

# ***Building an International Standard University***

## ***– The Challenges Facing Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University –***

By *Sakamoto Kazuichi*

### **I. Cultivation of Human Resources**

In April 2000 the Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) opened in the city of Beppu in Oita Prefecture. The special characteristics of this university include the fact that half of the student body comprises foreign students and the fact that lectures are held in two languages, English and Japanese. It is the first full-fledged international standard university in Japan.

The APU was established through large-scale public-private cooperation with Ritsumeikan, one of the leading schools in Japan, receiving, for example, a site and subsidies for the construction of facilities from two local governments, Oita Prefecture and the city of Beppu. This is also one of the main characteristics of the university.

Generally speaking, the motivation for opening Ritsumeikan APU came down to two points. First, under the recognition that the new 21st century will be the Asia-Pacific age, it was realized that there was a need to build a new stronghold to develop human resources capable of supporting this new age in the Asia-Pacific region. Second, it was realized that there was a need to attempt a breakthrough in the internationalization of Japanese universities, which at present are very much lagging in this respect.

As shown by the fact that the name of the university includes the concept of the Asia-Pacific, the opening of the APU carried with it a clear recognition of the coming 21st century and of the issues involved. This is a major feature of the university.

Many people share the common awareness that the 21st century will be an era of full-fledged internationalization and globalization that go way beyond the levels we have experienced so far. At the same time, however, looking more specifically at this trend,

we see that the development of the Asia-Pacific region, where about 60% of the world's population reside, will be the driving force behind global internationalization in the 21st century. In other words, we are entering the "Asia-Pacific age." Furthermore, we believe that people living in the region now are required to build this age through their own efforts, wisdom and cooperation.

However, when trying to build the sustainable and peaceful development of the Asia-Pacific region with our own strength in the 21st century, the biggest problem, needless to say, will be the cultivation of young people in the region who can actually support the region's development. As a higher education institution in Japan in the 21st century, the Ritsumeikan APU hopes to positively contribute toward the solution of this problem. This

understanding of the age and the issues involved lies behind the concept of the university.

In order to tackle such problems, the APU has proclaimed three principles and missions: (1) freedom, peace and humanism; (2) international mutual understanding; and (3) the future creation of the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, in order to realize these principles and missions, the university specifically has set three issues: (1) the cultivation of human resources in the Asia-Pacific region; (2) the establishment of Asia-Pacific studies; and (3) cooperation with industrial circles and the community.

### **II. Internationalizing Japanese Universities**

The APU also hopes to make a bold

Photo: The Ritsumeikan APU



*Students from 47 countries learn at APU*

breakthrough in tackling the university reforms, especially the issue of internationalization, that Japanese universities are facing today.

The environment surrounding Japanese universities has changed greatly in recent years. The rapid decline of Japan's 18-year-old population is having a serious impact on university education and university business, and responses to this problem have been moving into top gear since last year.

Together with these changes in the domestic environment, however, I believe that changes in the international environment surrounding universities should be of even more serious concern to university-related people in Japan.

First, the choice of school advancement by talented human resources in the Asian region, which is the central catchment area for the Ritsumeikan APU, is rapidly becoming more fluid and internationalizing. Leading universities in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe are becoming more positive about acceptance. Also, in response to this situation, governments and leading universities in Asian countries and territories are all setting about implementing large-scale reforms.

In Japan also, university reform is now proceeding at a rapid pace. In this international environment, however, the presence of Japanese universities remains weak. If the situation continues, more talented people from Asia will choose universities in regions other than Asia. And in the not too distant future, this trend will envelop Japanese senior high school students, too. It is anticipated that they also will come to think about their school advancement options on a global level. In these circumstances, the status of Japanese universities in the world again is coming into question.

Second, centered on innovations in information technology and biotechnology, scientific and technological research frontiers are developing at an amazing speed and embracing not only the natural sciences but also social and cultural sciences. Against this back-

ground, the appraisal of universities is also changing rapidly according to the extent to which they are able to keep up with these new research themes. The leading universities of the world are tackling various organizational reforms and organizational restructuring connected with the new science and technology and its application. Furthermore, they are actively carrying out reforms of their education systems (including undergraduate and postgraduate studies) in order to accept young people capable of responding to these advanced issues.

If Japanese universities are to raise their status in the world from now on, first of all, more than anything else, they must urgently assert their features in this international competitive environment and solidify their foundations.

### III. Urgent Establishment of International Standard University Education

Amid this changing international environment, in order for them to ensure international trust and evaluation, it is necessary for Japanese universities to urgently establish an international standard of university education and research and to build organizational and systematic conditions that enable free exchange with other universities around the world.

On this point, it is especially urgent to establish international system compatibility for university education. The fact that the international competitiveness and international standard of universities has increasingly come to be seen as a problem in Japan recently is very significant. In this case, the problem is often seen as concerning the research capabilities of Japanese universities. But the issue of the educational capabilities of Japanese universities is seldom discussed in its entirety.

However, the problem of the research capabilities of Japanese universities goes hand in hand with the problem of their educational capabilities. Japanese universities must urgently boost their educational capabilities and thereby build universities that are international-

ly attractive and an environment that attracts promising human resources from around the world. It is precisely such an educational environment, where varied and promising persons gather, that will create the conditions for supporting Japan's research standards in the future.

For this purpose, first of all, it is necessary to rebuild the educational system in Japanese universities into one that is open and has international compatibility. And then, from this perspective, it is necessary to show the international attraction and human resource development capabilities of Japanese universities to the world.

In order to establish this international compatibility of Japanese university education, one of the most basic conditions, needless to say, is the internationalization of the language used in university education. There is general agreement that a university education environment that depends solely on the Japanese language greatly obstructs this international compatibility and openness. So Japanese universities first of all must tackle the reorganization of their educational systems and teaching staff composition from this point.

### IV. Establishment of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

The Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, which opened in the city of Beppu in Oita Prefecture in April 2000, is fully aware of these changes in the international environment surrounding universities and its role as a Japanese higher educational institution in the 21st century, which has been described as the "age of the Asia-Pacific." The APU represents the most pioneering attempt by a Japanese university to respond to the situation.

The APU has arranged the following new mechanisms that have never before been attempted by a Japanese university.

#### (1) 50% Domestic Students, 50% International Students

The most important factor is the APU's target of accepting half of its

students from overseas. That is to say, the student body should comprise 50% Japanese students and 50% foreign students. Since there are 800 students in a school year at the APU, this means that 400 students per school year, or 1,600 over four school years, will come to the APU campus from abroad. This 50-50 ratio of Japanese and foreign students is the biggest characteristic of the APU, and it symbolizes the international and innovative character of the university.

When the concept of the APU was first revealed, observers often spoke about the difficulty of realizing such a mechanism. But we related persons at Ritsumeikan made efforts in that direction, because we believed that the *raison d'être* for establishing this university lay precisely in the realization of a "multicultural" educational environment through this setup.

As a result, we have been able to make a smooth start, just about achieving our targets for the first fiscal year, fiscal 2000. At present, although still in its first fiscal year, the APU has 420 foreign students studying alongside about 480 Japanese students.

Moreover, our goal for the fourth year was to have foreign students from 50 countries or territories around the world, but in the first fiscal year, we are already close to our target, achieving 47.

We believe that the creation of this "multicultural" educational environment will also serve as a major stimulus toward the solution of various problems facing Japanese universities today, such as the loss of enthusiasm for study and the decline of basic academic ability among students. Indeed, even in the brief period since the APU's opening in April, it has been observed that the great zeal for study and the lively activity of foreign students are exerting an extremely positive influence on the Japanese students' attitude toward study.

Various countermeasures are being advocated for the solution of the problems facing Japanese universities today. Regarding this point, I believe that, more than anything else, it is necessary to make the educational environ-



Photo : The Ritsumeikan APU

*The APU aims for a "multicultural" educational environment*

ment fundamentally more international and more multicultural.

### *(2) English and Japanese Dual-Language System*

In practice, it can be said that basically the characteristics of the various mechanisms at the APU stem naturally from the materialization of the concept of "50% Japanese students, 50% foreign students."

First of all, the APU adopts a dual-language system in which lectures are held in English and Japanese. At present, since exceeding the 50,000 level, the number of foreign students in Japan has stagnated in the 50,000 range. One of the main reasons lies in the problem of the study environment at Japanese universities, which require preliminary study of the Japanese language. Students in Asia who aspire to study abroad already have attained considerable mastery of the English language. However, students who wish to study at Japanese universities are forced to consume extra energy, time and money on preliminary study of the Japanese language. If Japanese universities offered an English-language educational sys-

tem, then without a doubt even more talented young people, not only from Asia but from around the world, would approach Japanese universities for their studies.

The development of APU's dual-language educational system, with lectures held in both English and Japanese, is aimed at fundamentally remedying the restrictions faced by Japanese universities today caused by their Japanese-language educational system. Under our system, as long as students have ability in either English or Japanese at the time of admission, they are able to take regular lectures at the university. And then in the first two years of the study system students are given basic academic ability and language training so that they are later able to take lectures in either language. As a result, it is much easier for foreign students to approach the APU.

This dual-language educational system through English and Japanese at the APU also has significance in greatly expanding the opportunities for exchange students from universities in English-speaking countries, such as the United States, Canada, the Oceanic

countries and Britain. Already the University of British Columbia in Canada and American University in the United States, which already have strong exchange student links with Ritsumeikan, are actively preparing an exchange student system with the APU, because they realize that the opportunities for overseas study at Ritsumeikan, which until now have been greatly restricted by the need for Japanese language proficiency, have been vastly expanded by the adoption of this dual-language system.

### (3) Foreign Teaching Staff Ratio of 50%

In order to support the educational system in this international and "multi-cultural" environment, naturally a fundamental international flavor is also required in the composition of the teaching staff. Our idea was that since the ratio of domestic students and foreign students is 50% - 50%, we also want half of the teaching staff to be foreign.

In order to realize this target, we dropped the conventional method of advertising for teachers based on experience and instead, using the Internet, sent our advertisements out to the whole world. The response that we received from countries and territories around the world far exceeded our expectations.

As a result, approximately half of the teaching staff of 105 persons is foreign, and moreover the foreign staff have 17 nationalities, making a very colorful team indeed.

### (4) Livelihood Support for Foreign Students

At present, the number of foreign students in Japan is stagnant in the 50,000 range. One more reason for this stalemate, needless to say, lies in the problem of living expenses and living conditions in Japan. The high cost of living in Japan greatly restricts the opportunities for foreign students to come to Japan, especially students from Asian countries. Unless some kind of fundamental measures are taken to tackle this situation, it will be impossible to attract

the large number of foreign students that the APU aims for.

In order to solve this problem, the APU, with special understanding and support from a large number of companies in the Japanese business world, has established an original scholarship system for foreign students. Centered on this scholarship system, and also including public assistance from the central and local governments and assistance from private organizations, approximately 70% of foreign students at the APU now receive some kind of economic support.

Another livelihood problem for foreign students in Japan concerns accommodation. On its campus the APU has a special dormitory for foreign students called the AP House, and at present all first-year foreign students, upon arrival in Japan, stay in this AP House in principle.

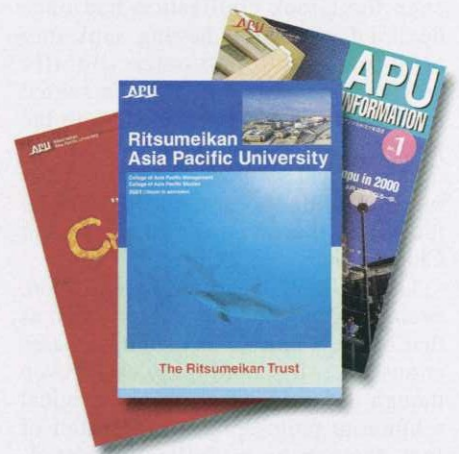
In their second year, however, students have to move out and find accommodation in the local community. Therefore, good relations between the university and the local community are extremely important. The university is a member of the local community. Generally speaking, the university will not be able to properly achieve its objectives without the trust and affection of the local community.

This factor is especially important in the operations of a university like the APU, which has a large number of foreign students. The reason is that support from the local community is an extremely important condition for foreign students, who bring a diversity of cultures with them, to gain a high level of satisfaction in their student life in Japan. And this degree of satisfaction with life in the local community rebounds directly as international trust and valuation of the university and local community and, in turn, of Japanese society itself.

So, we can say that the international character and the local character of the university really are two sides of the same coin. And in order to increase the local character of the university, it is necessary for the university to make contributions to the local community in a variety of ways.

## V. Conclusion

For Ritsumeikan and for myself personally, the project to establish the APU has gone far beyond the scope of our previous experience. I myself have been involved in many reform projects at Ritsumeikan University since the 1980s, and I have had the chance to play a responsible role. But this project to establish the APU has been a heavier



APU pamphlets are written in both English and Japanese

job than any of these other projects. And for that very reason, it has been a very worthwhile and rewarding one.

However, the APU has only just started. The real job of university education comes from now on. With the further support and guidance of a wide range of people both in Japan and overseas, I intend to bring this first international university in Japan to completion, thereby hopefully contributing through this APU project to the creation of a new image of the university in the 21st century.

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