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Internationalisation of Teacher Education in Japan viewed from a Swedish Perspective

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1. Introduction

This paper provides an analysis of the internationalisation of Teacher Education in Japan viewed from the perspective of a Swedish teacher educator. The analysis attempts to highlight the most interesting features and problematic aspects of the complex process of internationalisation as declared and implemented at national level and in one particular teacher training institution. The perspective of a Swedish scholar aligned the study focus on common and contrasting issues of the internationalisation of higher education in two countries, however the data provided in this paper concerns explicitly only Japan.

Teacher education is an integral part of higher education in Japan. For that reason, it shares many of the features of the development of internationalisation at the tertiary level of education. At the same time, it has a strong connection with the professional fields of teachers’ occupation — pedagogical work in schools. This paper therefore deals with the internationalisation process in both Japanese universities and in schools.

1.1. Defining internationalisation

Definitions are well known to be able shape policies and practice, and not least an academic study. Therefore, brief definitions of the internationalisation of higher education are provided first in this paper. Internationalisation is a rather new term that has gained popularity in the education sector since the early 1980s. Many individual authors and organisations working in this field offer a variety of definitions. Knight’s (2003) definition of internationalisation of higher education is used for this discussion as ‘the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education’. This concise definition underlines internationalisation as a process and not a single act or phenomenon. It also relates internationalisation to intercultural work with the diversity of cultures on a global and local scale.

Mobility (student and teacher exchange) is usually considered as the most important aspect of internationalisation; however it also includes the internationalisation of domestic university academic work. This demands, for example, the introduction of international (Western and multi-Asian, in the case of Japan) and global contents into the curriculum and also the use of modern teaching processes. Further, it concerns the social life of visiting students, scholars, teachers and/or administrative personnel.

Other dimensions of internationalisation include the exposition of the domestic culture to foreigners who are guests within the country and to other countries, as well as formal and informal studies of foreign cultures and languages. It also embraces sharing of information,
experiences, and practice with an international audience through common research projects, networking, and publications. Foreign educational aid work constitutes an integral part of international engagement of the higher education institutions in developed countries. The quality of this multidimensional process is assured by an internalised ethos of internationalisation, by individuals, institutions, and society at large.

1.2. Reasons for internationalisation

Different countries and institutions have different reasons for developing the internationalisation of education, but currently it is a clearly articulated policy area of governments around the world. Internationalisation is often viewed as an essential element of global economic competition that is of value for national economic development. For example, the United States, having a shortage of qualified scientists and engineers, attracts and trains capable international students and tries to retain them in the country to meet national demands.

In Australia, New Zealand, and the UK, foreign students are a substantial income-generating sector of the national service industries. Their national governments encourage universities to increase the number of self-financing foreign students. According to Spooner-Lane, Tangen, and Campbell (2009) for universities in English speaking countries, international students are an important source of revenue, and their recruitment has therefore become a core business activity. These countries generally charge higher tuition fees for international students than for domestic students (Shin and Harman, 2009). In the United States, over 623,000 foreign students (2007) support their education and stay in the US, spending about US$15.5 billion annually. Australia generates about US$13 billion from overseas students studying in its colleges and universities (2007). In Britain, a 2007 study by the UK's Higher Education Policy Institute found that the total net value of the international student presence was about US$6.34 billion, more that the export value of alcoholic drinks and publishing together. Even if some researchers question the validity of methods used for such estimations (Malsen, 2009), the export of educational services has become one of the most valuable service industries in English speaking countries.

As an outcome of internationalisation, individual universities might aim to increase the quality of education provided and to focus on creating a worldwide profile. International enrolment can provide the necessary critical mass of students needed to diversify the range of educational programmes on offer. More idealistic expectations might include that internationalisation will improve mutual understanding and friendship among people of different countries and thereby contribute to world peace and security. The arguments provided in this paragraph are often stated in the policy documents of Swedish universities.

Within these general frameworks of ideas and interests, two questions arise: What policies steer the development of educational internationalisation in Japan and how are these realised by the individual actors involved in the process?

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1 In the US science and technology workforce in 2000, 38% of PhDs were foreign-born (MEXT, 2008).
2. Sample and methods of the study

This study was conducted in Japan at a larger teacher education university with international students constituting approximately 10% of the total enrolment. Qualitative research methodology was used in this study. The main data collection was done through an analysis of the literature, official documents and statistical data provided on Japanese government websites, particularly that of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

Additional important instruments for data collection were interviews. The following groups of informants were interviewed: 1) Japanese teacher educators, 2) foreign students studying at teacher education institutions in Japan, 3) Japanese administrators of student exchange programs at the International Student Office. In all, 14 people were interviewed. The informants were able to choose whether they preferred to have individual or group interviews. Most of the students opted for focus group interviews of 2-3 persons. This method has been used widely in educational research. It has proven to be an effective method of exploring students’ views about areas of common experience in a supportive group environment. Interviews were conducted in English, Swedish and Russian depending on the informants’ preferences.

A semi-structured interview guide was generated before the interviews. This guide was examined by an independent experienced researcher with an interest in educational internationalisation. The researcher confirmed that the questions posed were likely to produce adequate data for exploring the research issues formulated in the study. Before the interviews issues of anonymity and confidentiality were discussed. Some interviews were audio-recorded.

3. Findings

3.1. Internationalisation as a national priority in Japan

From analysis of the government documents (MEXT, 2007, 2008, 2009) it became clear that the internationalisation of higher education in Japan is high on the political agenda however, the primary focus is on actions of mobility. The Government accepted the “International Student Policy” as a national strategy in 2007 stating: ‘we must keep in mind the standpoint of foreign policies and industrial policies as well as educational policies; we have reached the stage where our international student exchange must be strategically carried out as a nation’ (MEXT, 2007).

Politicians express concern that maintaining the global competitiveness of the Japanese economy in an era of an aging population and declining birth rate is a great challenge. The Japanese population took a downturn in 2006. The so-called productive-age population (15-to-64 years old) had already started to shrink during the 1980s (MEXT, 2008). This also means a long-term trend of decreasing size of college-age cohorts that threatens the very
survival of many universities. A steadily growing surplus of university capacity is expected in the country (Coulmas, 2007).

Consequently, the Japanese government recognises the importance of attracting foreign students and foreign talents into the country in order to maintain one of the leading economic positions in the world. The retention of international students in the country after graduation also becomes an interesting issue from a national economy perspective. Japan still provides limited employment opportunities for foreign students graduating in the country. According to Paprzycki and Fukao (2008) just over five thousand of them remained in Japan in 2005, and most of them are working in other fields than their training. Retaining students in the host country is a controversial issue. As Knight (2009) points out ‘The original goal of helping students from developing countries to study in another country to complete a degree and return home is fading fast as nations compete to retain human resources’. Apparently, Japan de facto implement international aid in the field of education as it was intended; training specialists for their home countries and not for the Japanese market. This policy is also strongly promoted in Sweden.

3.2. A developmental perspective on the internationalisation of higher education in Japan

Here, historical developments in the internalisation of Japanese education will be briefly outlined with particular focus on mobility. Already from the beginning of the Meiji era (1868-1912), Japan started participation in international scientific and educational cooperation. The students went to the United States, England, France, and Germany2. The international mobility of teachers commenced on a much greater scale after WWII. During the Occupation period (1945 – 1952) thousands of teachers and scholars were sent to the United States under the Government Account for Relief in Occupied Area (GARIOA) program set up by the USA. Ever since that time, internationalisation activities in Japan have been strongly biased towards cooperation with the USA. Later in the 1950s, programs were established by the Japanese Government for sending teachers abroad and for supporting education in developing countries (MEXT, 1981).

In 1983, major changes were introduced in the internationalisation of higher education in Japan through a “Plan to Accept 100,000 Foreign Students” by the beginning of the 21st century. These included bilateral exchange programmes and flexible curriculum solutions for foreign students enabling them to come to the country and earn credits on short-term programs and not only complete degree programmes. Universities also started to offer courses on Japanese cultural and social life in English. More scholarships became available from the Government of Japan and the study visa acquisition process was simplified. According to the interviewed representatives of the International Student Office, these measures markedly facilitated the acceptance of foreign students. This long-term plan was successfully

2 Interestingly enough, the same countries remain as major recipients of Japanese exchange students. Additionally, only Australia appeared as a destination country for Japanese students and scholars.
implemented by 2003, when the number of foreign students had increased more than ten times over the previous twenty years, as is visible in figure 1 below.

As a result, Japan became the sixth most important destination for students studying abroad after the USA, Australia, UK, Germany, and France (Cemmell and Bekhradnia, 2008). The share of foreign students in tertiary enrolment reached three per cent.

**Figure 1. Trends in the number of international students**


The next twenty year target was announced in 2008. Japan formulated the “300,000 International Students Plan” with the aim of receiving 300,000 international students by 2020. To realize this goal, MEXT launched the “Global 30” project in August 2009, establishing thirteen Core Universities for Internationalisation. Each university will receive prioritised financial assistance to expand the course programs offered in English and additionally recruit several thousand international students per year. In order to facilitate the recruitment process “Overseas Offices for Shared Utilisation by Universities” will be created in 7 countries - Tunisia, Egypt, Germany, Russia (2), India, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. These offices will provide information on Japanese universities overall, conduct enrolment seminars, and admissions tests (MEXT, 2009). The placement of the offices shows where strategic geographical expansion of Japanese educational investments is foreseen.³

Most of the students coming to Japan study humanities and social sciences. The field of education attracts only about two and half per cent of foreign students, and particularly in undergraduate teacher education very few foreigners are enrolled.

³ A Japanese university of science and technology will also be launched soon in Egypt.  
One problem related to internationalisation in Japan might be readily apparent: the imbalance between incoming and outgoing exchange students, as well as the regional flows of mobility. On a national scale, Japan takes in 50% more students than it sends abroad. This situation is very similar to the Swedish one. China, Korea and Taiwan stand for almost ninety per cent of the foreign students in Japan. However, these countries are not particularly popular among outgoing Japanese students. Most of the about fifty five thousand mobile Japanese students go to the USA (two-thirds), Europe, and Australia (Global Educational Digest, 2009). Currently, MEXT (2004) underlines the importance of ‘promoting overseas study by Japanese students, placing more importance on mutual exchange rather than focusing on accepting more foreign students as was previously the case’.

### 3.3. Costs, scholarships and academic credits

To study and live in Japan is expensive. Even if tuition fees are four times lower in Japan than in Australian universities (Cemmell and Bekhradnia, 2008), but the total cost of a degree does not favour Japan as can be seen from Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>Masters</th>
<th>Bachelors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA Private</td>
<td>116,902</td>
<td>81,501</td>
<td>161,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>95,306</td>
<td>53,257</td>
<td>93,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Public</td>
<td>80,621</td>
<td>79,613</td>
<td>82,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>94,824</td>
<td>41,756</td>
<td>76,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>81,132</td>
<td>45,131</td>
<td>67,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>59,507</td>
<td>31,632</td>
<td>66,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>19,929</td>
<td>14,428</td>
<td>36,014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Total cost of a degree (in US$), including tuition, living costs and other expenses (Source Cemmell and Bekhradnia, 2008)

The calculation of costs is not simple: living costs are more expensive in Japan but a bachelors degree is also shorter in Australia (three years) than in Japan (four years). This makes Japan the third most expensive country in the world to obtain a degree (after the USA and the UK). In Sweden, education for foreign students is still free of charge, but living costs are as expensive as those in Japan.

To facilitate the recruitment of foreign students, the Japanese government provides scholarships and gives support to privately financed students. The scholarships for graduate research students (e.g. for foreign Japanese language teachers in teacher training institutions) are US$2,000/month (MEXT, 2004). According to the interviews, the holders of these scholarships have great freedom in their academic activities. They are not formally registered at university and do not receive any academic credits. A scholarship for an undergraduate student is about US$1,500/month (MEXT, 2004).

Privately financed foreign students who need financial assistance can obtain Honours Scholarships: US$600 and US$800 per month for undergraduate and graduate levels. Foreign students can also apply for tuition reductions or exemptions. Many short-term exchange students, both inbound and outbound, can obtain Japanese scholarships of US$900 per month.
Traditionally, aid-related educational programs constitute an important part of Japanese internationalisation. Teacher education institutions are actively working in this field, in particular, with foreign teachers who come to Japan for in-service training. These are called foreign teacher-training students and come mainly from developing countries. All of them receive Japanese Government Graduate Scholarships. The recruitment of these students is done by MEXT; universities then get an offer to organise the training of these teachers. They first study an intensive Japanese Language Course and then attend courses and get individual supervision from university professors. This eighteen month long training in Japan awards no academic degree, but it contributes to capacity building and the professional development of the teachers. Some countries with a tradition of sending their teachers to Japan (e.g. the Republic of Korea), consider this training as being equivalent to a masters degree, and such training gives possibilities for advancing in professional careers.

Formally, about 15% of foreign students obtain Japanese Government Scholarships (see figure 1). However, opportunities for reduced fees and honours scholarships create rather favourable conditions for privately financed students. The teaching of foreign students consequently resembles more the Japanese universities’ contribution to the fulfilment of the national policy of internationalisation, rather than an income generating activity.

3.4. Exchange students’ experiences

Group interviews with Swedish exchange students showed that they had positive experiences of studying in Japan. The language skills acquired were valued most, as all of them had studied Japanese in Sweden prior to beginning their studies in Japan. Social growth, cultural awareness, learning about Japanese life, and skills of living in international settings were also highly valued achievements. However, their out-of-school contacts were mainly with other international students, not with Japanese people. This is also a rather typical situation for exchange students in Sweden and other countries. Contacts with local people are not easily established everywhere. However, the possibility to meet students from different cultures and countries around the world was largely appreciated. When Swedes came to Japan, their attention was initially focused on similarities; however it gradually switched to differences between the countries. Adaptation to a new food culture was one of the first challenges encountered.

The Swedish students had the advantage of meeting Japanese exchange students in Sweden with whom they remained friends in Tokyo. This facilitated significantly their adaptation to the Japanese context. Japanese students who had studied abroad were good mediators of Japanese culture. They understood foreigners better, and had themselves already developed a deeper interest in foreign cultures and people, that facilitated communication. As pointed out by one of the informants, ‘after studies abroad they became something different from 100% Japanese, acquiring new language skills and even new body language.’

Contacts with other Japanese students were rather superficial. ‘They do not let strangers get involved in any deeper discussions.’ Swedish boys experienced contact with Japanese girls as easier than that with boys. Swedish students’ experience of club activities was not very
successful either. They did not feel rejected or frozen out, but not particularly welcomed. This caused them to quit the club.

The quality of contacts with tutors varied from case to case. Some students were satisfied with their relationships with teacher tutors while others felt that it was an unnecessary burden for them and for the teachers. As a rule, contacts were limited to getting signatures on different papers. Swedes on the whole missed more personal /individual relations with teachers. One student felt that the tutor was trying to minimise their contacts, considering him as an extra disruptive factor, not giving him an email address and not returning missed mobile phone calls.

Paperwork was a matter of particular concern for the students. They had to fill in many forms with similar or even identical contents. There was no coordination or efficient electronic communication between the university, immigration officials, hostels and other administrative units. At every turn were many forms that had to be filled in, signed, and stamped; it was time consuming and a source of irritation for many international students. Not all of the forms had English translations either.

Some didactical aspects of teaching were questioned by the European students. They did not have a clear overview of their coursework, the goals of the tasks, and sequences of learning. Exercises were apparently of a very uneven level and not organised systematically. They experienced stress when teachers demanded answers to complex tasks without time allotted for thought and preparation. There were few tasks for reflection, but a lot of exercises for memorisation and reproduction. On the other hand, they felt that questions of the type — What do you think about this? What is your personal opinion? — were causing stress for another group of students (Asian, particularly Chinese). Accordingly, students saw distinct difference between the culture of teaching in Japan and that of their home university.

3.5. Internationalisation and school teachers

In general, teacher education is a very domesticated phenomenon. Researchers and practitioners from different countries have frequently reported difficulties in offering teacher training degrees to foreign students (see literature review in Spooner-Lane, Tangen, and Campbell, 2009). The teaching profession is very cultural and ideology laden. Aside from being language teachers, foreigners seldom find teaching positions in schools in any country. In Japan, basically only Japanese nationals get appointed as teachers in public schools. Japanese residency and a teacher education certificate (based on certified teacher education courses approved by MEXT) are insufficient for employment as a teacher. The employment of public school teachers is based on competition and is extremely selective. The selection procedure is based on an appointment examination conducted by the prefectural or municipal Boards of Education. ‘The examination is generally composed of written tests in both teaching subject and specialised and general subjects, an interview, practical exercise, and so on’(MESSC, 2000). Judging applicants’ aptitudes and personality qualities, boards of education usually deem that only Japanese nationals are capable of assuring the right interpretation and translation of educational, moral, and cultural values to the new generation.
In the interviews, not one respondent could give a single example of knowing a foreigner who had passed through the teacher appointment examinations and had received a permanent position in a public school.

As a part of the internationalisation policy, the Japanese government actively promotes the study of foreign languages, in particular English. It has different programs to dispatch language teachers overseas and to invite foreign youth to Japan as “Assistant language teachers” (ALT). The latter program started in 1987 (see http://www.jetprogramme.org/index.html) aiming to place bearers of target languages and cultures in lower- and upper secondary schools. There, the ALTs are expected to team-teach with Japanese teachers and to assist them with the preparation of supplementary material and extracurricular activities (MESSC, 2000). About 8,000 ALTs are contracted annually.

The internationalisation of schools is a complex process that faces many obstacles at local level. According to one interviewee, ‘each school is a small village with its local traditions and professional jargon. The presence of strangers is very disturbing in such tightly-bound communities. They create poles of tension.’ Therefore, internationalisation in the form of a broadened and permanent recruitment of foreign teachers in the schools will not be popular, according to this informant.

Understandably, internationalisation issues are not always a priority for the school principles. They have many other burning educational and social issues to attend to. Additionally, as one of the interviewees commented, most of the acting teachers in schools are of quite advanced age, particular those in senior positions. Many of them have little personal experience and interest in matters related to internationalisation. However, the younger generation of teachers has more intercultural experience through travelling, popular culture and meetings with foreigners. Consequently, time is expected to work in favour of improving internationalisation in schools. This can impose corresponding demands on teacher preparation.

As was mentioned earlier, graduates of teacher education also have the chance to be involved in foreign aid activities, for example, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Since the 1960s, hundreds of Japanese teachers have worked in schools in developing countries yearly. Normally, they go overseas for two years as volunteers and then return home. Interestingly enough, only about 10% of these teachers find teaching positions in Japan. Many of them who tried had difficulties in passing the appointment examinations. According to an interviewed person with a background as a volunteer who failed his appointment interview as science teacher, ‘school principals are anxious to take new staff with a strong independent standpoint. Young teachers coming back from Africa, with good survival skills after two years work on a local teacher’s salary, have quite good self-confidence and self-esteem.’ It can be so that an independent personality and international experience are not judged as being of particular value by some principals. However, there could be other reasons for such decisions as well.

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4 Currently, ALTs can also work in elementary schools given that they have good command of Japanese.
The very strict certification and appointment policies for Japanese teachers mean that opportunities for international student mobility are limited to short term visits abroad, mainly during the summer holidays in July-September. Longer studies abroad become problematic because teacher students must take all the necessary courses in Japan in order to acquire a teaching certificate. Currently, they cannot count on being able to claim the equivalence of courses taken abroad.

4. Discussion

The convergence of an aging society, lower birth rates, the knowledge economy, and demands for a professional labour mobility pose new challenges for the internationalisation of higher education in Japan, as in other developed countries. These challenges are address by the Japanese government in a systematic way. In the recent past, the plan to attract 100,000 foreign students to Japan was a story of success. However, favourable “external conditions” existed during that period. Families in China and the Republic of Korea have benefited from stronger economies and became able to send their children abroad using private funds. The self-abolishment of the Soviet Union created numerous new independent states with students eager to go to study in Japan and learn more about the country. These countries are also entitled to Japanese government scholarships. However, the politico-economical development and situations with international student mobility change rapidly around the world. Other countries in the Asian region are trying to attract foreign students. South Korea launched the Study in Korea project in 2005, which aims to attract 100,000 foreign students by 2010 (Shin and Harman, 2009). Malaysia also plans to become a major destination for foreign students.

The rapid increase in foreign student population in Japan has also been accompanied by a number of problems. In fact, MEXT (2004) expressed concern about inadequate acceptance mechanisms at universities including housing facilities (75% of incoming foreigners live in private accommodations), issues of poor knowledge of foreign students and their illegal work in Japan have also surfaced. Japanese universities struggle to address fake degrees and academic credentials that are earned by incoming foreigners at non-accredited institutions.

Nevertheless internationalisation is more than just mobility actions. One of the results of this study is that domestic internationalisation has many problematic dimensions in Japan. For example, the teaching of English to the broader public became commercialised instead of being professionalised. Any native speaker is assumed to be able to teach English. One interviewee, a foreign graduate student, expressed such an opinion directly. Being a professional English and Japanese language teacher she felt that ‘it is very difficult to find a teaching position, even at private language schools, if you are not from the USA or Australia.’ She believed that her professional competence in teaching English as a second language and advanced knowledge of Japanese were not valued equally high as an American or Australian cultural background seem to be. This superficial and vulgarised approach denigrates the value of the language teacher’s professional competence. It can be compared to the situation of
assuming that any sick person can cure other people; in the same way, not any native speaker can teach other people language skills.

Another issue is that international students, in an unfamiliar social and cultural environment of learning can suffer academic dissonance (Spooner-Lane, Tangen, and Campbell, 2009) as the Swedish informants recognised, commenting on didactical aspects of studying in Japan. Possibly, foreign students need some preparation for their studies, but Japanese professors also need training to work in multicultural classrooms. Usually, Swedish universities have different courses to develop the intercultural competence of their professors working with foreign students.

Eventually, it might be desirable to establish academic mechanisms to award academic credits for all courses that foreign students take at universities, and to demand a minimum number of credits earned during their stay in Japan, which is common practice in Sweden. At the same time, Japanese educational authorities must accept credits earned by the teacher education students abroad; otherwise the mobility of prospective teachers will remain problematic.

Japan (and Sweden) actively promote educational aid programs. However experience shows that foreign aid contributes to the process of the reproduction of national elites in developing countries. Primarily, access to international mobility is not available to the most capable students but to those who can afford to travel (and to pay tuition fees) or whose families have connections and can arrange scholarships. Some interviewees described their knowledge of such cases. Knight (2009) advocated the critical monitoring of intended and unintended consequences of internationalisation.

The internationalisation of higher education is a global phenomenon, but its implementation is context specific. As described in this paper, this study mainly addressed issues that appear to be more relevant for the Japanese context.\textsuperscript{5} The opposite but related trend to internationalisation and globalisation is the preservation of unique national culture. Uniqueness of culture makes a country attractive for visitors and exchange students. In Japan both of these trends are clearly visible and have been implemented successfully. Japan has great educational capital in the country. It is visible through the successful performance of Japanese students in international comparative studies such as \textit{Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study} (TIMSS, http://nces.ed.gov/timss) and \textit{Program for International Student Assessment} (PISA, http://www.pisa.oecd.org). This capital can be used more to attract international students and researchers in particular in the field of education and teacher education.

\textsuperscript{5} The Swedish context differs in many respects from the Japanese. For example, more than 20\% of young Swedes have an immigrant background. Most of them come from Muslim family backgrounds. This makes intercultural work at Swedish educational institutions a higher political priority than in Japan.
5. References


