

Human Resource Development & Innovation

Creating a “Nation Built on Human Resources”

By *Kazuhiro MORIMOTO*

During the 20th century, industry developed primarily on the strength of capital and technology. But the 21st century is called an age of the power of human resources. Amid the globalization of economic activities, superfluous capital is groping for lucrative fields for investment, while technology is spreading with greater rapidity. Under these circumstances, national power hinges on the quality and quantity of human resources capable of making the most of capital and technology, and generating additional value.

This situation also requires a change in the social system. The entire society needs to foster human resources capable of spearheading innovation and create frameworks for providing them with arenas for action. Above all, for Japan with a fast-aging population and the falling birthrate, it is of utmost importance to enhance the value of limited human resources.

In July 2006, the Japanese government came up with the Economic Growth Strategy spelling out measures to be implemented by fiscal 2015. This strategy, revised in June 2007, cites the power of improved human resources as one of five types of infrastructure for the elevation of productivity. Describing human resources as assets, it has put up the target of “a nation built on human resources.” It calls for the target to be achieved through three key policies – (1) establishment of a society that enables each and every individual to give full play to their abilities, (2) more effective development of human resources through academic-industrial alliance and (3) reinforcement of the international competitiveness of human resources.

Japan has so far contributed to stable development of the international economy by such means as the provision of funds and technologies to developing countries. As regards the 21st century, Japan considers that its mission as a responsible member of the international community is to contribute to the development of human resources across the world as well as achieving its target of “a nation built on

human resources.”

In the following, I would like to refer to the above-mentioned three key policies and explain two important projects of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) – academia-industry partnership for nurturing human resources and the “Career Development Program for Foreign Students from Asia.”

1. Establishment of a society that enables each and every individual to give full play to their abilities

* With progress in economic globalization and information technology, companies require increasingly sophisticated capabilities of their employees, such as the ability to communicate, and discern and resolve problems. In particular, young people newly going into society need guidelines for perceiving and fostering their own capabilities. METI provides such guidelines in the easy-to-understand form of basic abilities as members of society and engages in the development of methods for the cultivation and assessment of capabilities at such institutions as universities.

* The corporate management of human resources, so far characterized by the seniority wage scale and lifetime employment, now needs to be modified amid the growing employment of women and elderly people and the growth of non-regular workers. This being the case, METI has instituted a tax incentive system for the training and educational expenses of medium- and small-sized companies (tax credit of up to 12%) with a view to facilitating the development of human resources within such companies. At the same time, it has proposed a desirable picture of corporate human resource management at a study meeting of private-sector experts.

2. More effective development of human resources through academia-industry alliance

* It has become more important than ever for children to study with willingness and curiosity while giving full thought to their own future. Therefore, at more than 300 model schools, chosen across the country from primary and junior/senior high schools, children are studying according to practical curriculums, including experience in making and selling goods, and scientific experiments with the cooperation of technical experts from industrial communities in their respective regions.

* Moreover, at 79 technical high schools throughout the country, practical programs for acquiring techniques and skills are being developed in cooperation with local medium- and small-sized companies.

* Academia-industry partnership for fostering human resources

With global rivalry intensifying, competition for innovation growing fierce and job quality becoming more sophisticated due to such factors as the development of information technology, the industrial community is faced with an urgent problem of how best to nurture human resources capable of coping with such competition and progress. Accordingly, it has become even more important than ever for the industrial community and universities to closely cooperate in establishing a system for the integrated development of human resources.

For instance, universities need to respond properly to the request of the industrial circles that students should be better educated and acquire basic academic abilities more firmly. On the other hand, the industrial community itself, when hiring university graduates, needs to attach greater importance to their school records and what they have actually done at their university faculties and courses. In this way, it is imperative to clearly define the respective roles of the industrial community and universities in regard to the fostering and use of human resources, and further reinforce their cooperative relationships.

Therefore, METI, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT),

has set up the “Academic-Industrial Partnership for Fostering Human Resources” as a framework for the academic and industrial circles to have a dialogue about the development of human resources and expedite specific actions for the resolution of relevant problems.

The partnership has eight subcommittees on such subjects as human resources for chemistry, machinery and management and administration under a plenary meeting, which comprises representatives from academia and industry. The plenary deals with general ideas about academic-industrial cooperation in the cultivation of human resources. The subcommittees are charged with, among other things, clarifying the types of human resources required in the respective fields, having them reflected in universities’ educational programs, and studying specific measures for the industrial community’s cooperation. For instance, the subcommittee on human resources for management and administration is discussing measures for cooperation between companies and graduate schools for corporate management in nurturing next-generation business leaders among Japanese companies.

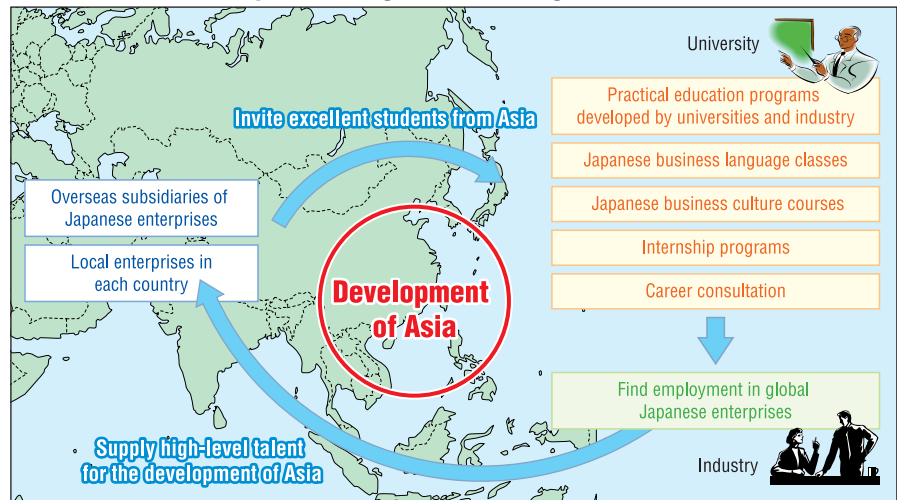
3. Enhancing human resources’ international competitiveness

* Career Development Program for Foreign Students from Asia

In 1983, the cabinet of then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone announced a program to invite 100,000 students from abroad to study in Japan. The idea was to mutually elevate the educational and research levels of Japan and other countries, and contribute to generating a spirit of international understanding and cooperation, and helping to foster human resources throughout Asia. It took about 20 years to attain this target. Nevertheless, as the interchange of students has expanded even more rapidly across the world in recent years, the proportion of foreign students at Japanese universities still remains low compared with other countries. At present, the number has risen to approximately 120,000 in Japan, and upon their acceptance, we are faced with many issues that remain to be solved.

Under these circumstances, what should now be done in particular is to prepare adequate “career paths” for foreign students who study in Japan. A survey has found that although many foreign students

Career Development Program for Foreign Students from Asia



Source : Data from Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

want to find employment at Japanese companies upon graduation, the proportion of those employed in Japan is still limited. On acceptance of foreign students into Japan, their “experience of Japan” should not be limited to just a cultural interchange. Japanese society should support the realization of their career plans.

To be more specific, considering Japanese companies’ fast-rising need for high-level human resources, it is essential to set up a system for stepping up the education of foreign students in a way befitting such necessity and for taking care of their employment upon graduation. As things stand, for instance, if foreign employees want to play an active role in Japanese businesses, they have to acquire the ability of sophisticated communication in Japanese. It is also indispensable for them to fully understand business styles common to Japanese companies. However, Japanese universities have yet to establish an adequate system with due regard to these and other requirements to help foreign students find proper employment in Japan upon graduation.

In order to eliminate such drawbacks, METI and MEXT have implemented the “Career Development Program for Foreign Students from Asia” initiative since 2007. This marks the first time that the Japanese government has directly taken the initiative in regard to foreign students’ post-graduation careers. The initiative is promoted through cooperation among the industrial circles, universities and regional communities in Japan, providing an integrated package, ranging from

supplementary education to measures to help them find employment upon graduation. This includes professional education, Japanese business language classes, Japanese business culture courses to learn about our unique corporate culture, internship programs at Japanese companies, and career consultation. The idea is to do away with mismatches between students and universities/companies, promote their mutual understanding, and facilitate the establishment of career paths for foreign students at Japanese companies. At present, about 500 students from China, South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand and other countries are studying under this program in various parts of Japan.

The initiative aims to add momentum to the globalization of Japanese society, enable foreign students to find employment and play an active role at Japanese companies, and expedite globalization of Japanese companies and universities so that they will invite many talented foreign personnel. Moreover, by helping foreign students study, work and acquire various skills and know-how in Japan, the program will contribute a great deal to the economic development of Asia. **JS**

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