

Japan's University Reform amidst International Competition

– What Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University has Learned –

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The Escalation of International Competition among Universities

It has been many years since industries in the business world entered the age of globalization and international competition. Universities, on the other hand, are just starting to enter this age. Leading universities around the world are working to develop new educational and research fields as well as restructure the systems and organizations that support them. New global partnerships are being forged between universities and industries, as well as between universities themselves. A fierce international competition is now arising among these academic institutions in various educational and research fields.

An intense battle is being waged to attract the brightest young students. If a university's mission is to produce competent individuals, it must first gather people with potential from around the world. The world's leading universities are currently putting forth great effort towards achieving this goal.

Various methods are being implemented to pursue this goal. For example, scholarships, tuition fee waivers



Photo : Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU)

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University was established in April 2000

and other incentives are offered to outstanding university applicants. Compared to their Japanese counterparts, big name universities in the West are characterized by high tuitions. However, outstanding applicants to such institutions often receive large economic incentives.

Moreover, careful recruitment systems are also being adopted to bring in highly capable individuals from around the globe. It is not uncommon for a university to have a full-time recruiter traveling year-round to various countries. Additionally, institutions

often rely on worldwide alumni networks to provide a perpetual referral system for finding new university applicants.

It is common sense for universities to use many types of media vehicles to find exceptional students. In recent years, Internet websites have played a major role in distributing information. It could be said that the world's leading universities have now entered a new age of mega-competition concerning the attractiveness of their websites.

The Present State of University Reform in Japan

Japanese universities have also joined in the race, directing a tremendous amount of energy toward attracting students from abroad. Yet, the major groups of international students studying in Japan come from China, South

Photo : Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU)



International students account for half of the 800 students accepted by APU every year

Korea and Taiwan. In fact, these places alone contribute about 80% of the international students studying in Japan. Compared to countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, the diversity of international students in Japan is low indeed.

The primary cause for this lack of international students is that aside from a small number of exceptional cases, most lectures at Japanese universities are conducted solely in Japanese. Regardless of what their native languages may be, in an age where English has become the lingua franca of the world, it is odd for international students that they must first invest great effort in learning the Japanese language in order to participate in the Japanese-only educational environment of Japanese universities.

If universities do not immediately take steps to resolve this problem of excluding international students, the current efforts to increase international competitiveness will have been in vain. Talented individuals around the world will not gather in Japan, opting instead to pursue their studies in the West. It is due to such circumstances that even Japanese people are increasingly aspiring to attend foreign universities from their freshman year.

What has been Learned over Three Years at APU

One concrete attempt to turn around Japan's lagging internationalization movement is Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), established four years ago in April 2000. Located in Beppu City, Oita Prefecture on the island of Kyushu, the university was founded by the Ritsumeikan Trust, which obtained project assistance from the governments of Oita Prefecture and Beppu City.

This new project to create a truly international university is characterized by several unique features, never before implemented by any Japanese university:

1: Of the 800 students accepted to the University every year, half are international students.

Table 1 Student Enrollment at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (as of April 1, 2003)

	Country / Region	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
1	South Korea	379	
2	China	237	2
3	Taiwan	119	
4	Vietnam	92	
5	Indonesia	85	
6	Thailand	61	
7	India	43	1
8	Sri Lanka	39	
9	Malaysia	29	2
10	Philippines	18	2
11	Nepal	15	
12	Laos	14	
13	Pakistan	14	
14	Bangladesh	13	
15	Myanmar	12	1
16	Singapore	12	
17	Mongolia	10	
18	Cambodia	7	
19	Uzbekistan	3	
20	Iran	2	
21	Jordan	2	
22	Georgia	1	
23	Syria	1	
24	Turkey	1	
	Subtotal	1209	8
25	Kenya	17	
26	Ghana	11	
27	Uganda	9	
28	Nigeria	7	
29	Ethiopia	6	
30	Cameroon	3	
31	Mali	3	
32	Malawi	2	
33	Sudan	2	
34	Zambia	2	
35	Zimbabwe	2	
36	Comoros	1	
37	Cote d'Ivoire	1	
38	Djibouti	1	
39	Madagascar	1	
40	Morocco	1	
	Subtotal	69	0

2: Lectures are presented in both Japanese and English. Unlike most Japanese universities where Japanese language proficiency is a prerequisite for enrollment, APU accepts students who can understand lectures in English only. Japanese language skills are developed at the University after enrollment.

3: In order to effectively implement

	Country / Region	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
41	U.S.A.	25	
42	Canada	10	
43	Bolivia	2	
44	Ecuador	2	
45	Peru	1	
	Subtotal	40	0
46	Australia	12	
47	Papua New Guinea	5	
48	New Zealand	4	
49	Samoa	4	1
50	Palau	1	
51	Tonga	1	1
	Subtotal	27	2
52	Lithuania	12	
53	Bulgaria	7	
54	Hungary	7	
55	United Kingdom	6	
56	Russian Federation	4	
57	Estonia	3	
58	Finland	3	
59	Romania	3	
60	Poland	2	2
61	Ukraine	2	
62	Croatia	1	
63	Czech	1	
64	Germany	1	
65	Netherlands	1	
66	Slovakia	1	
	Subtotal	54	2

Total	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	
International Students	1399	12	1411
Domestic Students	2128	5	2133
Grand Total	3527	17	3544

Notes: The term "International Students" denotes those students who possess a "college student visa."

The term "Domestic Students" includes international students with non-Japanese nationality possessing residential status in Japan other than "college student."

* Asterisk shows newly added country.

this dual-language educational system, half of APU's faculty body is comprised of professors from abroad.

4: APU's education content and research areas focus on the Asia Pacific region. This feature is clearly and symbolically expressed in the names of the undergraduate school and of the University itself. APU's education focuses on the competitive qualities of

Photo : Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU)



The APU's Japanese students must possess the skills for conducting English language discussions on the same level as the international students

Japanese management. This along with classes on the tea ceremony and other Japanese cultural activities make the University an attractive and worthy option for students all over the world.

In this way, APU's undergraduate school provides an authentic international education never before seen in Japan. It has been in operation for three years and is just now entering its fourth.

(1) Progress within APU: Reforms and their Effects

What exactly has APU experienced in its three years of operation?

First, APU's student body is comprised of international students hailing from countries and regions all over the world, resulting in a campus boasting a degree of diversity seen in no other Japanese university. (Table 1) APU students currently come from 66 countries and regions (as of April 2003).

The primary factor that attracts this great number of international students is the ability to attend lectures presented in English. Although there are other contributing factors, lectures remain the most essential part of any university education. The phenomenon observed at APU would never have arisen had its lectures not been accessible to students from around the world. Thus, through instituting its system of English lan-

guage lectures, APU is altering the composition of international students coming to study in Japan.

Second, the fact that half of the student body comes from abroad helps to promote mutual intellectual stimulation and understanding. Many international students have clearly defined goals for the future and possess a strong drive to pursue their studies. Above all, this situation creates a stimulus for the University's Japanese students, fostering the development of internationally-minded individuals and helping to bring forth a genuine desire to learn at a level that is hard to find at other institutions.

Third, the fact that half of the faculty body also comes from abroad provides additional mutual intellectual stimulation. The Japanese professors in particular are greatly motivated by this educational system. In many cases, the professors from abroad possess knowledge of effective educational methods that the Japanese professors have not had the opportunity to study.

Fourth, the enthusiasm shown by students toward learning about the postwar management systems initiated by Japanese companies and Japanese culture in general encourage the Japanese students and faculty to re-examine the world's assessment of things that are uniquely Japanese.

Fifth, the University has introduced unique systems of class credits and aca-

demeric merit awards that have never been fully realized at other Japanese universities. In particular, APU operates a system that puts half the tuition fees toward registered credits decided on by the students themselves. This system raises the intensity shown by the students toward their studies and by the professors toward their classes in a way never before seen at a Japanese university.

(2) Looking Toward Future Challenges

APU has shown relatively good progress over the three years since its establishment. So far, it has attracted students driven to learn about Japan and the Asia Pacific region from 66 countries and regions around the world. What challenges await the University in the future?

First, amidst escalating competition, the University must first successfully attract bright students from abroad. This task remains the APU's biggest challenge. Although APU is a newcomer among Japanese universities, it has thus far tackled this challenge with relative success. Yet, the global competition for attracting excellent students will surely intensify in the future. The question is, will APU – the first Japanese university to seriously venture into the international arena – be able to continue advancing on its path?

Furthermore, the University must work to attract Japanese students with high proficiency in English. As APU continues to enroll international students with high English proficiency, and in order for the University to be able to continue attracting such students, it must ensure that the other half of the student body – the Japanese students – are at a comparable skill level. It is vital that APU strives to enroll Japanese students who possess the skills for conducting English language discussions on the same level as the international students. **UJI**

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