

U.S. Image Lures Students

By Takahiro Takesue

The students sit huddled together, their desks arranged in a "U", their eyes intent on the female American instructor. The expressions on their faces still show traces of childhood. There are about 30 students in the class, two-thirds of them gaily dressed young women. The administrator of this Japanese affiliate of an American university, located in Tokyo, looked relieved as he told me, "These are new students who entered this year. They seem to have finally adjusted to classes held in English."

There was good reason for his relief. The number of students going to the school office to ask for stomach medicine was finally decreasing. Faced for the first time with a curriculum taught completely in English, some of these students suffered from stress and culture shock, and were continually having stomach trouble. After a few months, they had become accustomed to the English experience.

This school, established in Tokyo's Kanda-Surugadai area where there is a concentration of well-known universities, does not look at all like a typical Japanese university. The school building resembles a fancy apartment house. If there were no sign in front to identify it, it might completely escape notice. The school does not, of course, have a large campus. If one did not know that it was the Japanese campus of an American university, one might mistake it for a language school.

This affiliated school opened in 1989, and has an enrollment of 140 students. When the students complete the intensive English course and the liberal arts program, they will be able to progress to the main campus in the United States. Meanwhile, as they pursue that goal, classes held in English from morning to night await them. The tuition fee is ¥1.2 million (\$9,230 at the rate of ¥130/\$) per year, about the same as that of a private Japanese liberal arts college.

The students' goal is to complete the courses taught in Japan as quickly as possible, and to move on to study at the main

campus in the United States. At least, that is ostensibly their goal. But unfortunately the likelihood of the students' dreams being realized to an extent commensurate with their investment (actually, their parents' investment) is very slim.

The administrator told us that "since this is only the second year we have been open, no one has yet moved on to the main campus in the United States." And how many students have dropped out? "I think we've lost about 20 students. Why? Well, there has been some mention of health problems..."

Reputation lacking

At that point, the administrator seemed to be at a loss for words. After all, if he told us the real reasons, then he would be revealing the real state of affairs at the school. Instead, he presented us with an eloquent exposition of the time-honored tradition and the excellence of the main campus in the United States. His speech was an exercise in futility, since this school does not have any formal connection with its United States affiliate.

Japanese campuses of American universities began to appear in 1982, the first to open being Temple University Japan. Then, after a hiatus, their numbers began to increase around 1989. In April and May of 1990, about 14 campuses opened. At present, there are said to be at least 30, mainly in Tokyo and Osaka, with several more planning to open next year and thereafter. So, most of the Japanese campuses of American universities have come onto the scene during the last two years.

The boom in such schools was spurred by a Japan-U.S. trade meeting held in Tokyo in 1986 for the purpose of expanding bilateral trade. The meeting decided that one way of alleviating Japan-U.S. trade friction was to attract American universities to Japan. However, it is difficult to pronounce this idea a success

since, with only a few exceptions, these Japanese affiliates have not acquired a good reputation.

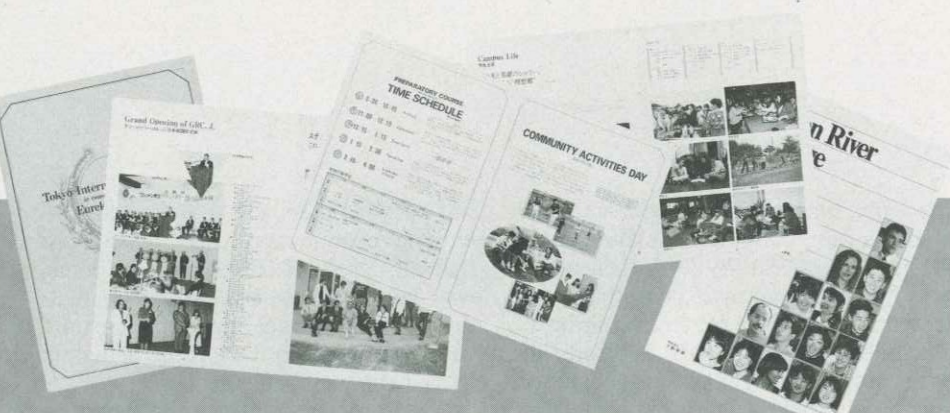
Comments like the following have been heard: "Classes are held in one room of a building, and their content is similar to that of courses offered at English conversation schools," or "The brochure stated that there would be foreign instructors, but what they actually have is Japanese instructors teaching in Japanese," and "Most of the foreign instructors are people without any teaching experience, standing in front of a class for the first time." There was even one instance in Osaka where the description of a school's curriculum, given to students prior to enrollment, was claimed by students to be so far removed from reality that students sued the school.

What has brought about all this confusion? One cause is the type of management overseeing the operation of these schools. There are several categories of partners of American universities operating in Japan: local governments, operators of specialty schools and ordinary companies.

Counting those which have not yet opened, there are eight schools operated under the auspices of local governments. They are located in places such as Niigata, Fukushima and Okayama.

The private companies running these campuses are very diverse. Among the operators are an educational corporation which runs about 10 specialty schools, and companies which run English-language schools and swimming schools. There are also hospital owners, companies in education-related businesses, manufacturers of road signs and politicians operating these affiliated schools. And, surprisingly, one school is operated by a company which runs a golf course. The majority of the operators of these





affiliated schools have no connection with education. One operator is the owner of a wedding hall. He gave the following ludicrous reason for his involvement in running an affiliated school, without the slightest hesitation: "Japanese wedding halls are busy on Saturdays and Sundays. Since there is a lot of slack time on weekdays, we thought we'd try our hand at running one of these schools."

In Japan, the cultural education business, which runs "culture schools" intended for housewives, is now a big business. The Japanese affiliates of American universities are another profitable cultural business which they have zeroed in on. An educational analyst presents his criticism of this situation: "These schools are charging tuition fees of as much as ¥1.2 million or more for course content on the level of a language school. Is this appropriate behavior for an educational organization?"

Good partners

Local governments are also good partners for American universities. Affiliated schools have opened in regions such as Akita and Fukushima, where population is sparse, and there is no industrial base. Governments of cities and towns in the regions had good reason to take an interest in Japanese campuses of American universities.

During the past five years, the economic gap between Tokyo and other regions has widened considerably, because people, goods, money and information have accumulated in Tokyo. One of the effects of all this on the capital has been skyrocketing land prices. Meanwhile, the concentration on Tokyo has eroded the economic bases of other regions. Faced with atrophying regions, local govern-

ments hoped that establishing Japanese campuses of American universities would help ameliorate this situation. They would attract educational organizations and thereby draw young people away from Tokyo to these regions. This would be the quickest way to revitalize the regions.

The Koriyama campus of Texas A&M University, which opened in May 1990, was established under the auspices of Koriyama City in Fukushima Prefecture. Koriyama is a little more than an hour away from Tokyo by Shinkansen bullet train. Koriyama City invited Texas A&M to open a campus in the hope that it would become the nucleus of the research and academic complex that the city is now planning. At present, the school has 69 students and eight instructors, all of whom are on assignment from the main university. There are approximately 15 students in each class, in keeping with the "select few" system.

The school's administrator, Masayuki Nagai, told me proudly that "once the students have completed the intensive English course, they can advance to the main curriculum. All curricula are exactly the same as those taught at the main campus."

But when asked about the future his tone changed. The school has not attracted the number of students anticipated. He continued: "We have a great deal of trouble recruiting students. The school's budget is limited, so we are unable to spend a great deal on advertising. Recruiting involves a lot of legwork on our part. We have only one full-time recruiter. The rest is done by several of our staff members, who visit high schools in Fukushima Prefecture and neighboring prefectures. But, perhaps because of inadequate public relations, we have a hard time getting people to understand the

nature of a Japanese affiliated school."

The Koriyama campus of Texas A&M charges an enrollment fee of ¥140,000 per student, and annual tuition of ¥1.4 million. Since there are only 69 students, a simple calculation reveals that the school has an income of only about ¥100 million (nearly \$770,000). This makes management difficult. The school facility is a temporary one. The land was provided by Koriyama City, and the school building, constructed by a private company, is rented. The school plans to build a campus within the research and academic complex in around 1994-1995. However, if it continues to have difficulty in recruiting students, the new campus project will be endangered.

"Our desire is to have all our students progress to the main campus in the United States. If that can be accomplished, then our school's reputation will improve, and we will be able to attract more students. If we cannot, then the construction of our new building will be in jeopardy," commented Nagai.

Students' attitudes

The Japanese affiliated schools use a variety of methods to recruit students. Rio Grande University's Japanese affiliate, which opened this year, ran a massive advertising campaign, with television commercials and advertising posters in trains and subways. As a result, the school succeeded in recruiting more than 1,000 students, to the envy of other such schools. The enrollment at most of these affiliated schools is 100 to 200 students. Those schools' reaction to the number of students recruited by the Rio Grande University affiliate must have been one of amazement. The expensive advertising campaign paid off.

To Japanese students, the affiliated schools all seem to be the same. All their catalogues emphasize how wonderful the school campus is, and extol the tradition and the superior staff of the American university. Thus, the students have little basis on which they can make a choice. Students make their decisions according to the number of advertisements appearing on television and in magazines.

The affiliates which have extensive financial resources are well aware of this fact. A spokesman for one of the Japanese campuses told us the following: "The Japanese operators which are running these affiliated schools as businesses have to recruit a large number of students. If they can collect a year's worth of tuition from a student, it doesn't matter to them if he drops out later on. They have made their profit."

Every affiliated school makes lofty claims about "nurturing international citizens," but the real purpose of the operators is to make money. But the problems with the Japanese affiliates are not entirely the fault of the Japanese partners of the American universities. There are also problems with the attitudes of the Japanese students.

Recently, students of these affiliated schools have begun to frequent the office of Yoko Sakae, a consultant on foreign study. Most of them complain that their dreams have been shattered. But Sakae takes a harsh view toward these students. "It is true that some of these schools are simply terrible, but there are many more problems with the students' attitudes than there should be."

Sakae told me one family's story. The father is an ordinary salaried employee, and the family lives in the provinces. The daughter wanted to study in the United States after graduating from high school. But her parents were reluctant to send her so far away to study, and tried to persuade her to enter the local Japanese campus of an American university. The daughter abandoned her dream of studying abroad, but refused to enroll in the local affiliated school. In her opinion, the local campus was absolutely *dasai*, a word young Japanese people use to describe something that is unfashionable. The daughter ended up enrolling at one of the affiliated schools in Tokyo.

Sakae regrets that "the students make their decisions about where to study abroad and which Japanese affiliate to attend according to 'brand name,' just as if they were buying Louis Vuitton or Cartier products."

In Japan, there is more and more interest each year in studying abroad. Up until

the early 1980s, about 14,000 Japanese students were studying at American universities every year. By 1989, their numbers had increased to 25,000. But Sakae feels that most of the students desiring to study abroad "simply want to be able to speak English. Any other consideration, such as what field of study they would like to pursue, is secondary." And there are plenty of students at the Japanese campuses who are brand name-oriented. In fact, it is they who are most likely to enroll at these affiliated schools.

There is another aspect which must be considered if one is to obtain an understanding of the Japanese affiliated schools. That is the scholastic ability of the students who want to enroll at these schools. Even an objective analysis of their scholastic ability shows that it lags behind that of students entering Japanese universities.

Academic level

When there were still only a few of these Japanese affiliated schools, many members of the student body were self-supporting adults or graduates of leading Japanese universities. They had enrolled at these schools because they wanted to study law, economics or politics abroad later. But these affiliated schools had the same sort of curriculum one might have found at an English conversation school.

This was not surprising, since the majority of the students at these schools had failed entrance examinations for Japanese universities. Looking for an emergency refuge, they enrolled at the Japanese affiliated schools. Unlike ordinary Japanese universities, these schools had no entrance examination requirement to speak of. And courses are geared to the students' academic level. Students who had already obtained a bachelor's degree could not possibly have been satisfied with that. They soon abandoned the Japanese affiliated schools, and found their own means to study abroad.

Some of the operators of Japanese campuses established their schools explicitly to attract students who had failed Japanese university entrance examinations. Starting next year, children of post-

war baby-boomers will be taking college entrance examinations. The prediction is that each year 400,000 or more students will fail examinations. Unfortunately, those who cannot get into a Japanese university may, as a last resort, be drawn to the Japanese affiliated schools.

A spokesman for one of the Japanese affiliates disclosed his real motives when he told me that "I expect that we will have an easier time recruiting students if the entrance examinations for Japanese universities become more demanding."

Among the Japanese campuses there are, of course, some which have first-rate curricula. And there are some gifted students. What is unfortunate is that there are so few enthusiastic educators and students. However, operators who continue to run affiliated schools only to make a profit will eventually be weeded out. This is because, several years from now, the population of young people aged around 18 will decrease.

But these operators are not terribly worried. Those who had buildings put up to open schools will not suffer any hardship. Even if they pull out of the business, they can make ample profits by converting the school building to apartments or offices. Even more to the advantage of these operators is that, at present, the campuses operate under the same conditions as private cram schools or specialty schools. The Ministry of Education has adopted a wait-and-see policy toward the problems of the Japanese affiliates. It is easy to establish a Japanese campus, and just as easy to close one down.

Sakae seems irritated when she says that "the people entering the Japanese affiliated schools should be aware that at best they are pioneers and at worst lemmings. Their only hope is to study as hard as they can, at their own initiative." But for the time being, it doesn't seem likely that her words will make much of an impression on brand name-conscious Japanese young people.

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