

Multiculturalism on the Japanese Campus: The Road Less Travelled By

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Abstract

As Japan endeavors to “internationalize” its tertiary educational institutions, in part to offset declining enrollment, it faces new opportunities and challenges. This paper takes a comparative look at recent government policy initiatives, which have seen the doubling of overseas student enrollment over the past five years. It also examines efforts by higher learning institutions to create more multicultural campuses. It finds that the recent removal of some structural hurdles has improved entry and living conditions. But unlike Australia, England and France, for example, Japan still lacks clear national policy objectives and a comprehensive cross-sector approach. Without these, it is uncertain how the government and the institutions plan to balance national aims, the business of higher education and the needs of students. Furthermore, if Japanese campuses are to become culturally inclusive and quality sites of learning for international students, greater educational and administrative reform will be required, especially in the areas of instruction, curriculum and services.

<Keywords:>

Curriculum, Higher Education, International Students, Multiculturalism

Introduction

In 1983, then Japanese Prime Minister, Yasuhiro Nakasone, announced the goal of accepting 100,000 foreign students annually by 2000. A government report at the time, *Foreign Student Policy*, stated this “is one of our most important national policies and should be seen as a central component in both educational and foreign policies.”¹ Though this target was not achieved and change has been slow in coming, as of 2002 a record 94,000 overseas students were studying in Japan’s higher education institutes.² In the past 5 years alone, there has been an increase of over 53% in the number of students. This growth mirrors trends in other countries with more advanced economies and developed educational infrastructure. In 2000, according to OECD member data, 1.5 million students were enrolled in post-secondary level institutions outside of their country of origin, a growth of 14% from 2 years earlier. On a worldwide basis, it is estimated there are 1.8 international students.³ Along with the freer

flow of capital, information and goods, the past decade has seen the increased globalization of educational services and greater student mobility. This paper examines what this demographic shift means for Japan and Japanese educational institutions. Is the country prepared to host so many international students? Does government policy sufficiently address present conditions? What opportunities and what challenges do institutions face? Can they turn from their long inward gaze? Indeed, are they ready, after the poet Robert Frost, to take “the road less travelled by” in this case towards a multicultural campus, and what will help make all the difference? To look at the case of Japan, the experience of other nations is drawn upon to provide comparative examples. Research is mainly based on a review of available documents, surveys and scholarship and on data collection overseas. The reader should note this paper is meant more as a general review and critique than a comprehensive study and analysis. Further investigation of the rapidly changing higher education field in Japan and overseas will be necessary to better gauge current issues and trends.

I

Though countries today eagerly recruit foreign students as a source of financial, intellectual and cultural capital, this enthusiasm cannot yet be described as an embrace of an open-door policy. International diversity, based on numbers, is still a long way off at many campuses. Switzerland, with 16.6% of its tertiary enrollment coming from abroad, and Australia, with 12.5%, are the exceptions rather than the norm. According to 2002 OECD data, the mean is only 4.9%. In the U. S, foreign students as a percentage of all students (foreign and domestic students) totaled only 3.6% in 2001, and in Japan it was a paltry 1.5%. This later figure makes one wonder if the above-mentioned *Foreign Student Policy* report didn't somewhat overstate the Government of Japan's commitment to cultural diversification and an open society. In fact, 20 years after the initiative was launched, Japan still ranks far below other OECD member nations, with only Italy and Korea hosting fewer foreign students.

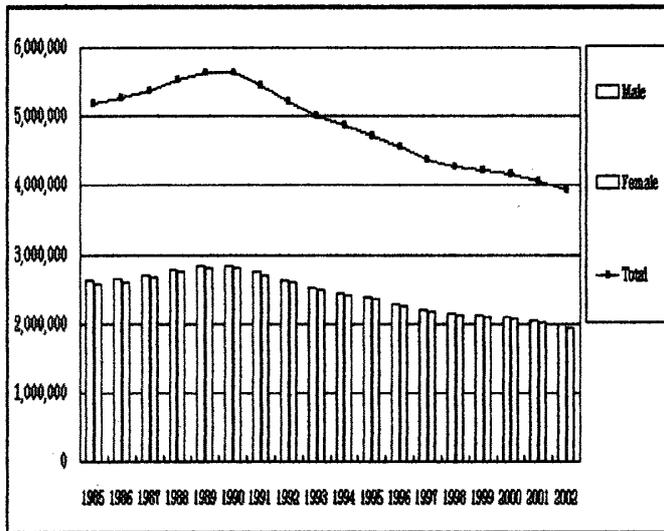
There are a number of factors that can explain the rise in international student mobility. Firstly, some receiving nations and institutions see it largely as a revenue generator. For example, international students in the US, which with 30% captures the largest share of the global foreign student market, contribute more than \$12 billion to the American economy.⁴ In Australia, education exports were US\$2.35 billion in 2001/2.⁵ Countries also wish to attract top-class research students, many of whom are invited by academia and industry to stay and work after completing their degrees. Foreign students, as cultural ambassadors and future leaders in their countries, also help to build and maintain diplomatic and trade links. Notes Patricia Harrison, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural

Affairs, “Our ability to promote sustainable development, civil society, and international peace requires stronger educational and social institutions. Welcoming learners from abroad over the long term helps enormously to eliminate hostile preconceptions, to promote cultural relations and to attempt to solve conflicts peacefully”⁶ Finally, in many of the receiving nations, a declining birthrate and graying society necessitates filling spaces in schools in the short run and attracting immigrants in the long run. Students who learn the local language and culture, gain professional certification and forge ties to the community become a potential future asset. This may be behind Germany’s new policy permitting students to stay and work for five years after graduation.

In Japan’s case, the concern for cultural understanding and “internationalization” is most often mentioned. Notes Tsuboi Hiroshi, director of the Student Exchange Division of the Higher Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), “To build ties of friendship based on trust within the international community, we need to have more foreign students come and become familiar with Japan. Later, they can serve as bridges with Japan after they return to their home countries.”⁷ But what this quote shows is that despite talk of an “open door” approach, it is mainly conceived as a revolving door policy. Foreigners are to come, learn about Japan and its culture, become more sympathetic and take that feeling back home with them. Consequently, government surveys of overseas students inevitably place weight on temperature-reading questions about students’ feelings towards Japan. Did you have a good stay? Did you get a good impression of the people and the country? These are similar questions one might ask people returning from a two-week holiday. If internationalism is really a goal, it might better serve the country to consider fully the other ways international students can and do contribute to the society: for example, as a rich source of erudition, creativity and diverse cultural wisdom, as role models for Japanese students and, possibly, as future members of society.

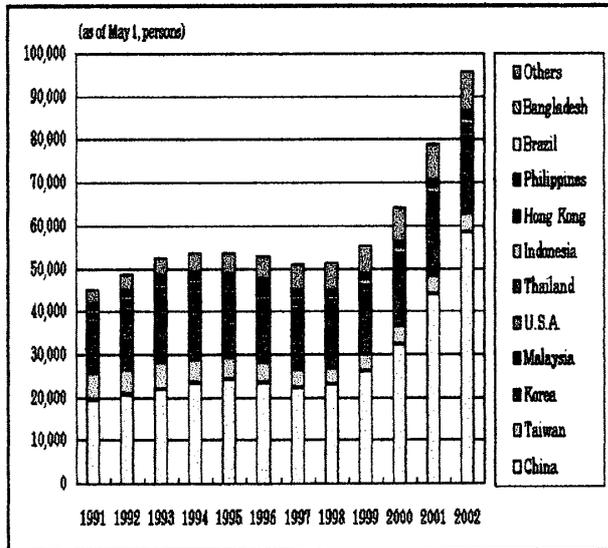
In today’s Japan, however, recruiting foreign students is no longer simply the ideal of “internationalism;” like other countries, it has become an economic necessity for higher education institutes, which had flourished during the baby-boom years but now face a present or looming financial crisis. Local enrollment is already on the down-turn and is set to rapidly decrease over the next 25 years as the population shrinks. To meet the assigned student placement quota and receive government subsidies, institutions have begun accepting larger numbers of foreign students. This started with junior colleges and vocational schools several years ago and now four-year universities have joined the parade. Chart No. 1, which shows the declining number of students enrolled in Japanese high schools, and Chart No. 2, which shows the rising number of foreign student in tertiary institutes, illustrate this cross-current.

Chart No. 1 : High School Enrollment in Japan



Source: School Basic Survey, Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Aug. 9, 2002)

Chart No. 2 : Foreign Student Enrollment in Japan



Source: Ryugakusei Ukeire no Gaikyo (General state of accepting foreign students in Japan), Student Exchange Division, Higher Education Bureau, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Nov. 15, 2002)

A third possible reason for attracting overseas students is the growing need for immigrants. This is not officially acknowledged since public sentiment is against a large influx of ethnic others. But by some estimates more than 375,000 immigrants annually will be needed to maintain the present population and fund the social security system.⁸ There may be no choice. The recent cooperation on foreign student policies between the MEXT, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice (which looks after immigration and foreign-resident policies) could indicate that the government is slowly moving in this direction.

As for students, they seek better academic conditions and opportunities and internationally recognized degree and certificate programmes. These can advance their careers and open up job possibilities in one of the receiving countries. Many also gain a rich intercultural experience during their stay. Lastly, a growing number see a student visa as a means to work and save highly valued foreign currency. The majority of students coming to Japan are from other parts of Asia. Most see it as a career move, especially since

they privately fund their education, and their concerns are quite practical, as will be discussed below. Here there is some discrepancy with present government policy objectives, which emphasize the needs of the nation and the educational institution over those of the student. How the government and the institutions plan to balance national objectives, the business of

higher education, students' immediate needs and the ideal of a multicultural campus will pose a challenge over the coming years.⁹ Recent moves suggest the road less travelled may be hard going unless a more visionary plan is developed.

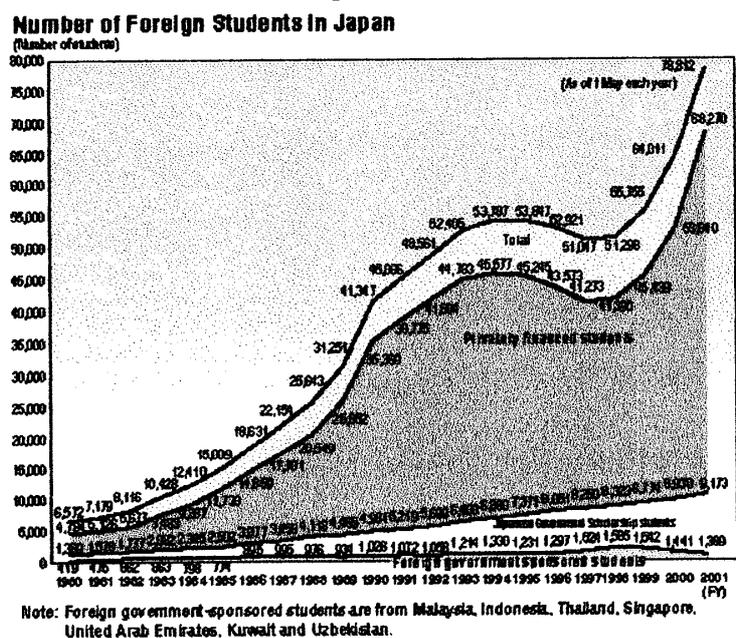
II

To facilitate the recruitment process, in the past 5 years the national government has taken a more active role. A 1997 Ministry of Education report, *Outlook for Future Foreign Student Policy*, identified the 7 following factors as ones preventing significant growth in foreign student enrollment:

1. The comparatively high cost of living in Japan and the difficulty of finding housing.
2. A lack of information in other countries on higher education in Japan, application procedures, and scholarship availability.
3. The failure, in some instances, of the educational and research systems at Japanese universities to adapt to the needs of foreign students.
4. A continued lack of acceptance of other cultures in Japanese society as a whole.
5. The establishment of more universities in Asian countries, with a consequent shift in student needs towards the graduate level.
6. A preference for study in English-speaking countries and difficulty of learning the Japanese language.
7. The Japanese recession, which has reduced expectations of finding jobs with Japanese companies.

In response to these findings, the national government has simplified visa requirements and procedures, eased part-time work restrictions, funded student housing projects, increased the number of scholarships, encouraged local governments to provide financial and welfare support, begun promoting Japanese higher education overseas at "Japan Education Fairs," introduced new university entrance test procedures, and supported efforts to improve

Chart No. 3 : Number of Foreign Students in Japan



Source: MEXT

Japanese language education as well as educational programmes and curricula.¹⁰

Based solely on recent numbers, these efforts, particularly reducing structural barriers, have born fruit. More students, especially from China, Korea and other parts of Asia, are coming and studying at Japanese language schools and then entering technical, junior and four-year colleges. As Chart No.3 shows, most students pay for their education privately, and though a large part of funding is suppose to be sent from the country of origin, a high tuition fee and cost-of-living expense in Japan means the vast majority of students must work at part-time jobs to cover living costs and pay back loans. More flexible working regulations and local Ward subsidies have eased some of the financial burden. In fact, as has been shown in Australia and Britain, the “working” student visa is an effective recruitment tool, since still few countries offer this privilege.¹¹ On the other hand, if more caution is not taken, Japan may find itself with a serious screening and enforcement problem. Though students are not permitted to work more than 28 hours a week, a growing number are obtaining their visas, paying the initial school fees and then cutting classes to work at several jobs.¹² Colleges are required to expel such students and inform the immigration authorities, who will nullify the visa and deport offender if caught. But colleges do not always enforce attendance requirements strictly and actually tracking wayward students is impractical. Australia has recently tried to counteract abusers and over-stayers by setting more stringent requirements, such as providing work permits only after college courses commence, requiring 80% attendance and necessitating high English ability for students from Mainland China, who more frequently abused the system.¹³ In the near future, this problem will also test the present policy in Japan, which is now shifting to a more market-driven approach.

Of course, numbers alone do not reveal the whole picture. If Japanese campuses are to become quality, international sites of learning for foreign and local students, greater educational and administrative reform will also be required. This is one area where individual institutes must take the lead and innovate and not simply rely on the government. The government, for its part, must also ease regulations that hinder ingenuity and work with a broader set of stake-holders to adequately address the needs of institutions and students. At present, the best and brightest international students head for wealthy European and English speaking countries, which have a competitive advantage in terms of research facilities, internationally recognized degree programmes, creative and practical curricula and student support services. These countries clearly have a language advantage, too, but this alone does not account for their popularity. They have identified education as a key service sector and an asset to actively develop and promote abroad. This has led, through trial and error, to the creation of policies and programmes that build on local strengths and better accommodate

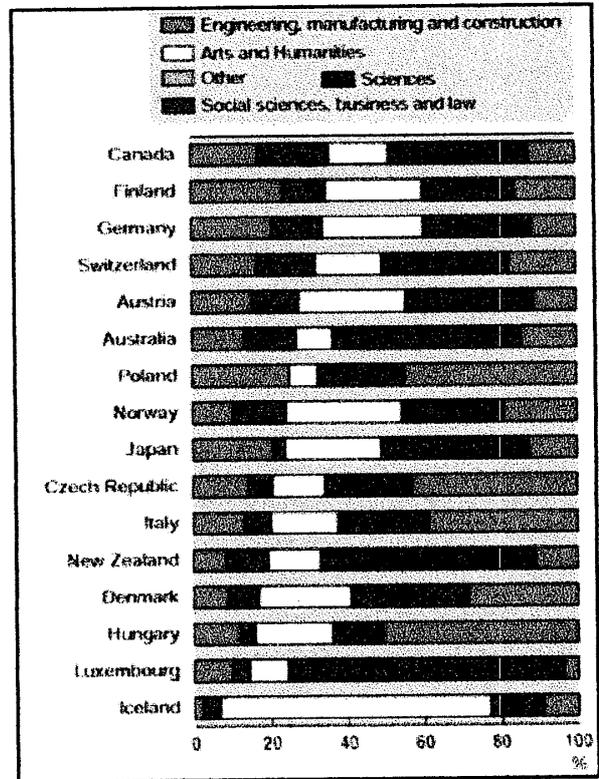
the needs of foreign students. Japan must do the same if it hopes to compete. For instance, institutions can take advantage of Japan's uniqueness as a cosmopolitan and economically developed "kanji" or Chinese character based nation, offering students from China, Taiwan and other Asian Pacific nations course taught in Japanese, Mandarin and English if there is such a demand.

After a long period of idleness, Japanese institutions must now advance at a faster pace just to catch up with their overseas counterparts.¹⁴ In an over-regulated and under-assessed education system, where demand during the baby-boom years was high, Japanese universities and colleges had little need to compete even for local students and became complacent in terms of their academic programmes and services. Asides

from a few specialty fields, such as medicine and engineering, it mattered more where you graduated from than what you studied or achieved. Four-year colleges became a respite between the "entrance exam hell" and the security of life-time employment, and few universities established graduate course.¹⁵ Likewise, junior colleges were mainly finishing schools for female students, who would then work as "office ladies" for a few years before marriage. Despite all the talk of "internationalization," without any real external stimulus, the atmosphere became academically banal and culturally myopic. Only a handful of top public and private institutions continued to flourish and build their reputation abroad through faculty and student exchanges and programme innovations.¹⁶ Those students seeking more specialized knowledge and an intercultural experience had to go abroad for their studies.¹⁷

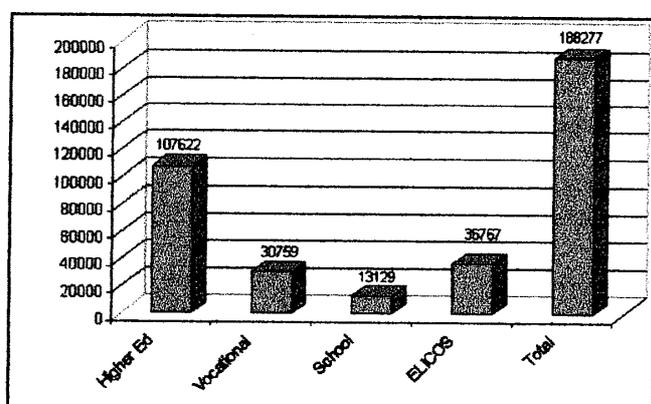
Now the question is how and whether most mainstream institutions can adapt to the new set of local and global conditions. As a stop-gap method, padding numbers and addressing financial needs with overseas student fees may be the most beneficial action, but in the long-term educational institution will have to become culturally sensitive, reliable and dynamic to survive. International students who seek an education and not just a student visa will demand that the curriculum is applicable and career oriented, that courses are worthwhile

Chart No. 4 : Distribution of university level foreign students by field of study (1998)



Source: OECD, Education database

Chart No.5 : Total Number of International Students Studying at Australian Educational Institutions (By Sector), 2000



Source: Overseas Student Statistics 2000, AEI

and that the instruction is clear and of high quality. This was verified in two studies in Britain, which variously rated educational standards, teacher ratings, courses offered, course fee and reputation as the top student concerns.¹⁸ Chart No. 4 also shows that in the countries which host the largest number of international students, the most popular programmes are business and management, engineering and technology, and the hard and applied sciences. In the U.S., over 55% of international students are enrolled in these fields. This is true, too, of students enrolled in four-year universities in Australia and Canada. A recent unpublished survey of over 900 students in Japanese language schools also confirmed that commerce, management, economics and computing are the fields most in demand. The concern for applicability can be seen in recent increases in enrollment in U.S. community colleges and in Australian vocational education and training (VET) institutes, which now account for 43% of overseas students (see Chart No. 5). At these schools again business administration and economic programmes are most popular. In Japan, too, statistics show privately funded students opt to enroll in special training colleges at a higher rate (13.7%) than those on a Japanese Government Scholarship (2.2%).¹⁹ The same is true with enrollment in junior colleges. Clearly they seek a smaller outlay and a more immediate return on their investment in education. Since this group has the greatest growth potential, tertiary institutes would be well advised to directly address the needs of international students. Furthermore, the survey by Hisamura (2002) revealed that quality education and curricular content are of utmost concern when choosing an institution.²⁰ In an unpublished follow-up study, the same author found that most students defined quality as good instruction. Another study found the major predicting factor for the satisfaction of international students was the suitability of curriculum.²¹ This result shows that international students cannot just be expected to adjust to pre-existing programmes designed originally for Japanese learners. As Tamaoka, et al. (2002 : 8) write, "Japanese universities have been considered as an untouchable zone for a long time. As a result, curricula of universities are seldom reviewed by students or by people on the outside although various types of internal evaluation have been conducted by many universities."²² This is starting to change: the MEXT, in a new policy position, has begun to require

that public universities conduct external evaluations by specialists in both academia and private industry. At issue here is whether the inclusion of external input will also allow for the opinion of multicultural others.

III

We can expect that some private institutions will quickly capitalize on the new opportunity increased student mobility offers. And institutions most dependent on overseas enrollment will have to readily adjust to the needs of international students and the market if they are to remain in business. If they follow after colleges and universities in Australia and New Zealand, for instance, they will provide practical and flexible, career-oriented learning that offers nationally and internationally recognized accreditation. Holmes Colleges in Australia is a instructive example. This institute, with facilities in several large cities, offers one-year diploma courses in business that can be credited towards a university bachelor degree. It also provides English language support programmes for international students attending an affiliated university and English for Academic Purposes courses for those hoping to enter university. With more students coming to Japan who lack sufficient language skills to enter regular university and college programmes, there is need for institutions that can offer both support services and a stepping-stone to a more advanced degree. At the moment, language schools, junior colleges and technical colleges play these various roles independently. A combined entity, more along the lines of a community college in the U.S. or Canada or Holmes Colleges in Australia, may better serve international students.

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, on the other hand, is an example where a private organization and a local government have worked together to create a new model of a multicultural campus. At this university, they even accept student with no prior knowledge of Japanese, who can enroll for content-based courses in Japanese as their language proficiency increases. Over 30% of the faculty is non-Japanese and the about half the student body are international students. Instruction is in both Japanese and English and students can study other languages. The dormitories are completely mixed irrespective of race or religion, and all campus events require some participation by every cultural group. Furthermore, the choice of programmes—Asia Pacific Studies and International Management—addresses the diverse needs of students and the international community.

Of course there are those who argue against diversification if it means losing national culture. Should, for instance, more classes be taught in other languages? Mitsuda (1999 : 66) asks, “If all research were carried out in English and all classes conducted in English, would Japanese institutions be more attractive to the outside world? Conversely, if Japanese

universities continue teaching in Japanese will they ever attract more foreigners? He concludes that, “To be universal but unique is the difficult task for institutions outside the Western hemisphere”.²³ Framed in this way, the task does seem daunting, but is this either-or position, which plagues Japanese views on “foreign” matters, really necessary. Changing this way of thinking about all matters “foreign” is probably the most daunting task facing Japanese society as it moves to become more multicultural. No one would propose that all research and all classes in Japan be conducted in English. True some satellite campuses of overseas universities now offer an all-English programme, such as the McGill MBA course. But they are targeting a small market segment. Even if classes are taught in other tongues, Japanese will undoubtedly remain the main language of instruction and erudition at tertiary institutions and Japanese and Asian culture will help shape curricular design. The issue is not in or out, native or foreign, local or universal. Difference already dwells on most campuses, not only in the body of international students but also in the social and cultural experience of Japanese faculty and learners. The real issue is not whether we open physical borders but rather whether we open those of the mind and heart. This is the real spirit of internationalism and the promise of the multicultural campus and it is this spirit of openness that will endear overseas students to Japan, not a continued inward gaze.

IV

Now facing a crisis in higher education, Japan has an opportunity at the start of the 21st century to take bold initiatives to create learning environments fitting of such a highly developed nation. Recent government plans indicate that this has become a priority. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology’s *University-based Structural Reform Plan for Revitalizing the Japanese Economy (2001)* stresses meeting international standards of research, organization and management. Chapter five of the Ministry’s *Educational Reform Plan for the 21st Century*, talks of “Building a Distinguished University in the Times of Intellect,” through better organizational management, broad-based evaluation and more mobile teacher labour. Sadly, there is no mention in either report of how cultural diversity fits into the new vision of Japan’s higher education nor are there any stated directives aimed at creating more culturally inclusive campuses. Ironically, the national government replicates its own findings in the *Outlook for Future Foreign Student Policy report*, where it concluded that society generally does not accept foreigner and that institutions often overlook their educational needs. At the grass-roots, as outlined above, positive change is occurring. Demographically, campuses are becoming more ethnoculturally diverse, and through peer and student-teacher interaction greater intercultural awareness and under-

standing will increase. To foster this, however, governments and institutions will need to more actively create multicultural spaces of learning. They will have to bravely take “the road less travelled by” if they are seriously committed to making a real difference.

註

- 1) Quoted in Saeki Shizuka, (June 2002) “Admission More Possible: Foreign Students in Japan,” Cover Story I *Look Japan*, (<http://www.lookjapan.com/LBcoverstory/02JuneCS.htm>).
- 2) See: The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology website (<http://www.mext.go.jp/>) .
- 3) According to forecasts by IDP Education Australia, an independent not-for-profit organization owned by 39 of Australia’s universities, the global demand for international higher education is set to exceed 7 million students by 2025 (<http://www.idp.com/marketingandresearch/research/internationaleducationstatistics/article764.asp>).
- 4) *Open Doors 2002* (www.opendoors.iienetwork.org).
- 5) Education Travel Magazine, Jan. 03, 2002 issue (<http://www.hothousemedia.com/etm/>).
- 6) Highlights from *Open Doors 2002* (www.opendoors.iienetwork.org).
- 7) Quoted in Saeki Shizuka, (June 2002) “Admission More Possible: Foreign Students in Japan,” Cover Story I *Look Japan*, (<http://www.lookjapan.com/LBcoverstory/02JuneCS.htm>).
- 8) According to projections by the United Nations Population Division, the population of Japan should reach a maximum in 2005, at 127.5 million, and begin to rapidly decline thereafter. To maintain this level, Japan would need to accept approximately 17 million immigrants over the next 45 years, or an average of 381,000 annually. By 2050, these immigrants and their descendants would make up almost 18% of the total population. Given the present public attitude, social conditions and government policy, accepting such a large number of immigrants is an unlikely scenario; however, long-term economic needs will necessitate a rise in the number of immigrants in the near future if Japan does not want to see a drop in its standard of living.
- 9) Australia in recent years has also faced this challenge and may provide a good example of what and what not to do. After an education as aid policy, a financial crisis in higher education in the 1980s forced the government to promote a very market driven approach. But this has come under heavy criticism and the government has made efforts to move from an “export of education” policy to a more sincere “internationalization of education” one in the 1990s. See: Don Smart and Grace Ang, “The Internationalization of Australian Higher Education,” in *International Higher Education*, November 1996 issue. (<http://www.bc.edu/bcorg/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News06/text2.html>).
- 10) See: Saeki Shizuka, (June 2002) “Admission More Possible: Foreign Students in Japan,” Cover Story I *Look Japan*, (<http://www.lookjapan.com/LBcoverstory/02JuneCS.htm>).
- 11) In what has become a highly competitive global higher education market, more countries are trying to get an edge up by permitting students to work. For example, in 2002 Germany introduced a new immigration bill that will allow student visa holders to work without a permit 180 half days off-campus and to stay and work for five years after completing their degree. In comparison, international students in Canada and the U.S. are still only allowed to work on campus.
- 12) No data is available yet from the MEXT or Justice Ministry, though this is now common knowledge among college administration and faculty.
- 13) See: the Oz Migration website (<http://www.ozmigration.com/info/tempstudy.cfm>).

- 14) Now the competition is not just with the traditionally dominant nations. Other non-English speaking countries are also starting to seriously vie for the growing international student market. France, for instance, announced in 1998 an initiative, EduFrance, with a goal to attract 500,000 students overall. Many are following Australia's lead, where the government and country's 39 public universities run a nonprofit body that offers one-stop shopping for international students on the web or at overseas representative offices.
- 15) Ellington, L. (2001) "Japanese Education," in *Japan Digest* National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies, Indiana University (<http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/digest5.html>).
- 16) Not surprisingly, some of these universities (including the Universities of Tokyo, Kyoto, Nagoya and Osaka, Josai International, Waseda, and Ritsumeikan) still claim the largest proportion of international students, with the top ten national and private institutions accounting for over one fourth of the total.
- 17) In 2001, there were an estimated 46,810 Japanese students in the U.S. alone, with 67% in undergraduate and 20% in graduate programmes. (<http://www.fulbright.jp/e4/stats-2002.html>). According to Ministry of Justice data, there were over 180,000 Japanese nationals overseas for study and training purposes in 1999. This is an increase of approximately 30% over a ten-year period.
- 18) Binsardi, A., Ekwulugo, F. & Price, C., *International Marketing of British Education; Research on the Students' Perception and the UK Market Penetration*, Paper presented at UKCOSA Conference 16-18th July 2002-07-26 University of Surrey.
- 19) See: The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology website (<http://www.wpi.mext.go.jp/>).
- 20) Hisamura, Ken (2002) "Curricula for a Multicultural Education Environment: Results from a Survey of the Academic Preferences of Foreign Students in Japan," in *Chofu Gakkuen Junior College Journal* Vol. 34 pp. 111-133.
- 21) Tamaoka, K., Ninomiya, A. & Nakaya, A. (2002) *What Makes International Students Satisfied With a Japanese University?* International Student Center, Hiroshima University Publication.
- 22) Ibid.
- 23) Akimasa Mitsuda, (1999) "Universal Problems and National Realities: Japan in Comparative Perspective," in Altbach, P. G. and McGill Peterson, P. (eds.) *Higher Education in the 21st Century: Global Challenge and National Response*, IIE Research Report No. 29.