

### **BOX 25.4 Internationalization of Universities in Japan**

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The need for the internationalization of universities is a long-standing issue in Japan. It seems that universities and internationalization have been closely intertwined ever since the beginning of modernization of the country (Meiji period: 1868–1912). The internationalization of universities was essentially a national strategy for Japan, considered a less developed country in the area of higher education during the Meiji period, and, in that sense, internationalization could be considered a

government-led endeavor. The Japanese government and universities typified the approach of importing knowledge and technology from overseas and modifying them to Japanese usage for the sole purpose of the country's modernization (internationalization for modernization) under the imported models of universities from the West. However, after the early stage of Japanese higher education development, universities started to localize their institutional organizations and structures to fit in traditional Japanese culture, featuring rigid hierarchy and the low mobility of students and faculty, although those universities continued to import Western knowledge and technology and translated them for Japanese application. This is a typical case of "Japanese spirits and Western knowledge" and prevented Japanese universities from internationalizing their curricula for a long time since the vast majority of course contents originally came from the West.

With the subsequent development of the country and its universities, the Japanese government has made substantial efforts to promote international exchange programs, such as the Japanese Government Scholarship (launched in 1954), the 100,000 International Students Plan (from 1983 to 2003), the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program (started in 1987), and Japanese Fulbright Programs (organized by Japan-U.S. Educational Commission). As a result of these intentional efforts to internationalize, Japan has become one of the most popular destinations for study abroad students in Asia. Nevertheless, it seems that the internationalization of universities ended up becoming dependent primarily on the personal activities of faculty members. For instance, individual researchers collaborated with researchers abroad, participating in international conferences and international research projects; those individual researchers introduce advanced studies in foreign countries to academic circles in Japan; or they teach foreign studies courses. Thus, international activities at Japanese universities have relied heavily on the initiative of individual faculty members, and there have been few concerted organizational efforts, apart from international student exchange programs, to garner true support for internationalization within universities. Representative and common problems with hosting international researchers in Japan include visa application procedures, language, a lack of adequate housing, and schools for family members of those international researchers. In most cases, individual host researchers provide solutions to those problems without the systematic support of their university. At the same time, institutional support for Japanese researchers to conduct research abroad has been limited and so, as mentioned above, the individual-level activities have inadvertently come to play a major part in the ad hoc internationalization of Japanese universities, despite a number of funding programs for Japanese and international researchers provided by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. It is likely that this happened as a result of each faculty or department, or even each professor, having a high degree of academic autonomy, especially within national universities. This autonomy meant that the institutionally organized activities of the university were relatively weak, particularly with regard to internationalization, and there was little leadership for exploring comprehensive internationalization strategies for the university as a whole. However, under recent and rapidly changing circumstances, such as university privatization, the deteriorating demographic climate within many industrialized countries, and the increasing competition to recruit international students and researchers, it seems that this ad hoc approach is no longer viable in the global landscape of higher education.

The Japanese higher education system is currently undergoing a comprehensive process of reform, in which internationalization is a major component. This includes the corporatization of public universities (the changing role of government from direct control to supervision at the macro

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level and the delegation of more autonomous powers to individual institutions). Under the reform agenda and given the low percentages of international faculty (5.0%) and students (3.8%), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2011) has supported Japanese researchers and students' engagement in increased international activities abroad as well as supporting Japanese universities' capacity to host increased numbers of international students (under the 300,000 International Students Plan started in 2008) and researchers. The ministry also has encouraged universities to increase the number of courses and programs taught in English to enhance the diversity of the student and faculty population and to meet the increasing demand for global-minded graduates (workforce) at globalizing Japanese companies.

At the same time that internationalization grows in importance in education and research evolves into a more mainstream role in Japanese higher education, Japan's public debt is reaching 200% of its GDP under the prolonged economic stagnation. Society and taxpayers increasingly expect universities to be able to clarify the added value of the international dimensions and the impact of internationalization on the institution. Under the circumstances, a growing number of successful international liberal arts institutions and schools—Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Akita International University, and Waseda University's School of International Liberal Studies—offer a truly international learning experience with a high percentage of English-taught courses, highly diversified student population and faculty, and a variety of study abroad programs. They have made internationalization the first priority within their institutions' missions and efforts.

Currently, one of the crucial challenges among Japanese universities is to develop the effective evaluation process of their internationalization efforts. This challenge lies in balancing trusted quality control (which creates a bottom line in terms of accountability), transparency, resource management, and quantitative expansion. In addition, such an approach requires a creative assessment structure and related methods, such as peer review and benchmarking, which encourages overall internationalization initiatives and adds a strategic dimension to further university internationalization.

All in all, the MEXT's initiatives (e.g., Strategic Fund for Establishing International Headquarters in Universities from 2005 to 2010 and Global 30 launched in 2009) have promoted the organizational restructuring of universities to better attune them to these institution-wide internationalization tasks, and university leaders have equally made efforts to introduce an institutionally organized, proactive, and strategic approach to university internationalization. The Japanese government is expected to continue to develop strategic policies of university internationalization in order to provide a catalyst for the functional transformation of Japanese universities toward meeting the demands of the 21st century's global knowledge-based society.