



Internationalizing Higher Education Worldwide

National Policies and Programs

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Internationalizing Higher Education Worldwide: National Policies and Programs

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CIGE Insights

This series of occasional papers explores key issues and themes surrounding the internationalization and global engagement of higher education. Papers include analysis, expert commentary, case examples, and recommendations for policy and practice.

Appendix

Internationalization Over Time: Policy Evolution in Japan

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The policies outlined in this report are each a snapshot of current activity in different countries or regions. While internationalization-related policies are a relatively new development in many national contexts, some countries have been active in this realm for many years. Japan is one such example, particularly in terms of policies to attract international students. Here we provide a brief history of Japan's governmental internationalization initiatives, in order to illustrate how such policies and activities evolve over time to respond to changing national circumstances and priorities.

Before the 1980s: Post-war Mobility

Nascent internationalization efforts in Japan focused on student mobility. Under U.S. occupation (1945–51), Japanese students were sent to the United States to expose them to American democratic values and to help them develop skills and expertise that would be useful for the rebuilding of post-war Japan. These students were sponsored through scholarship schemes, such as the U.S. government's Government Aid and Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA) program (1949–51) and the Fulbright Program (1952–present).¹

In 1954, the post-war Japanese government became active in this arena, creating the **Japanese Government Scholarship Program for Foreign Students**. The aims were to pay de facto compensation for war damage, support the social and economic development of developing countries—particularly in Southeast Asia—through the cultivation of human resources, and to promote a better understanding of Japanese culture.²

1980–99: Attracting International Students

The year 1983 marked a significant moment for Japanese internationalization policies. At that time, the government established an official goal of attracting 100,000 foreign students to Japan by 2020 (**Plan to Accept 100,000 Foreign Students**). Motivations for the policy included improving Japanese higher education, developing understanding and cooperation between Japan and foreign countries, fostering human resource capital in developing countries, and internationalizing the economy of Japan.

A number of measures were taken to support this ambitious numerical goal. Graduate courses in English were made available at national universities for the first time; the government also stipulated that doctoral theses could be submitted in English and accepted as such. **Eliminating the**

¹ <http://www.fulbright.jp/eng/keikaku/index.html>

² Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is drawn from three sources: Ninomiya, Knight, and Watanabe 2009; Horie 2002; and Umakoshi 1997. Full citations are provided in the references list.

language barrier was seen as a major step toward improving the accessibility of Japanese higher education and thereby increasing the number of foreign students coming to Japan.

Direct government **financial support for international students** also increased. The 1983 plan included a reform to the existing scholarship system: The number of foreign students receiving financial support was to increase from 2,000 in 1983 to 10,000 in 2000. Additionally, tuition reductions were offered at national universities for foreign students who were not scholarship recipients.

While mobility was squarely in the policy limelight during the 1980s and 1990s, some other aspects of internationalization also received attention. In 1982, for example, foreign nationals gained the right to become full-time employees at national universities. Though they still could not become civil servants like domestic faculty, their status and working conditions were significantly improved from their previous status of foreign lecturers. In the late 1980s, the internationalization of research came to the fore, with the creation of the **International Academic Research** award to fund scholars who initiated international cooperation activities.

National efforts during this 20-year period also targeted exchanges between Japanese universities and foreign institutions. For example, the Japanese government and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency launched an initiative aimed at developing partnerships with universities and colleges in developing countries. Japanese experts were sent abroad, while trainees were brought to Japan. In 1987, the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Sciences initiated the **Core University System program**, which matched universities in Japan and developing countries and funded scholar exchanges. And in 1991, the **University Mobility in Asia Pacific program** was established—with Japan as one of the original founders—in order to create a zone where student exchanges would be facilitated via credit transfers.

Mixed reports on the success of Japanese internationalization efforts in the 1990s led the government to intensify its efforts in the final years of the century. Starting in 1995, the government began funding institutions to develop **short-term programs in English** specifically for international exchange students, usually for a period of one year (Ota 2008). And to reach international students lacking proficiency in either English or Japanese, the government sponsored Japanese language instruction in China and Malaysia (Kudo, Kamibeppu, and Ota 2014). In addition, the government began dedicating specific funds to **increase and improve housing options for international students**, the lack of which was a persistent issue.

Overall, the internationalization of higher education in Japan was gradually improved over this 20-year period, if inbound mobility is used as the main criterion for judgement; though the goals of the plan to accept 100,000 foreign students were not fully achieved by 2000, its numerical target was met shortly thereafter (in 2003). Looking beyond the numbers, however, it is important to note that the main approach to internationalization during this time was still that of an **“island” or “add-on” model**, in which so-called international programs were not necessarily integrated into the other existing programs and curricula.

2000–10: Quality and Depth

The advent of the new century and the end of the 1983 initiative led to a number of policy changes in Japan. Fuelled by growing concerns about declining higher education enrollments among domestic students due to demographic shifts, inbound mobility again took center stage. **Visa requirements**

and restrictions were reformed in the early 2000s in order to attract more international students; getting a visa to enter Japan as a college student became simpler, flexibility toward off-campus part-time work (work permission) was increased, and the duration of foreign student visas was doubled (as cited in Kudo, Kamibeppu, and Ota 2014).

Though numbers remained a focus, government policies also began to emphasize considerations around the quality of international students and depth of internationalization. To this end, the **Strategic Fund for Establishing International Headquarters in Universities (SIH)** was introduced in 2005. Nineteen universities and an inter-university research institution received five-year grants to develop a comprehensive—rather than exclusively mobility-focused—approach to internationalization. The SIH focused on nine aspects of internationalization, including institutional goal-setting, action plans, and evaluation systems (Ota 2014). A key intended outcome of the program was the sharing of good practices with institutions outside the SIH program.

In 2008, the government announced another ambitious inbound mobility plan—this time with a target of 300,000 international students enrolled in Japanese universities by 2020 (**300,000 Foreign Students Plan**) (MEXT 2008). In support of this goal, the government launched the **Global 30 Project**, which would identify 30 Japanese universities to receive funding (from the project’s budget of USD 38 million) to support institutional efforts to attract foreign students and send Japanese students abroad.³ However, due to a policy change when a new political party took office, only 13 universities were ultimately chosen to participate.

The selected 13 universities were required to offer degree-granting programs in English, make application possible from overseas, provide instruction on the Japanese language and culture, and create or improve support structures dedicated to international students.⁴ Better monitoring of the attendance and achievements of foreign students were also mandated, thereby putting an emphasis on the academic quality of incoming international students and their experiences.

2010–Present: Global Engagement

With the arrival of the 2010s, the Japanese government began to shift its internationalization policy focus from inbound mobility to two-way exchanges and developing collaborative education programs with universities abroad. In 2011, for example, the government launched the **Re-Inventing Japan Project**,⁵ which focused on the creation of collaborative networks between Japanese universities and foreign universities. Initially, an open call was made for universities interested in setting up collaborative networks with North America, Europe, Australia, and East and Southeast Asia, resulting in the selection of 25 programs to receive funds. In 2012 and 2013, 21 collaborations with institutions in the ASEAN region were funded; in 2014, nine programs with Russian and Indian universities received support through the project.

In recent years, outbound student mobility has also become a key focus for Japanese government policy, due to concerns about significant decreases in the number of students studying overseas—particularly in the United States—since the mid-2000s. The **Go Global Japan project (The Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development)** started in 2012, and focused on three

3 <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Slow-Start-for-Japans-Ef/124346/>

4 <http://www.uni.international.mext.go.jp/global30/>

5 <http://japanest-nippon.com/en/feature/detail.php?id=43>

objectives: for Japan to overcome “youth’s inward-looking tendency,” to educate global talent, and to internationalize Japanese universities (Aruga 2013). Two types of grants were awarded as part of this project, both for a period of five years. So-called “Type A” grants (11 universities) were awarded for projects carried out by whole universities, and “Type B” grants (31 universities) for projects proposed by specific schools or departments. Each university receives USD 1 million to USD 2 million per year (depending on the size of the institution) for the grant period.

Building on these efforts, in 2013, the government set an **official goal to increase the number of Japanese students who study abroad to 120,000 by 2020** (The Office of the Prime Minister of Japan 2013). Subsequently, in 2014, the MEXT launched a new scholarship program called Japan Public-Private Partnership Student Study Abroad Program, or “**Tobitate! Young Ambassador Program**” to provide grants for Japanese students who study abroad or engage in international activities overseas (JASSO 2014).

The latest in the line of internationalization policies undertaken by the Japanese government is the **Top Global University Project**, started in 2014. It aims at enhancing the compatibility of Japanese higher education with foreign systems (global standards) and at fostering the international competitiveness of Japanese universities.⁶ For 10 years, funding will be provided to 13 “type A” (Top Type) universities, which have the potential to be ranked in the top 100 of world university rankings, and to 24 “type B” (Global Traction Type) universities that lead the internationalization of Japanese society. Selected universities are expected to undertake significant reforms and efforts—including more lectures in English, improving the foreign student and faculty ratios, making changes in management, and creating double degrees—to improve the global status of their institutions.

Important Milestones in Japanese Internationalization Policies

Year	Policy Name	Main Goal	Main Means
1954	Japanese Government Scholarship Program for Foreign Students	Promote a better understanding of Japanese culture	Scholarships for inbound mobility
1983	Plan to Accept 100,000 Foreign Students	Host 100,000 international students by 2000	Scholarships and subsidies for tuition reductions for international students
2005	Strategic Fund for Establishing International Headquarters in Universities	Develop internationalization strategies at selected higher education institutions	Grants to reform institutional governance and management of internationalization, qualitative evaluation
2008	300,000 International Students Plan	Host 300,000 international students by 2020	Scholarships, deregulation and streamlining of visa process, support for job placement of international students

6 http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/26/09/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2014/10/07/1352218_02.pdf

2009	Global 30	Develop a core group of internationally focused universities in support of the 300,000 International Students Plan	Grants available for universities to develop degree-granting programs fully taught in English and to improve international student recruitment and admissions process; quantitative evaluation
2012	Re-Inventing Japan Project	Create collaborative networks between Japanese universities and foreign universities	Grants available for universities to develop collaborative education programs with partner institutions abroad
2012	Go Global Japan project	Increase the number of Japanese students studying abroad	Grants available for universities or schools/departments to develop study abroad programs
2014	Public-Private Partnership Student Study Abroad Program (<i>Tobitate!</i> Young Ambassador Program)	Foster intercultural competence of Japanese students through studying abroad	Providing scholarships for students who study abroad or engage in activities overseas
2014–2023	Top Global University Project	Improve the international competitiveness of Japanese universities and enhance the compatibility of Japanese higher education with global standards	37 universities are to receive funding for 10 years (total of JPY 7.7 billion, i.e., about USD 62 million)

Policy Actors

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT) is the main actor and the omnipresent creator, supporter, and funder of most of the milestone policies described above.

Over the years, several other entities have supported the implementation of internationalization policies. Notable among these are:

- **Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO):** A government agency under the auspices of the MEXT, JASSO oversees student services and administers scholarships for international students enrolled in Japanese higher education institutions, as well as Japanese study-abroad students. JASSO also provides information for prospective students seeking to pursue international mobility (both inbound and outbound).⁷
- **Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA):** Under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, JICA is responsible for supporting international cooperation as well as fostering the development of the Japanese and global economy, particularly by helping developing countries.⁸

⁷ http://www.jasso.go.jp/about_jasso/index_e.html

⁸ <http://www.jica.go.jp/english/about/organization/index.html>

- **Japan Foundation:** Another agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japan Foundation promotes cultural exchange between Japan and other countries. It also administers Japanese language education and Japanese language proficiency tests outside Japan.⁹
- **Japanese Society for the Promotion of Sciences:** This government agency is responsible for the development of science in all fields, and supports international collaboration between Japanese universities and foreign universities.¹⁰
- **Central Council for Education:** This entity within the MEXT focuses on educational policy issues.¹¹ It hosts temporary committees when needed by the government, such as the Special Committee on Foreign Students, which is developing an action plan to reach the 300,000 goal by 2020 (Ninomiya, Knight, and Watanabe 2009).

Higher education institutions are, of course, also essential actors in Japan. Particularly in the last decade, when government policies have focused on providing funding to institutions (rather than individual students, for example) to spur internationalization, buy-in and commitment at the institutional level are crucial to policy success.

Conclusion

The Japanese government has been heavily implicated in the internationalization of higher education in Japan, as exhibited by the plethora of policies that have been initiated in the past 30 years. Until recently, Japan has mainly been focused on student mobility, especially inbound mobility. The repetition of similar objectives for different policies in the past 30 years shows, however, that **mobility alone cannot succeed in internationalizing a national system of higher education**. The new approach currently being undertaken in Japan is more comprehensive, including regional exchanges as well as global linkages, inbound and outbound mobility, and expanding the focus from students only to other university human resources as well as education and learning programs. This approach is more in line with what recent research suggests internationalization should focus on, especially concerning internationalization of the campus.

The number of institutions getting funds for each project is also limited, perhaps making internationalization of Japanese institutions an **elitist project**. One might raise the question of whether the system will become more internationalized as a result of these efforts, or if only a small cluster of universities will get to play a serious role on the international higher education scene.

The recent competitive government projects for internationalization typically have a fixed funding period, which makes it **difficult for institutions to make a long-term commitment** to the internationalization after the funding period ends. The lack of stability in financial resources for those projects also created a situation where staff and faculty members who are specially hired for these projects operate under mostly fixed-term and nonrenewable contracts, with unstable working conditions.

The legitimacy of the top-down approach to internationalization in Japan can also be questioned, as the government continues creating policies at a quick pace. Indeed, problems of micro-management from the government, homogenization among top universities, and the limitation of funding

9 <https://www.jpfi.go.jp/e/about/index.html>

10 <http://www.jsps.go.jp/english/aboutus/index2.html>

11 <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/organization/1303054.htm>

to a small number of top universities have already been highlighted (Shimmi and Yonezawa 2015). As internationalization of Japanese higher education seems to have been led by central government policies from early on, one wonders about the **role of institutions in the crafting of these policies and how committed they are to them**, beyond the funding opportunities they offer. The dynamic between policymakers and policy implementers may be an important consideration for Japan moving forward, as in many other countries around the world.

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