Internationalization as driver of university reform in mature systems?:
Mixed evidence from Japan

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Internationalization of higher education systems increasingly is seen both as a desirable objective in
itself and as impetus to broader reforms at the institutional level. This paper focuses on the second,
more recent, policy hope in Japan: namely that enhancing international student and staff mobility
may generate both demand and supply side pressures for better practice in universities. The evidence
is mixed, and Japanese experience shows that such international mobility relates imperfectly to what
may be termed ‘cognitive internationalization’. Japan has some institutions of high domestic stature
that see themselves in a global market for research excellence, yet have very little experience of
inbound foreign student and academic mobility, and still underdeveloped outbound flows. At the
same time, some leading institutions with significant inbound student flows have, in effect,
quarantined organisationally their impacts within institutional sub-units. Weaker institutions face the
same compromises between academic standards and financial exigencies troubling some other
higher education systems. This paper notes how the systemic reform impacts of international student
and staff mobility are blunted by the sheer scale of the Japanese higher education system, and the
ways in which institutional leadership is embedded in particular governance, employment practices,
and socio-cultural contexts.

Internationalization’s impacts

In recent decades higher education institutions and the governments and other
stakeholders that impact upon them have placed considerable emphasis upon promoting
the internationalization of students’ learning experiences. This is seen to entail positive
impacts on students such as broadening personal outlooks and aspirations as well as
stimulating the development of particular border-spanning capabilities. The latter
include foreign language skills, specific cultural aptitudes, and general skills for
managing inter-personal differences and constrained communications. There is a
growing research literature, beyond the scope of this paper to survey, that explores these
impacts as well as dynamic ongoing dialogues within the large international
professional communities embodied in such organisations as NAFSA and EAIE. The
profoundly important contribution that international mobility of university researchers,
and the networks of collaboration and information sharing that are formed and reinforced, is also widely understood. Yet at the same time it is also widely recognised that the institutions and practices of national higher education systems are deeply patterned by particular national – and sometimes sub-national histories – and that there is considerable path dependency in the ways that academic work are conceived, organised, and conducted. It is often intuited that ‘internationalization’ may drive convergence in national practices, although – as in parallel debates about corporate governance convergence (see Gourevitch and Shin, 1995, for a good account) the specific mechanisms for that, and the forces for resistance, are much less often explored. It is notable that some higher education institutions with a long history of state funding and regulation, such as those of Australia and New Zealand, were first subjected to full market pressures with given the latitude, and imperative, to recruit full fee-paying international students. This implies then a broader role then for ‘internationalization’; namely to impact upon established academic and university administrative practice in ways that may be efficiency-enhancing, but which may also raise questions about institutions’ core academic missions. Japan provides an interesting case of a national higher education system founded initially on borrowed foreign models and a dynamic mix of domestic foreign educational entrepreneurship in the late 19th century, with a subsequent period of ‘foreign learning’ in the aftermath of World War Two, and then a sustained period of solidifying of particularistic national practice. In recent times public policymakers have explicitly seen ‘internationalization’ as a potential impetus to enhanced general academic and administrative standards with Japanese universities and colleges. There is a growing literature specifically on the Japanese experience of internationalization; primarily in relation to it as an end in itself rather than as an impetus to enhanced good practice in universities generally. The prospects for internationalization being an impetus for reform within Japanese universities and colleges, and specific factors blunting such positive impacts, are the concern of this paper.

Definitional issues obviously arise in relation to just what is meant by ‘internationalization’. Clearly inbound and outbound student, academic and managerial mobility are a significant concern, and yet it goes much beyond that (and, indeed, also precedes that in critical ways). What may be termed ‘cognitive internationalization’ both precedes and is cemented by cross-border mobility and may manifest in varying ways across the particular types of institutions and tasks that characterise modern higher education systems. In the research domain, it may take the form of more actively
engagement by academic researchers in international scholarly communities – in persona and or virtually – and may have few impacts in relation to student mobility. Managerially, while there is considerable scope for strategic collaboration between institutions of different countries, cognitive internationalization may entail more benchmarking of an institution’s own practices against those of well-recognised foreign institutions. In the area of teaching, cognitive internationalization may entail curricular reform, independently of inbound and outbound student mobility. Indeed for many higher education institutions in developing countries this will be the primary internationalization initiative re teaching given the limited resources for outbound international student mobility and limited demand from international students for their programs. Priorities under the rubric of ‘internationalization’ will change with both national economic and university development, with changes in the international higher education environment, and in response to domestic ideational change. This has been evidenced in Japan.

*Internationalization of Japanese higher education as policy objective & reality*

Education policies, from early schooling to higher education, have often been publicly contentious in postwar Japan. Yet beneath the surface of apparently endless debates about educational objectives and standards there has been considerable continuity in practice and policy throughout much of the postwar era. This prompted one scholar to sub-title his book on education reform ‘a case of immobilist politics’ (Schoppa, 1991; see also Marshall, 1994). The objective of promoting internationalization of Japanese higher education institutions is notable in being both uncontentious and immobilist. Key aspects of the social context of Japanese higher education that have blunted public policy objectives in relation to internationalization will be explored below; in relation to specific aspects such as inbound and outbound cross-border student mobility, curricular and pedagogical reform (including the participation of foreign, and foreign-trained, academics in Japanese institutions), research performance, and an overarching cognitive internationalization in relation to the place of Japanese universities and colleges in the wider world.

Despite this ‘blunting’ in practice of a wide-ranging will for internationalization of Japanese higher education, certain general stages of policy and practice can be distinguished. It should be noted from the outset that discussion of ‘official policy’ in the Japanese case is complicated by the plethora of institutions, advisory boards and the
like that have articulated public positions on higher education internationalization with a more or less explicit imprimatur of the state. That aside, several objectives and stages of policy can be discerned. In the early post-war period there was a strong desire to have Japan better understood abroad, while simultaneously promoting a more cosmopolitan on-campus experience for domestic students. Inevitably a small number of generally elite (although notably often private, not national) institutions showed most initiative. Despite the relatively small numbers of foreign students in Japan, compared to the United States, it is reasonable to conclude the first of the policy objectives was met (see Table 1). There are significant professional communities and networks of individuals with experience of studying in Japan, either for a full degree or for a shorter period of exchange-based academic study and/or Japanese language training. Yet for reasons that will be discussed subsequently, the overall impact upon both the cosmopolitanism of Japanese domestic students, and their universities, has been less pronounced. With Japan’s increasing economic affluence the outbound mobility of Japanese students was increasingly prioritised in government policy, although with strikingly varied impacts both amongst and within institutions. The sheer scale of the domestic market for higher education, and its particular socio-cultural and labour market contexts, meant that institutions with strong brand cache could be rather indifferent to both attracting foreign students and promoting the mobility of their domestic students abroad. Less prestigious institutions, seeking to differentiate themselves positively from their more selective counterparts, were increasingly drawn to international programs (both in a regular curriculum and experiential sense) in order to provide some distinctive value proposition to students of higher academic standing.

Public policy then prioritised larger-scale inbound student mobility. This was encapsulated in the 1983 policy objective of the Nakasone government to lift international student numbers ten-fold to 100,000; a target achieved in 2003. In January 2008 Prime Minister Fukuda flagged a new target of 300,000 international students; with a related program to designate thirty universities to play a key role in realising the target and an objective of having half the students staying on in Japan for a time to work after graduation (Daily Yomiuri, 31 July 2008). This profoundly ambitious target built upon a mid-2007 statement by the previous prime minister, Shintaro Abe, explicitly identifying university reform, a sharp increase in foreign faculty numbers and more teaching in English, as well as breaking down programmatic divides between science and humanities majors, in the Government’s ‘Innovation 25’ strategic guidelines for a prosperous nation in 2025(Daily Yomiuri, 27 May 2007). Inbound student and staff
mobility were seen as both an impetus to university reform, and dependent upon it, and both those foreigners and young Japanese educated in a more dynamic and cosmopolitan university system would provide an impetus to national innovation. It is timely then to give closer consideration to the track record of Japanese universities in both promoting, and capturing the full benefits of both inbound and outbound mobility. Japan is unusual in having its numbers of inbound and outbound cross-border student flows roughly in balance (IIE, 2006). Moreover, in the absence of substantial inbound academic staff mobility, Japanese universities should be more reliant on the temporary outbound mobility of graduate students and established academics and university management.

**Study-in-Japan demand and supply**

Over half of foreign graduate students in Japan are in national universities, reflecting their strengths as research institutions and graduate students represent over a third of total international students (See Table 4; Huang, 2006: 527). Undergraduate degree students account for over 40 percent and the remainder are students in shorter visiting programs as year or semester abroad. Many undergraduate and visiting students are in private institutions and this overall mix reflects the interplay of foreign demand for, and supply of, Japanese higher education. Previous comparative studies have found a number of factors to be significant determinants of study abroad destinations: shared language, shared historical/colonial links, cost (with mixed evidence), geographical proximity, access to science-based education, and, a ‘larger country’ effect (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001: 15-17). With the limited exception of Taiwan in an earlier period, Japan has been disadvantaged as a study abroad destination by its distinctive language. Yet the other factors identified accord with observed patterns of foreign demand for studying in Japan (considering China as smaller economically; although obviously not in population terms).

Foreign demand for Japanese full degree programs has been, and remains, overwhelmingly, from Japan’s immediate neighbours; China, South Korea, Taiwan and, to a lesser degree, Southeast Asia (see Table 2). Demand for semester and year abroad programs, as well as short course programs, historically was strongest from the United States, followed by Europe and then Australia, Canada and the like. Demand for degree programs reflected the strong recognition in the Asia Pacific of Japan’s economic influence (and trade and FDI linkages with home economies in particular) and cultural
influence. The latter has been complicated by unresolved issues concerning memories of
the Pacific War but it is difficult to measure the impact of that concretely. Less
controversially, with the rise of English as the de facto *lingua franca* of international
business and academe the attractiveness of Japan as a study abroad destination is
somewhat hampered by the predominance of Japanese as the language of instruction in
universities. Demand for exchange programs in Japan has been heavily patterned by the
extent and popularity of Japanese language and Japanese studies programs in sending
countries; although there is also a certain path dependency as many receiving Japanese
institutions have required some formal study of the Japanese language as a precondition
of applying for an exchange program, generally in the belief that this exposure would
mitigate student adjustment issues that have long concerned many Japanese universities.

The organisational response of Japanese institutions to demand from international
students has, in general, sharply differed between degree-seeking foreigners and
exchange students. Exchange students have been generally well supported, and often
subsidised to a significantly greater degree than that the outbound Japanese students
who balance off the inflows under bilateral agreements. Yet there have been persistent
issues facing exchange students since institutions such as Waseda University became
active in creating inbound programs in the 1960s. Specialised host organisational units
have often been created (so-called ‘ryugaku bekka’) that coordinate provision of
Japanese language classes, academic courses taught in English, and exchange student
services. These units typically have been organisationally independent of faculties and
not infrequently led to a certain ‘exchange student ghetto’ effect where foreign students
had few opportunities to interact with Japanese students. Although most institutions
made it formally possible for their domestic students to take classes in English with
exchange students there was typically few formal credit arrangements in place and little
coordination with faculties, which are central to a student’s status in a Japanese
institution. Moreover, course offerings in English were inevitably limited as internal
incentives have only rarely been provided for Faculty to offer such courses. A critical
issue then is for what may be termed ‘mainstreaming’ of exchange programs; namely,
integrating visiting foreign students into courses provided by faculties and taught in
English, along with regular faculty students. Exchange students have great potential to
be an impetus to better educational practice as they already have the experience of
another, foreign, higher education institution and also often higher attaining students on
average than their home cohorts.
In contrast, Japanese universities have generally accepted degree-seeking foreign students from neighbouring countries into regular faculties with little fanfare, somewhat limited supporting services, and very little regard for the pedagogical and curricular implications of increasingly diverse student cohorts. One factor in this, both cause and effect, is the relatively low numbers of foreign degree-seeking students recruited directly abroad by host institutions. More often, students from China, Korea or elsewhere have first come to a private Japanese language school in Japan and then made application for admission to a Japanese university. This has made it easier for institutions to have less regard for adjustment issues, or to develop integrated Japanese language training pathways into degree programs in the way that many Anglo-American, Australian and New Zealand institutions have done. There are also notable differences in the recruitment practices of Japanese universities abroad. Marketing and recruitment techniques tend to mirror those commonly used in the Japanese domestic context, such as cultivating links with feeder institutions such as better high schools. Little use is made of agents and fairs and Japanese institutions do not have the benefit of public organisations such as the British Council or Australian Education International, or the collectively university-owned IDP Australia with their extensive international networks of offices and organizational capabilities.

Channel-specific strategies do reflect recognition of the difficulty presented by the Japanese language but as a general approach they are less effective outside China, South Korea and Taiwan. In some respects the more elite institutions, with strong domestic market standing, or the most cognitively constrained when carrying out recruitment activities abroad. As Japanese institutions, such as Waseda, seek to attract international students to predominantly English-based programs they will be going head-to-head, or at least should be, with many institutions in English-speaking countries with a strong track record of international recruitment in the last twenty-five years. Whether similar know-how can be cultivated within Japanese universities will be a significant factor in determining whether the more ambitious targets around for international student recruitment can be met in a desirable fashion. Policy-makers have certainly toyed with quite radical policy changes to make it easier for Japanese universities to attract foreign students. For instance, former Prime Minister Abe’s Education Rebuilding Council suggested a reworking of the academic calendar to a September start, on the grounds that elite North American and European institutions are on that calendar (Daily Yomiuri, 19 September 2007). Actually universities already have latitude to, and some actively do, take students from September who are graduates of a regular Japanese high
school as well as international students, through certain admission processes.

**Outbound student mobility**

Although the absolute numbers of Japanese undertaking higher education studies abroad have since been relatively large, these flows have generally reflected pull factors (e.g., the foreign destination’s cultural attractiveness or specialist expertise) rather than the push factor of insufficient domestic higher education capacity to meet demand. Detailed discussion of outbound mobility is beyond the scope of this paper, and has been undertaken by this author elsewhere (Pokarier, 2006) as by many others. Several points should be made briefly though as pertain directly to internationalization’s impacts on general university practice. Whilst many Japanese institutions have developed a plethora of international exchange agreements on paper, in practice many universities and colleges did little curricula-wise to facilitate students undertake part of their program abroad. Credit arrangements have been only rarely formulated, meaning that most students who went abroad on exchange took an extra year to graduate, at their own expense. This, amongst other factors distinctive to Japan’s company recruitment and human resource management systems, dampened demand for exchange programs. An upshot of this is that most institutions have only a tiny constituency of current and former students who have experienced alternative models of higher education abroad and who might be provide positive pressures for better practice at home.

**International staff mobility**

MEXT data reports that in 2005 there were only 5062 fulltime foreign faculty in the Japanese university system, out of a total of 161,690 staff. There are a similar number again of part-time academic staff in the Japanese institutions, but foreigners are slightly better represented as a proportion with some 11045 (see Table 3). This is a function largely of the large numbers of part-time language instructors employed part-time. Huang (2006: 531) noted a quite substantial rise in the total number of foreign faculty members across Japanese higher education in the decade from 1992; although did not clearly distinguish between part-time and full-time. Hwang noted that the proportion of foreigners employed in private institutions remained roughly unchanged at 77 percent. Contention continues over hiring practices of foreign staff in some institutions; with claims that special categories of staff appointment entail higher teaching loads and less job security. Yet there has been a notable increase in the preparedness of quite a few
Japanese institutions to both tenure foreign academic staff and to post position notices in English as part of a general shift to more open recruitment practices. Nonetheless, in 2005 only 52 of Tokyo University’s 2,800 fulltime teaching staff were non-Japanese (Yomiuri Shimbun, 4 July 2005). Moreover, a substantial number of foreign staff, tenured and otherwise, are responsible primarily for language education – regardless of their initial field of academic training. Individual research profiles are often relatively weak, and a great many foreign staff outside specialist scientific disciplines have not held regular academic posts abroad prior to being employed in a Japanese university. This means less direct transfer of know-how from foreign to Japanese institutions than the still meagre numbers of foreign academic staff suggest. Furthermore, although an increasingly significant proportion of Japanese academics have foreign graduate training – attenuating the disciplinary know-how shortages associated with a still strong preference for hiring of Japanese speakers – most such foreign-trained nationals have had no substantial experience as regular academic staff in foreign institutions.

Explaining the chequered pattern of institution-level internationalization

At first glance the relatively slow pace of institutional innovation vis-à-vis internationalization seems surprisingly at odds with the numerous public policy statements and initiatives to that end. Yet the reasons for such a disconnect can readily be found in the strikingly large role played by private institutions in the Japanese higher education system, as well as the specific educational priorities assigned to the public (national, regional and municipal) institutions, within the historical context of strong postwar growth in domestic demand for higher education.

By the early Meiji era Japan had a well-established precedent for private educational entrepreneurship, both by visionary locals (such as Kiichi Fukuzawa, founder of Keio University), as well as foreign missionaries, and the not-for-profit basis of such institutional endeavours proved to be predominant in Japan as elsewhere (James, 1986; Horio, 1988) Currently in Japan 73.7 percent of higher education students are in private institutions (77 percent of undergraduates but only 24 percent of doctoral candidates), public outlays on the sector are about half the OECD average at 0.7 percent of GDP, and private outlays are double the OECD average (MEXT, 2006; OECD, 2007: 230). There is a large academic literature on the ‘internal rate of return’ to Japanese personal investment in a university or college education, which declined somewhat with rising
higher education participation rates (which were also somewhat sensitive to labour market conditions), with good insights provided by Oshio and Seno (2007) and Mosk and Nakata (1987). Dore (1976), Cummings (1979) and others have also explored the status premium that accrued to university graduation, and its socio-cultural context, which also compounded demand. In short, throughout the postwar period the private returns to a Japanese university or college education were positive. This was recognised by policymakers who prevailed over a growth model of higher education that entailed a relatively small (compared to Western Europe etc) public subsidy except in limited areas of targeted need or strategic intent such as nursing or the sciences.

There was considerable scope for innovation by the plethora of new higher education institutions that emerged from the late-1950s, and many of the humanities programs had an ostensibly international flavour. Yet the key models were the established elite national universities (and to a lesser extent to private institutions) where staff had themselves been educated. Amano (1979: 11) and others noted that for all the massive expansion of the Japanese higher education system in the postwar era, there was little change in the established status hierarchy of institutions (Amano, 1979: 11; cited also in McVeigh, 2002:67). At the same time, successive Japanese governments set as priorities for public institutions the expansion of science and engineering education, with a strong emphasis on serving the human resource needs of the internationally-competitive Japanese manufacturing sector, and promotion of basic research in key fields that might have positive spillover effects to industry.

Clark (1979) concluded that postwar Japanese university governance was essentially an ‘academic baronial model’ that was an extreme form of continental European-style professorial chair systems. The old professorial chair system (‘kyoza’), where the full professor had exclusive responsibility for a disciplinary area and more junior staff, was often criticised for reinforcing patronage systems, poor governance, and resistance to innovation in both educational practice and research (Hall, 1998). Elements of this system were well established prior to World War II, but the negative experience of state interference in academic affairs during Japan’s dark days of militarism resulted in strong

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1 The standard national university fee has been raised by 26.5 percent over the last decade to ¥535,800 per annum in 2006. This still compares favourably with private university fees which typically range, for instance, between ¥750,000 to ¥1300,000 for general humanities and social sciences courses (Daily Yomiuri, 1 November 2006).
postwar norms of academic independence (Marshall, 1992, 1994). Such attitudes could be, and still often are, harnessed by the opponents of reform. The last regulatory and policy vestiges of the old chair system was to end from April 2007 (Yomiuri Shimbun, 1 May 2006). This was ultimately reflected, for instance, in a formal change of titles from ‘assistant professors’ (jokyoju) to ‘associate professors’ (jun kyoju) and regulation for them to have more independence and responsibility in teaching, research and administration. Prior to the change, many institutions had already moved in that direction. While such changes have removed certain barriers of hierarchy to academic innovation, this has more immediate impacts in research than in teaching and the development of international programs.

Yet this explanation for many institutions not having prioritised internationalization initiatives raises other significant questions. Firstly, if reinforcing the international competitiveness of Japanese enterprise was a key policy objective, why did that not manifest in strong demand from students for a more ‘international’ learning experience? The answer lies primarily in the particular character of employment practices in leading Japanese enterprises; namely so-called lifetime employment and the incentives that it provided firms to invest in employees’ ongoing development through a mix of on-the-job training (OJT) and outsourced specialist training and testing services. Both a cause and effect of the latter was the development of vibrant private educational enterprises; including a range of foreign language and cross-cultural training businesses. With the implicit promise not to lay off core employees in downturns, as well as norms of seniority-based pay and promotions, firms needed considerable flexibility from employees in relation to job deployments in return.

The recruitment practices of large enterprises evolved therefore to prioritise the hiring

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2 The particular postwar political economy out of which this distinctive ‘J-firm’ model of human resource management, and insider-dominated corporate governance, is well beyond the scope of this paper but can be explored, in comparative perspective, through the recent works of Gourevitch and Shinn (2006), Roe (2004), Aoki, Jackson and Miyajima (2007) and Nottage, Wolff and Anderson (Forthcoming, December 2008). For this author’s views on the implications for Japanese higher education see Pokarier (2004), and for attitudes to foreign investment, Chapter 10 in the aforementioned Nottage (2008) et al volume.
of new university graduates into a generalist managerial/professional stream, with often little regard for the particular field of study undertaken at university. Job-seekers’ university affiliation provides a key signalling effect of relative academic ability, rather than denoting an extended period of specific post-secondary human capital formation. This has shifted the focus of measured academic attainment from during the tertiary education period forward to the initial point of university entry (Dore, 1976). The exception to this was in the engineering and sciences fields, and it is notable that these are the sole disciplinary areas in which in a substantial proportion of students (and indeed the more academically accomplished) continue onto to graduate school prior to being recruited by a first-tier enterprise. The stature of mainstream Japanese higher education institutions therefore has been almost entirely a function of their relative exclusiveness at the admissions stage. Given the demanding, team-based, and long-term nature of work for many management-track employees in Japanese enterprises, the initial recruitment process has often prioritised evidence of collegiality, liveliness and stamina once a certain minimum threshold of academic attainment has been demonstrated. The university and faculty entered became a common proxy measure of the latter, and may impact also impact on subsequent career prospects within the firm (Ishida, Spilerman, Su, 1997; Ishida, 1993; Kawaguchi & Ma, 2004).

This situation has had profound implications for the incentive structures that individual students face, with significant consequences for the demand for an ‘international experience’, and for higher education institutions (see Amano, 1990). Firstly, families invest heavily in pre-tertiary ‘shadow education’ – such as cram schools, private tutors, correspondence courses, mock tests and diagnostics – to maximise personal prospects of success on entrance examinations for more prestigious universities and faculties (Stevenson & Baker, 1992). This has, in turn, generated an enormous related industry that is a significant stakeholder in the ongoing political economy of Japanese higher education. The form and contents of entrance examinations determine what is prioritised educationally by both students and many of the secondary schools whose status depends on their success in placing students in prominent tertiary institutions (and likewise, all the way back down to private kindergartens). Therefore, decisions as the one taken by the National Center Test for University Admissions to include a listening test component on the English exam for the unified ‘Center’ exam some five years ago, created strong incentives for students to familiarise themselves with native speaker English. A second consequence was that universities and colleges felt little pressure to compete through offering quality academic programs of any kind; let alone
internationally-oriented ones (Nagai, 1971; Amano, 1979; Clarke, 1979). While not entirely indifferent to the concerns of employers (and the latter have resorted to extensive third party net-based testing of job seekers of late, in part owing to declining faith in academic standards), universities felt relatively little external scrutiny of academic outputs. Public monitoring and control centred on periodic micro-management of certain readily quantifiable inputs (such as physical facilities, staff-student ratios etc) and was centred upon the foundation and initial four years of new academic programs. This reflected a governance style that evolved with the rapid – initially almost unchecked – expansion of private universities (see Pempel, 1973, 1978; Yonezawa, 2002), as well the ongoing bureaucratic control of the once 100-odd national universities (now 87 following rationalisations under the Koizumi Government; see Murasawa 2002, Goldfinch 2006).

**Impetus to reform**

Curricular and pedagogical innovation, as well as plain old-fashioned good practice, requires incentives – or at least the absence of disincentives. At a systemic and institutional level this would see funding being tied, at least in part, to some measures of performance. Jongbloed and Vossensteyn (2001: 141-2), and others, have noticed considerable variation between countries in the extent to which they seek to tie funding of teaching to outcomes, rather than input measures, and the risks to efficiency of the latter when there are significant structural barriers to student mobility between institutions. In their account Japan confronts this problem. Reform of national universities certainly has created new financial pressures for the institutions. Data on both student and staff numbers in national universities following the 2001 reforms is revealing: there has been no growth for five years as institutions are compelled to generate an efficiency dividend to cope with certain rising costs (such as age-indexed salaries) in the context of declining public funding. In general, university and faculty leaderships, facing performance-oriented financial pressures, are more likely to create and maintain incentives for individual staff members to both perform core teaching and research effectively, but also to cooperate with particular strategic initiatives such as the promotion of internationalization (in all its facets). It is not yet clear whether this is being evidenced in Japanese national universities. As elsewhere, staff face simultaneous, and ultimately contending exhortations, to enhance research performance (of an internationally competitive level – as shall be seen below) and to cooperate with various institutional initiatives. Yet, generally speaking, in both public and private universities
the plethora of new institutional endeavours does not extend to hard-headed performance management at the individual level.

The quality teaching challenge

Japanese universities and colleges are relatively weakest in their teaching and assessment of students, reflecting certain features of their distinctive operating environment. Enders and Teichler (1997: 367-368) found that Japanese academics generally rate their commitment to teaching, in contrast to research, significantly lower than do their counterparts in the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, the USA and Great Britain. Yet their classes are generally larger, and they are also more likely to be doing side-teaching at another institution. Yet, for reasons well understood and not particular to Japan, neither does it automatically follow that greater competition domestically would enhance institutions’ commitment to education standards.

In 2005 Japan had 726 universities and 488 junior colleges, of which many of the latter are affiliated with the former. Yet in April 2008 nearly half of all private universities failed to meet their student intake quota and institutional rationalizations and closures are inevitable. The potential impact upon institutions of the shrinking domestic university-age cohort is profound. A survey and analysis by Promotion and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private Schools of Japan found that in the Spring of 2005 29.5% of private universities (160) did not meet their intake quota; 17 institutions filled less than 50 percent of places and one institution attracted only 14 percent (Yomiuri Shimbun, 27 July 2005, 21 August 2005). A year later 40 percent of private universities did not meet their intake quotas (Daily Yomiuri, 22 November 2006). Underlying this are the simple maths of supply and demand. Enrolee numbers peaked at 810,000 in 1993 and fell to 690,000 in 2006. Despite this evident trend the number of private universities actually rose substantially during the same period (Daily Yomiuri, 22 November 2006).

One Central Council for Education subcommittee report, reflecting MEXT views, stated that: ‘With universities giving priority to the immediate securement (sic) of students, the ability levels guaranteed by universities is not clear.’ (Daily Yomiuri, 26 March 2008). Since 1991 universities have had greater latitude to design their own curricula. The postwar curriculum model of two years of general education followed by more specialist training is no longer enforced. Ironically given its prior role in enforcing the general studies requirements, MEXT currently plans to introduce ‘attainment targets’ in
specified disciplinary areas that universities should demonstrate their graduates can meet. The explicit rationale is that many universities’ curricula are insufficiently structured; permitting students to take diverse courses on an *ad hoc* basis (*Daily Yomiuri*, 26 March 2008). Underlying ministry statements is the concern about declining academic standards in an era of too many universities for domestic demand.

An increasingly significant market for certain Japanese universities are the already somewhat ‘internationalized’ Japanese students (so called ‘returnees’ or *kikokusei*) who have spent extensive time abroad, usually owing to parents’ work. In the past more of these students might have been lost to foreign institutions but they have been more readily accommodated in admissions processes with the advent of the so-called AO (from the English ‘admissions office’) mechanism; which 45 national and public universities and 380 private institutions made use of in 2006 (*Daily Yomiuri*, 18 January 2007, 12 June 2007). This creates an alternative application path, separate from the general entrance examination, which involves a comprehensive review of students’ school records, personal accomplishments, application statement, and, not infrequently, performance on a distinctive examination and in interview. Even the Japan Association of National Universities have permitted institutions to lift the proportion of AO admissions from 30 percent to 50 percent, beginning with the 2008 Spring intake (*Daily Yomiuri*, 18 January 2007). Issuing AO offers is attractive to institutions in an era of declining domestic demand because they can fit their enrolment quotas without impinging heavily on their ‘hensachi’ rankings of relative demand owing to the opaqueness of the AO system. Partly for this reason, the Education Ministry is proposing the introduction of a new standardised test for the AO process (something akin to the SAT).

Some institutions are committing to offering full academic programs in English, such as the private Waseda University at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and the boutique Asia Pacific University (APU) at Beppu which is a spin-off from Ritsumeikan University. Yet such initiatives are still the exception, excepting small scale offerings to accommodate limited numbers of inbound exchange students. Japan is still far from the wide-ranging establishment of English-based programs (more often graduate) that has been witnessed in Sweden, the Netherlands and even France.

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Graduate education and research

Graduate school education recently has been recognised in Japanese policy as a key weakness of the higher education system. The creation of professional graduate schools, to serve the needs of industry and the professions, is a significant recent development and may contribute to the attractiveness of Japan as a vocationally-oriented graduate training destination over time. Enhancing the quality of doctoral training is a key priority given its deep relationship to both research and university-level teaching. Graduate education reform is seen as inexorably tied to the broader promotion of Japan’s research performance and the development of ‘world class’ institutions (Arimoto, 2007; Kobayashi, Yan & Shi, 2006). A National Institute of Science and Technology Policy study of scientific publishing suggested that Japanese researchers had had a significant impact in fields such as material science and physics, but less so in fields such an environmental science and engineering in which Japanese researchers might be expected to be prominent (Daily Yomiuri, 6 April 2007). Japan came forth with 9 percent of papers surveyed, following the US at 61 percent then Germany (13 percent) and Britain (12 percent). A number of national universities, led by Tokyo University, figure prominently in international rankings but they are still seen as needing to do more to attract promising foreign researchers (and to coax talented Japanese back home). Tokyo University has established an engineering ‘Nobel Prize’ program to attract and resources promising younger researchers (Hasebe, 2006). The Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) provides some 200 postdoctoral fellowships and 70-odd senior fellowships a year (www.jsps.go.jp) but few foreign researchers who come under such programs stay on beyond the fellowship period (Osborne, 2007).

There is considerable tension between ideas of promoting certain ‘national champion’ universities as global centres of research excellence, often linked to arguments for more performance orientation in funding, and the interests of smaller public institutions. In 2008 smaller regional institutions staunchly resist a government committee proposal for a new funding model fro 2010 that would greatly favour the likes of the University of Tokyo over them4 (Murai & Hashimoto, 2007). Despite the policy emphasis upon

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4 The February 2007 proposal for competitive funding was submitted to the Abe Government by four members of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy, including Nippon Keidanren Chairman Fujio Mitarai, with the support of Finance Minister Koji Omi and prominent private university and Tokyo University identities. It is strongly
fostering inbound and outbound student mobility, other reform proposals sometimes end up cutting across that objective. For instance, recent proposals, drafted by Nobel laureate Ryoji Noyori as head of former PM Abe’s Education Rebuilding Council, would extend graduate school programs from 2 to 3 years (creating a 3+3+2 system – the latter for a doctorate). This would be a shift away from EU Bologna process direction and further diminish the attractiveness of Japanese master degree programs vis-à-vis foreign offerings (which have become as short as a year). (Daily Yomiuri, 13 April 2007). Yet the internationalization of Japanese graduate schools is also an explicit object of government policy. For instance, MEXT seeks more public funding to bring talented foreign graduate students from developing countries, but also is promoting a change of tax and other laws to facilitate corporate donations to graduate schools (Daily Yomiuri, 24 June 2008)

Conclusions

To a significant degree, societies get the higher education systems they demand. Japanese universities have not faced the same amount of pressure as Anglo-American institutions have, for instance, to produce graduates with readily deployable specific skills sets. These pressures have come both from students themselves and employer representatives; most notably from the largely self-governing professions. Changes in the operating environment of Japanese enterprises may place more pressures on universities; although the state of higher education is always endogenous to firm decisions about staff development so immediate pressures on universities are attenuated by firm-level initiatives. As elsewhere, Japanese universities are most responsive to employer hopes when there is a clear industry constituency for specialist programs. Elsewhere Japanese academics have had considerable latitude, owing to both labour market and organisational particularities, to show little regard for the impacts of their teaching on the capabilities of their students. This was reflected in the IMD’s ranking of the effectiveness of university education as applied to future careers had Japan 58th, ahead of only South Korea and Indonesia in a 60 nation sample. Japan came last in a small sample in 2000 and 2002. (Yomiuri Shimbun, 13 July 2005).
What might be called ‘international rankings fever’, notably in relation to The Times’ Higher Education Supplement and the Shanghai Jiao Tong university rankings – has spread to the leading institutions in Japan. In turn, studies are being undertaken to assess whether Japanese institutions are done justice by them and, more tenuously, the implications for Japanese universities (Kobayashi, Yan and Peijun 2006). Perhaps this new-found concern for rankings reflects less of a genuine concern that Japanese universities are competing in an international market for students than a more practical regard for how their standing in international rankings impacts upon their stature with domestic constituencies such as government, industry and potential domestic students.

International rankings do contribute somewhat to cognitive internationalization – looking beyond national borders for norms and benchmarks of good practice – and Japan has a record of this since the Meiji period. Yet the standards so identified were often lost in the domestic implementation; frustrated by particularistic governance norms that served the immediate interests of those most influential within institutions. Despite considerable popular enthusiasm for the idea that enhanced international mobilities, associated with the notion of ‘globalization’ will be a powerful force for convergence in higher education systems and practices, John Douglass (2005), amongst others, has rightly cautioned that there are potent countervailing domestic forces.

Intense domestic competition with the dramatic decline in the university-age demographic cohort compels entrepreneurial behaviour by private institutions in particular. This has manifested in a dramatic expansion in university marketing activities, including now prolific television commercials for institutions, but university leaderships know too-well how difficult it is to shift resources (especially mature human resources) into new areas of demand and to promote major reforms in existing educational and administrative practice. In specific relation to promoting outbound student mobility and curricular internationalization, institutions are also hampered by having to be less selective with their intakes. Bluntly put, as the average academic capabilities of incoming cohorts fall, substantial internationalization initiatives become more difficult to realise. Only the leading elite institutions, and those that offer boutique skills-oriented education, are largely spared from this ‘pinch’. Yet, as noted earlier, the brand cache of elite institutions have spared them from having to make tough decisions to promote teaching quality as well as internationalization. Existing governance norms tend also to be more resilient.
It is in relation to those elite institutions that the policy vision of affecting reform of established general practice through greater inward student and staff mobility does have greatest promise. The institutions already employ relatively more internationally research active staff, although even in the top institutions there is great individual scope for not being so. Some institutions, such as the author’s employer Waseda University, have shown a ready preparedness to tenure foreign staff and see them elected and selected into positions of some influence such as deanships and advisory roles related to international programs. In late 2007 came an official policy statement urging the doubling of foreign academic staff in Japanese higher education and a significant expansion in international student numbers (Daily Yomiuri, 27 May 2007). This is further elaboration of a view from within MEXT that the ‘internationalization’ of Japanese institutions may be an impetus to improved quality. Yet it is in the elite private institutions where, owing to collegial governance structures and no shortage of financial reserves, that there remains considerable latitude for indifference to good practice and the benefits of international student and staff mobility.
Bibliography


Douglass, John Aubrey, 2005. ‘All Globalization is Local: Countervailing forces and the influence on higher education markets’, Research and Occasional Papers Series CSHE.1.05 (University of California, Berkeley).

Ehara, Takekazu (1998) ‘Faculty perceptions of university governance in Japan and the


Table 1: Foreign Students in Japan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Graduate school</th>
<th>Junior college</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Japanese gov.</th>
<th>Private funds, etc.</th>
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</thead>
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<td>557</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>...</td>
<td>5,573</td>
<td>1,650</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>15,088</td>
<td>10,913</td>
<td>2,644</td>
<td>1,461</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>5,573</td>
<td>1,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>21,342</td>
<td>14,264</td>
<td>5,477</td>
<td>1,601</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>12,489</td>
<td>2,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>28,444</td>
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<td>...</td>
<td>28,560</td>
<td>4,769</td>
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<td>8,360</td>
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Source: MEXT 2007

Table 2: Country of Origin of Foreign Students in Japan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Origin</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Graduate school</th>
<th>Junior college</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Asia</td>
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<td>100.0%</td>
<td>61,152</td>
<td>30,278</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
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<td>91.8%</td>
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<td>26,835</td>
<td>3,063</td>
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<td>North America</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>153</td>
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<td>Middle &amp; South America</td>
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<td>2.0%</td>
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<td>336</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>1,450</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
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<td>0.9%</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>

Source: MEXT 2007
Table 3: Staffing Profiles

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Percentage of female</th>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>32,910</td>
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<td>2,663</td>
<td>24,410</td>
<td>4,725</td>
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<td>57,445</td>
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<td>89,948</td>
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<td>5,902</td>
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<td>85</td>
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<tr>
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<td>123,838</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Vice-president</th>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Assistant professor</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
<th>Assistant</th>
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<td>01</td>
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<td>620</td>
<td>32</td>
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(recounted)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Percentage of female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate school teacher</td>
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<td>6,920</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1,347</td>
<td>1,545</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>3,732</td>
<td>23.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>162,393</td>
<td>40,028</td>
<td>36,321</td>
<td>11,869</td>
<td>114,203</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which non-Japanese nationals</td>
<td>11,945</td>
<td>3,983</td>
<td>1,727</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>8,713</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MEXT 2007
TABLE 4: International Students’ Field and Level of Study

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Students from Abroad by Field of Study</th>
<th>Students classified by source of funds (May 1, 2005)</th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Japanese government</td>
<td>Private funds, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>85,181</td>
<td>58,702</td>
<td>22,444</td>
<td>3,091</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>1,422</td>
<td>1,535</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual &amp; performing arts</td>
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<td>1,360</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>4,422</td>
<td>1,656</td>
<td>382</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MEXT 2007

Author Profile: Christopher Pokarier

Christopher Pokarier is associate professor of international business at Waseda University, Tokyo. He has undergraduate and masters degrees from the University of Queensland and a doctorate from Australian National University. From 1996 until 2003 he was lecturer, then senior lecturer, in the School of International Business at the Queensland University of Technology. Dr Pokarier’s current research interests are in university internationalization strategies, economic nationality issues, and comparative corporate governance. At Waseda University he also serves as councilor in the International Division, involved in the management of a study abroad program that sends over 900 students abroad annually.