japan Times, entitled, "Crime hysteria fueling visa rejections: Chinese being frozen out of student visa process" mentions the high profile murder of a family in Fukuoka of which a Chinese student now stands accused. This may have much to do with the government's change in policy. Needless to say, this change in policy is likely to have a negative impact on foreign student university admissions in the next few years to come.

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