Examining the Progress of Internationalizing Japanese Higher Education From 2000-2010: An Interactive Approach

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This paper reveals a more comprehensive scenario for readers to generate better understanding of "internationalizing" Japanese higher education system from 2000-2010. In fact, it is a very complicated and dynamic process which involves the interactions between national and local actors. By adopting a national-local complexity framework, the paper examines the stances of multi-level stakeholders in contributing or obstructing the implementation in macro-, meta-, and micro-level. In macro level, the author scrutinizes how the national government during the period allowed a dual-track approach through providing financial resources in which public and private universities share diverse "responsibilities" – preserving traditional Japanese system and enhancing the globalized process respectively. In meta-level, the author examines the interactions between university administration and foreign students. It is true that university staff attempted to resolve the problems encountered by foreign students. However, the university administrative system inherited in Japanese management style disappointed those foreign students particularly from Anglophone countries. In micro level, the author looks into the daily life of international students and how the local community interpreted the increasing number of foreigners (*kaikokujin*) in mixed manner. Such complex analysis undoubtedly exposes that it was quite far for Japan to evolve a truly "internationalized" higher education system in the first decade of the 21st century.

Keywords: internationalization, higher education, Japan

Introduction

The goal to "internationalize" (*kokusaika*) higher education system in Japan has begun under the reform agenda of prominent Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone since early 1980s (Hood, 2001). Throughout almost three entire decades, there are some remarkable achievements in terms of promoting a positive attitude towards international community and increasing the number of foreign students to 100,000 by 2003 (Burgess et al., 2010). In order to continue the process of internationalization, it was necessary for higher education sector in Japan at that time to realize the essentials of our "globalized" world (Kaneko, 2004; Aoki, 2005) and became "more internationally competitive" (Tusuneyoshi, 2005). In 2008, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (*Monbukagakusho*) − MEXT announced to recruit 300,000 foreign students to English-only programs at selected prestigious universities through Global 30 Project by 2020 (MEXT, 2009).

However, if we simply compare other leading Anglophone members of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) such as the United States and the United Kingdom in the same period of time, Japan as the second largest economies in the world did not attract too many foreign students to study

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even though the figure was persistently increased for the decades (OECD, 2007). "The rate of internationalization (number of tertiary foreign students) has increased by 89% since 2000 compared to 93% at the OECD average, which indicates that Japan does not catch up compared to the OECD average" (Ibid). McVeigh (2002) seriously criticizes the value of Japanese higher education and contends the failure of the entire system. So, what was wrong with the system? Was it missing any imperative elements for globalizing and standardizing the programs? Were all stakeholders at that time willing to recruit foreign students so as to meet the need of human resources in newly emerged globalized situation?

The author is not intended to simply provide severe criticisms onto the initiatives. On the contrary, this paper attempts to demonstrate a more comprehensive scenario for readers to generate better understanding of "internationalizing" Japanese higher education system from 2010-2010. In fact, it was a very complicated and dynamic process which involved the interactions between national and local actors. By adopting national-local complexity framework, the paper examines the stances of multi-level stakeholders on contributing or obstructing the implementation in macro-, meta-, and micro-level. In macro level, the author scrutinizes how the national government allowed a dual-track approach through providing financial resources in which public and private universities shared diverse "responsibilities" – preserving traditional Japanese system and enhancing the globalized process respectively (Horie, 2002). In meta-level, the author examines the interactions between university administration and international students. On the one hand, university staff members attempted to resolve the problems encountered by international students. On the other hand, the university administrative system inherited in Japanese management style disappointed those foreign students particularly from Anglophone countries. In micro level, the author will look into the daily life of international students and how the local community interpreted the increasing number of foreigners (*kaikokujin*) in mixed manner. Such complex analysis undoubtedly exposes that it was quite far for Japan to evolve a truly "internationalized" higher education system.

Literature Review: Internationalizing Japanese Higher Education

Reviewing the literature related to internationalization of higher education in Japan is a tremendous and challenging task. The main difficulty in fact is how to classify the voluminous literature in a logical and systemic way. Huang (2007), however, is able to properly categorize it into four main areas: (1) new definitions of internationalization and the relationship between globalization and internationalization; (2) admission of foreign students; (3) internationalization of university curriculum; and (4) transnational education. In the following, the author will focus on presenting and criticizing the scholarly work of the first three areas mentioned above. The major weakness of the existing literature related to the time scope in fact lies on the lack of emphasizing national-local interactions.

Theoretical Issues Related to Internationalization and Globalization

Even though Japan was traditionally regarded as a conservative and inward-looking country since the Meiji Period, external forces mainly from economic dimension severely pushed forward to the process of internationalization for decades. More recently, the term of economic globalization regardless of various aspects is widely accepted as the most imperative driving forces for structural changes and transformation (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002). Which term is more suitable? Are they interchangeable?

Scholar particularly Japanese specialists seem not to come up with a precise conclusion. Huang (2007, pp. 94-96) quotes the work of K. Ebuchi to explicate why the two terms can be interchangeable. It is largely because the substance of globalization is yet fully developed and hence shares similar idea as concurrent internationalization (Ibid, p. 94). Other scholars hold different views on them. Globalization is a more radical phenomenon or signifies "the decay and crisis of Japan" (Iwabuchi, 2005, p. 104), which in result engenders a borderless word while internationalization is just a practical way to seek the membership of international society through standardization (set by a single nation or a group of other nations) (Hook & Weiner, 1992; Daly, 1999). In addition, globalization is about the world order while internationalization is related to institutional and organizational matters (Paige, 2005).

Apart from stressing on their differences, it is also very important to understand the interpretation of the meaning of internationalism. Is it merely a process of fully adoption of western ideas including English and Western principles of management as well as living principles? In fact, the Japanese way of internationalism suggested in Nakasone's reform agenda incorporates "healthy nationalism" as "healthy internationalism" (Hood, 2001, p. 55). According to an official statement,

> [f]rom now on the Japanese must have a deep understanding, respect and affection for Japanese culture as well as be tolerant toward other cultures … It must be understood that a good world citizen is also a good Japanese, and our education must teach people love for the country and a firm sense of the individuality of the Japanese culture as well as deepen the knowledge of the culture and traditions of all foreign countries. (Kyōiku Seisaku Kenkyūkai, 1987)

It vividly demonstrates that healthy internationalism does not merely concern with "looking out" but also stress on strengthening and revitalizing Japanese identity. Nakasone's education reform philosophy undoubtedly has become a very significant and underlying principle for any attempts to deepen internationalism. In other words, it is the theoretical foundation for a dual role of Japanese central government in administering the overall affairs of international students and mixed feeling among ordinary Japanese residents in local level.

Recruiting Foreign Students

University entrance recruitment is one of biggest issues in the Japanese society (Aspinall, 2004). In order to "win" a place for prestigious universities mainly those old public universities, candidates have to go through the "examination hell' – a term describing the high-pressure nature of university entrance examination system (Mori, 2002). Foreign students however might experience differently depending on their types of candidature. For those are privately finance students, they still have to sit for university entrance examination known as The Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students (EJU) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007; JASSO, 2007). For other types of foreign students such as Japanese government scholarship holders and those sponsored by foreign governments, they have encountered a very competitive selection process through Japan Embassy in their countries of origin before the commencement of his or her study (Ibid).

For a very long period of time, almost all international students were required to attain a considerable level of Japanese proficiency to sit for EJU – one paper particularly for Japanese language and attend admission interviews before formally commencement of his or her university study (Ibid). This could ensure all freshmen are able to take classes in Japanese. The reason behind probably was related to preserve the culture of Japan and advocate Japanese nationalism by "forcing" international students to adapt the lives in Japan through daily interactions with local community.

As mentioned earlier, private universities particularly those prominent ones since 2000 already established English-taught programs rapidly such as Waseda's International College and Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies, Nanzan University's two new faculties, and Ritsumeikan Trust's Asia Pacific University (Horie, 2002). This demonstrates an urgent need for expanding international education on the one hand and encountering global competition on the other hand.

Lastly, international students mainly youngsters also perform a very important economic role in contributing the local community particularly their labor force in part-time job market (Rebick, 2005). Restaurants, hotels, factories and even farmlands in rural areas require substantial manpower and those privately-financed international students (and even domestic students) work after class in weekdays and full days on Saturday and Sunday. It provides a win-win condition – local community is happy with increasing young labor and international students can earn their living.

Internationalizing University Curricula and Administration

The academic programs in Japanese higher education was undergone remarkable changes by expanding the number of English-taught programs and even establishing new faculties, schools, and universities. The medium of instruction for a long time was limited to Japanese. Since the era of contemporary globalization in late 20th century, more and more "experiments" to promote using English for instruction carried out in various universities such as the case of Tokyo University for providing short-term English program in campus since 1995 (Tsuneyoshi, 2005). There were also some attempts mainly from private universities to offer English-taught programs (Huang, 2006). The Global 30 Initiative in 2008 was regarded as a breakthrough in Japanese higher education system as more highly prestigious public and private universities are selected to provide more English-taught programs.

Undoubtedly, the "experiments" were to encounter huge pressures from university domestic students, faculty members, and the national government. The national or prefecture governments seemed to work very hard to guarantee their success by supplying financial grant and assistance. In addition, it was also essential to ensure certain degrees of Japanese culture coincided in the curriculum (mainly for undergraduate). University Japanese faculty members sometimes strongly hesitated to teach class in English and even did not receive proper compensation for extra work in the program (Tsuneyoshi, 2005). Japanese students were found their inferior positions in the program. The extreme diversity of English ability may further undermine the confidence of Japanese students comparing with Anglophone students. Tsuneyoshi (2005) shows how a Japanese student responded to the above scenario:

> I couldn't understand the English. It was impossible to concentrate on listening to English for an hour and half, and I would give up in the middle of the course, then I would get totally lost. It also meant struggling with my inferiority complex.

International students were basically welcome the increasingly variety of undergraduate and graduate programs offered by Japanese universities but experienced some sorts of troubles when encountering university administration at that time. Language barriers and rigid Japanese way of management however still existed when foreign students sought the aid of the administration (Lassegard, 2006). The detailed explorations of the above situations need to be further investigated.

Overall Critique: Lack of Interactive Analysis Among Stakeholders

Theoretically speaking, the author agrees that "internationalization" and "globalization" are interrelated in

many areas but supports the thesis of distinguishing "internationalization" and "globalization" (Burgess et al., 2010; River, 2010). Focusing on internationalization can spark off the discussion for the meaning of national border/territories and finally the role of state. Re-instituting boundaries regardless of geographical or status enhances the importance of multi-level interactions. Moreover, University entrance system related to internationalization was not simply enlarging the figure of international enrollment and matter of university. It involved stances of national government, university management, local community, and international students to elicit their deepened interactions. Last but not the least, the study of internationalizing curricula and administration is still highly restricted and limited unless the researchers are able to involve as many stakeholders mentioned earlier as he or she can find to conduct a relatively comprehensive piece of research.

Analytical Framework: National-Local Complexity

In order to provide a better analysis of internationalization in Japan's higher education sector, it is necessary to adopt an interactive approach which allows the dynamics of various stakeholders in different interactive opportunities. Robert Weller realizes the complexity of local actions which he states "remixed and recreated at various crucial node and at different scale" (Weller, 2006, p. 168).

In terms of theoretical understanding, Weller contends that "the continued impact and influence of state structure on how global forces are realized, the multiplicity of both global and local influences, and the different scales of influence and nodes of power that shape the effects of globalization" (Ibid). In short, the influences do not simply flow from the top (national government) to the down (local community) and in fact work in multiple ways.

The paper attempts to utilize a modified national-local approach into the analysis of internationalization and Japanese higher education. The stakeholders in higher education sector at that time consisted basically of the national government of Japan, the local governments, public and private universities, international and domestic students, and local community. The interactions in reality might be much more complex and absence of orders. However, the implementation process could be systematically divided into three manageable levels: macro-, meta-, and micro-level. In macro-level, it largely involves national government (policy makers) and universities (key implementers). In meta-level, it deals with the interactions between universities (education service providers) and international students (consumers). Lastly in micro-level, it focused on local community (citizens and inhabitants) and international students (foreigners). Each level of interaction would generate essential impacts pushing forward or pulling backward the degrees of internationalization.

Methodology

The entire study is largely based on secondary data analysis. Throughout the last two decades, the literature of Japanese higher education including official documents, books, and articles is so voluminous both in English and Japanese. In addition to printed materials, the author has also interviewed several international students from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, the United States, and Kingdom of Tonga (a South Pacific country) and Japanese residents in the cities. Based on their experiences and comments, the author may draw some implications of the dynamics among all stakeholders.

Macro-analysis: Government-University Interactions

Since the Nakasone's agenda for healthy internationalism, the government officials particularly in education ministry paid considerable amount of efforts to attract international students by providing national

scholarships and relaxing immigration restrictions to obtain student visa (Horie, 2002). Such positive attitudes toward foreign students could be seen in the official websites of MEXT as well as state-sponsored institutions like Japan Student Service Organization (JASSO).

MEXT in fact worked very close with public and private universities at the period. In terms of scholarships, MEXT sent suitable government scholarship recipients to those universities to kick off their study. It would pay for their full tuition to the universities. MEXT also offered a program called Japanese Government Scholarship Student Priority Placement Scheme – allowed some qualified universities mainly private universities to recruit non-Japanese speaking scholarship holders for English-taught academic programs in advance. In addition, MEXT gradually provided regular funding programs for universities to promote teaching and research so as to meet the international standard. For example, MEXT initiated the program for promotion of internationalization of university education that advanced the international recognition of Japan's higher education by sending university faculty and staff to educational and research institutions abroad. The most remarkable program was Center for Excellence (COE) which attempted to raise research standard in universities by rewarding large sum of money for any innovative and excellent research (Eades, 2004). The COE program also introduced the culture of audit in university research and funding, which is similar to western standard.

The above interactions seem to provide a very positive image for internationalizing higher education in Japan. However, the reality were much more complicated. First, even within the central government, different ministries (or bureaucracy) in the government structure had conflicting views on education assistance within ODA (Wan, 1995; Arase, 1995). In fact, the process of selecting scholarships was highly political. This served certain degrees of political objectives which promoted foreign relations with ODA recipient countries. In certain countries or region, the recipients of Japanese Government Scholarship must master Japanese language. For example, in Hong Kong, the candidate must go through a fierce selection process which would be conducted in Japanese. However, in other developing countries in South Asia or South Pacific region which were newly Japanese diplomatic targets, the selection process was conducted entirely in English. The differences showed how the Japanese government really viewed their financial assistance as a mean of internationalism or politics. Second, not all universities equally engaged in the internationalization initiatives. Unlike private universities which urged for additional financial resources, public universities particularly those prestigious universities were not very willing to apply for the funding projects to promote international exchange even though a series of incorporation reform had already taken place from 2001-2010. Furthermore, in order to preserve university tradition mainly Japanese way of education, the newly admitted international students were required to have considerable level of Japanese proficiency by their prior study or attending university intensive courses. Third, based on the willingness of various universities on selecting their students, the government also intentionally divided the pool of international students to Japanese-taught programs and English-taught programs. The former recruited mainly for national and public universities while the latter was for private universities. One of the informants from the South Pacific Islands who was a recipient of Japanese Government Scholarship and did not know Japanese tells the author:

> When I was asked for which university I wanted to join, the official (from the Japanese Embassy) told me that several universities like *Todai* (Tokyo University) or *Kyodai* (Kyoto University) insisted the freshmen to know certain levels of Japanese. It might delay my graduation. For some other universities (private universities), it is not a must. So, I chose the one we have studied.

Another informant with similar background from India also shared similar feeling. It is quite common now for Japanese Government Scholarship holders to enroll English-taught programs. This practice certainly on the one hand reduced the burden of those international students to learn a new language for medium of instruction. On the other hand, the national universities could still give the priority to domestic students who in general were not good at English.

The Global 30 initiative in fact faces severe criticisms on whether the government or universities sincerely adopted internationalization of higher education. In terms of academic programs, a paradox of Global 30 Project: "the provision of to learn about Japanese language culture through high-quality instruction" vs. "the English-only nature of academic programs" (River, 2010).

In short, the government did very well in utilizing financial resources to promote internationalism with the aid of public and private universities. Although English-taught programs were increasingly offered both in private and public universities and might attract larger amount of international students with government scholarships, public universities however still admitted considerable amount of foreign students who should be able to master their study in Japanese. Such interactions demonstrated a fact that internationalization as a national policy was not sincerely and equally implemented in university level from 2000-2010.

Meta-analysis: University-Student Interactions

When foreign students begin their studies in Japan, the most important stakeholder representing Japan is the universities they are going to study. The actual level of internationalization in Japan's higher education can be observed in terms of interactions between university and its foreign students. University not only offers academic programs to international students but also provides necessary assistance to help them adapt the life in Japan. So, it is natural for foreign students to expect university to think of their side. However, is it what they think of in reality? In the following, there are some experiences shared by former students in an international university they studied in Japan.

First, the language barrier generates different confusion and misunderstanding between university administration and international students. Due to the establishment of English-taught programs, the number of English-speaking international students dramatically increases in various universities. The university even employs several foreign staff to deal with international students but the number is still very limited. So, there is an urgent need to improve the English language competence of staff to communicate and even resolve the problems of international students.

In accordance with an informant from the United States, the poor English ability of staff members in Student Support Center made him extremely difficult to resolve financial problem. He was a self-financed mature student studying PhD program who always looked for scholarship opportunities. He recalled one of his bad experiences dealing with the staff:

> They (the staff from the Student Support Center) could not really understand what and why I need… Why did they tell me the method of applying that scholarship in English? If they did, I might get it and therefore resolve my financial difficulties…Why couldn't they hire someone who had better English communication ability? It was a joke. It is Japan not from a developing country. More importantly, modern universities have been built for centuries. Why can't they (administers) learn from the past?

In fact, the officials even a foreigner with clear appearance distinction always started their conservation in Japanese. It is quite rare in other places with well developed university administration.

Secondly, the Japanese way of university management always discourages international students who really need sincere assistance. According to an US informant, it was very difficult for international student (and even domestic students) to look for a specific staff to take care of a particular problem. For example, when he had some problems related to university hostel, it was very hard to have the same person to follow-up. Then, the person lodged the compliant might need to explain the problem every time to different staff members in the office. The only result was that the problem would prolong and continue to harm the students. Another important mentality of Japanese university administrators is to view all students (including those mature international students) as "kids". In the orientation session of each semester, the representatives from Student Support Center who acted like parents from the Asian culture repeatedly emphasized the importance of complying with the rules in Japan particularly concerning cigarette smoking, alcoholic drinking and drug abuse.

In short, collective responsibility seems to be a prominent management style in Japanese organizations including universities. Being so-called an internationalized university, foreign students seemed not to be respect and fully understood. From the interactions between university and student, the impartiality of higher education system in managing those international students from various cultures and beliefs was clearly found.

Micro-analysis: Student-Local Community Interactions

In micro-level, international students probably do not live under the boundary of the campus and therefore certainly become parts of local community. When the author has recently had a chance to talk with several Japanese residents from the areas of an international university located, they had a mixed feeling towards international students. One of the respondents made the following comments on international students:

> They (foreign students) are quite nice to us. Economically, they provide labor force to us and assist economic development in the local community. Due to low birth rate, the amount of teenagers is not enough for many part-time positions. International students do fill the gap…In addition, they can also help us learn the cultures all over the world…However, they may also be the source of troubles. Increase in the number of crimes and traffic accidents of our community are very likely attributed to their (international students) misbehaviors and carelessness…

Economic contribution to local community reduces the unemployment and even accelerated the overall development. Cultural exchange activities widen the horizons of local residents because they can explore various cultures of the world. For example, a South Pacific informant stated that she was welcomed by many Japanese host families because they really wanted to involve cultural diversity programs and know more about rare places like South Pacific.

The delighted attitudes do not simply cover the worries of local community. It is natural to imagine the potential problem generated from the cultural differences. There are lots of rules and norms in Japanese society. So, is it possible for foreign students to learn and behave in accordance those principles? However, the only concern here is whether Japanese are able to alter their mentality towards foreign students. The worries are sometimes overstated through mass media and the university. Being a partner of local community, it is understandable for the university to go along with local community. So, the Japanese university management makes announcement to all students about some specific cases happened and even warns the students to behave properly when there are some cases reported.

The comments made by several Japanese residents even though cannot represent all citizens. But, they at least crack down the "imagination" of full support from the local community for bringing more foreign students.

Such unpleasant interactions reveal again Japanese may not be fully ready for sincere and deepen internationalization during that period.

From foreign students' perspective, life in Japan is not easy at all. Apart from the high living cost, they found extremely difficult to communicate with local community except using Japanese. As mentioned earlier, more and more international students were not required to master the Japanese language before they came to Japan. Hence, it is quite easy to predict the acceleration of such difficulties and even potential conflicts with local residents in daily contacts. The informants from South Pacific and Malaysia told the author that it was very tough when they went shopping on Sunday. The only way they could use is body language and therefore discouraged further contacts with local residents.

Another essential observation is that which stakeholders should change their living styles. The author contends that both of them should work harder to achieve mutual understanding. Foreign students are expected to adapt the Japanese culture while local community should also tolerate their period of adjustment. Otherwise, the process of internationalization in higher education sector in Japan is not only in doubt but also in danger during that period.

Conclusion

Internationalizing higher education is not an easy task to be accomplished. Sometimes, it is likely to observe that internationalization may be simply reduced as a slogan by the governments without sincere substance. The key is how to strike a balance. In Japan, such agenda does face different types of opposition. On the one hand, the pro-internationalization groups like private universities or business corporations particularly those are keen on developing overseas markets criticizes the insufficiency of current initiatives. They urge to admit more international students and establish standardized and recognized international programs like MBA courses. On the other hand however the pro-nationalization groups point out the problems like culture conflicts or even Japan's decay yielded by international students and request to cut the quota of international students. More importantly, the initiative should not "hurt" the core of Japanese culture. Any attempts for furthering internationalization should be very cautious.

The paper suggests that the core for internationalization in Japan should focus on university governance and student support. Frankly speaking, it is rather difficult to request other stakeholders to alter their expectations except university. Being the frontline workers of executing internationalism initiatives, the university administration has to be fully equipped with internationalist mentality. Most dissatisfaction of international students is derived from their hash experiences dealing with university staff. It can be observed that Japanese government and universities spend a lot of money for international promotion. However, any international students with unpleasant experiences in Japan may counter-promote and even hurt the prestige of Japanese higher education abroad. The underlying principles of the "new" 2014 "Top Global University" project does address the problems mentioned above on how to deepen internationalization in terms of admission, curriculum and student support but it is still too early to see whether the project can achieve the ultimate aim for a "truly" internationalized higher education system in Japan.

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