

G30 and its Implications for Japan

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Abstract

In 2009, the Japanese government, led by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, launched the Project for Establishing Core Universities for Internationalization (Global 30, G30). The project aims to enhance the internationalization of Japanese universities. Thirteen institutions were designated as pilot universities for the project. Last year, when the governing party changed to the Democratic Party of Japan, the budget for the project was reduced. Despite the budget cut, the thirteen universities seem determined to achieve their original goals. The new government also publicized its “21 national strategic projects for the revitalization of Japan for the 21st century,” which includes the G30 Project. This paper reviews the international context of G30, and shows that, from an international perspective, it is not an isolated initiative, and that it is vital for the Japanese government and the selected universities to continue their efforts towards internationalization. It also analyses the possible impacts that G30 may have on the future strategies of Japanese universities.

[Keyword] G30, Plan for 300,000 Exchange Students, courses offered in English, study abroad for Japanese students, internationalizing universities

1. G30 Project

In 1983 the Japanese government announced its “plan to accept 100,000 international students.” The target number of 100,000 international students was reached in 2003. As of May 1, 2008, the total number of international students in Japan was 123,829 ⁽¹⁾. Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda announced a new plan to increase the number of international students to 300,000 in January 2008 ⁽²⁾ in an effort to increase Japan’s international accessibility. The Japanese government, led at the time by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, launched the Project for Establishing Core Universities for Internationalization (Global 30, G30) in 2009. The project aims to increase the number of international students in Japan to 300,000 by 2020 by systematically implementing measures to improve their situation: from assistance prior to arrival, to help with searching for employment after graduation. The project represents a new endeavor to internationalize Japanese universities. In July 2009, thirteen universities were designated as pilot universities for the project. The selected universities submitted their proposals to implement the measures detailed below, and proposed their own strategies for the G30 Project. MEXT requested that the universities include the following points in their proposals:

- 1) Development of a system which enables students to obtain academic degrees entirely in English.
- 2) Recruitment of international teaching staff to conduct lectures in English.
- 3) Recruitment of specialist support staff for international students and international faculty members who cannot speak Japanese.
- 4) Implementation of a system which enables international students to apply for university admission without visiting Japan.
- 5) Establishment of overseas centers for the recruitment of international students.

When the Democratic Party of Japan was elected to government last year, the budget for the project was reduced from 4.5 billion to 3.5 billion yen. In spite of the budget cut, the thirteen selected universities seem determined to achieve their original goals. The new government also publicized its *21 national strategic projects for the revitalization of Japan for the 21st century*. G30 is included as one of the projects.

This paper reviews the international context of G30, and shows that, from an international perspective, it is not an isolated initiative, and that it is vital for the Japanese government and the selected universities to continue their efforts towards internationalization. It also analyses the possible impacts that G30 may have on the future strategies of Japanese universities.

2. The Background to G30

There are several reasons why the Japanese government is implementing the G30 Project ⁽³⁾. The reasons can be divided into domestic and international factors.

2.1 Demographic Change

One of the major reasons for the G30 project is the demographic change which is occurring in Japan. Japan has a rapidly aging society. It has one of the lowest birth rates in the world, and its population decreased in 2005 for the first time in recorded history. The number of births in 2009 was 1.07 million, compared to an annual birth rate of over two million in the 1950s. The 18 year-old population decreased from 2.04 million in 1990 to 1.24 million in 2008. During this period, the ratio of students entering universities after graduation from high school increased from 36.3% in 1990 to 49.1% in 2008 and the number of new students entering universities increased from 492,340 to 607,159. At the same time, the number of universities increased from 507 to 778 and the capacity of universities increased more than the student numbers. This has resulted in a situation whereby prospective students are certain to find a university which will accept them, even though it may not be their first choice. About 38% of private universities in Japan were reportedly unable to fulfill their capacities due to the severe competition to recruit students in 2010 ⁽⁴⁾. Some Japanese universities which are relatively new and have not yet established a reputation often have to recruit students internationally in order to continue their operations.

The top universities in Japan do not face such difficulties domestically, because of their reputation and,

in case of national universities, relatively low tuition fees. However, they are facing severe competition for talented students, especially graduate students, in the international market place. If Japanese universities were to offer more courses in English, their level of international competitiveness would be greatly increased.

2.2 Business Environment

As with all countries throughout the world, the progress of globalization is effecting changes in Japanese society. In his book of the same name, Thomas Friedman asserted that “the world is flat ⁽⁵⁾”. This is a metaphor to describe the way that, in terms of commerce, modern technology such as Information Technology (IT) and the Internet enables developing countries to compete equally with developed countries. Indian corporations, for example, are now developing software and offering call center services for US corporations. Globalization is now spreading all over the world and Japan is no exception. The Japanese government has recognized the necessity of coping with globalization by fostering international human resources ⁽⁶⁾. Japanese universities must adjust themselves to this increasingly globalized environment.

According to the Global Brand Growth Ranking, Japanese companies are losing their positions as top brand producers ⁽⁷⁾. The Japanese public in general is losing its confidence in society after two full decades of economic stagnation. The economies of the other Asian nations are catching up with Japan. China now has the largest number of patent registrations in the world. Its biggest corporations have larger capitalization than their Japanese peers. There is a high demand by Japanese companies for good international students. Due to the diminishing domestic market in Japan, Japanese companies are having to transfer their operations to other countries in the world. It is necessary for Japanese universities to respond to this situation by enhancing their capacity to educate international talent.

The courses offered by universities under the G30 Project would enable Japan to fulfill such expectations. Kyoto University, for example, offers courses in civil infrastructure management, environmental management and an MBA course in international project management. Such courses will provide companies with the international and domestic human resources that they need. This is one important reason why the G30 Project was launched.

2.3 Macro-Economic Environment

Well-known economist Yukio Noguchi has suggested one possible way to revitalize Japanese society. According to Noguchi, post industrial society is in need of a different type of growth to that which Japan has been seeking ⁽⁸⁾. He asserts that the Japanese industrial structure is too dependent on manufacturing, and that Japan should shift its industrial focus to service industries. He also asserts that Japan’s education system, in which most students do not advance beyond the undergraduate level, is not responding to the needs of the emerging global environment ⁽⁹⁾. Lack of foreign language ability is also a problem for Japanese society in the globalized world. As foreign investment in Japan stagnates, it is becoming increasingly important for Japan to improve its English language education. “The superiority of the English language as the global language has become decisively clear in the internet age. For a high grade service industry, language is vital ⁽¹⁰⁾.”

Noguchi's concerns are widely shared by business people in Japan and the G30 Project is a response to such concerns. The Japanese government proposed increasing the number of highly-skilled international personnel in Japanese universities in order to globalize higher education in its "21 National Strategic Projects for Revitalization of Japan for the 21st Century" ⁽¹¹⁾. As envisioned by the national strategic plan, the internationalization of Japanese universities will help to revitalize Japanese society by providing more ambitious young talent who can initiate new business ventures.

3. International Environment

The G30 Project is not being undertaken in isolation from educational initiatives elsewhere the world, and it will contribute to the regionalization of higher education in Asia.

Countries in which the mother tongue is English, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand have historically attracted international students. They have a great advantage in the fact that their native language is English, in addition to strong economic reasons for their attracting international students.

In Europe, the concept of the European Higher Education Area has been promoted for a considerable time. As early as 1955, senior ministers of the European Coal and Steel Community met and discussed the establishment of European Universities ⁽¹²⁾. The Erasmus Programme, in which almost 1% of the European student population takes part, was launched in 1987, and the Bologna Process was launched in 1999. It is noteworthy that the Bologna Process is not actually being implemented by the EU Commission, but by the European University Association (EUA) ⁽¹³⁾. The process was initiated by the EU Commission, but the responsibility for implementing the goals of the Bologna Process in each country lies with the respective academic institutions, student organizations and professional bodies. With the progress of the Bologna Process many educational reforms have been implemented in Europe, such as the adoption of a credit transfer system and a common way of describing qualifications (diploma statement). The EU Commission is aware that the EU does not have a strong presence in global higher education, and is trying to attract more students, and also increase student mobility within Europe. In 2004 the EU initiated the Erasmus Mundus Programme, which supports student exchange with non-EU countries. The program aims to recruit the best students from around the world. The Bologna Process has affected countries outside the EU. The Australian government put a series of projects into place that may enable Australia to develop "Bologna Compatibility" ⁽¹⁴⁾. The US has also reacted to the Bologna Process, with US Education Secretary Margaret Spellings convening a commission to stimulate a national dialogue on higher education in 2006.

Historically, Asian countries have been known for sending their own students to study abroad, rather than hosting students from other countries. China and India send the largest number of students to study in the US. Korea also sends a significant number of students to the US and other developed countries. Recently, however, these Asian countries have changed their policy, and are trying to receive more international students. The Chinese government has launched an initiative to increase the number of international students

in China to 500,000 by 2020 ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Jane Knight asserted that the internationalization of higher education is also the regionalization of higher education ⁽¹⁶⁾. The G30 Project also has the effect of regionalizing higher education in Asia as the G30 universities try to recruit more Asian students. There is a strong incentive for Asian students to study in Japan because tuition is substantially cheaper than the US or other English speaking countries ⁽¹⁷⁾, and also the similar cultural background in comparison with other developed countries makes it easier for them to adjust to Japan. In the long term, Japan and other Asian countries will develop a two-way movement of students, and the G30 project will facilitate such development. It will also benefit Japanese companies looking for students who can assume leading positions.

4. English as the Language of Instruction

4.1 English as the dominant international language

One of the main aims of the G30 Project is to develop a system whereby students can obtain academic degrees in English. When this idea was proposed at Kyoto University, the question of why we should teach in English in Japan was raised. This is a legitimate question to which the promoters of the G30 Project must provide an adequate answer.

Enever (2009) described the changing situation regarding language education in Europe amid globalization, and Sullivan and Enever (2009) reported the use of English as a teaching language in Swedish higher education. The cases cited by those researchers are very inspiring with regards to the situation in Japan.

Enever described the language shift in Europe from the eighteenth century as follows: "Over a period of 200 years national languages have established a robust role in the cultural identity of most nation states of Europe" ⁽¹⁸⁾. In the midst of globalization, however, certain languages, for example those of Sweden and Malta, are at risk. Europeans are required to use dominant languages such as English, French or German in their daily work, and that may result in the decline of some European languages. English is becoming particularly prevalent, and effectively functions as the principal language of Europe ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Japan's population is approximately 127 million, which is fairly large compared to European countries. It has a long history and its own unique culture. Japanese is not a minor language; it is unlikely to vanish in a matter of centuries. However, Japan will face the same challenges as Enever described regarding Europe, notably the use of English as business language in daily life. The challenges will become more serious when supranational companies begin to play more important roles in Japan. Very recently there have been many news reports in Japan about certain Japanese corporations changing their official language to English. The famous entrepreneur Hiroshi Mikitani, president of the major online shopping company Rakuten Corporation, publicized his decision to adopt English as the official language of Rakuten, replacing Japanese ⁽²⁰⁾. All executives of Rakuten are expected to speak English and the corporation will offer its employees English

lessons. There will be exams for employees and when they do not pass certain levels, they will be excluded from promotion opportunities.

Another example is the Kyocera Corporation, which is one of the most important high tech companies in Kyoto, a city well known as a bastion of Japanese tradition. The Kyocera Corporation announced that their employees should be able to speak English, and that they will be required to take English classes and pass certain examinations ⁽²¹⁾. Recently, the company has also begun to require that its departmental directors can speak two foreign languages.

In view of the fact that English is becoming the global language, it is inevitable that Japanese universities will also be required to teach in both English and Japanese. There is a need for awareness to be raised in Japan regarding the importance of being able to speak at least two, or possibly three, languages. Otherwise, Japan is at risk of losing its competitive edge in the international business and political world.

4.2 English as the language for research in universities

English is becoming the dominant language in the academic world ⁽²²⁾. Most of problems which researchers are tackling have international factors. For example, research on climate change must address the issue as a global phenomenon and the use of English is important for any researcher in that field. The eradication of extreme poverty from the world will require research work on a global scale because the problem should be shared by all countries. The field of molecular cell research also requires collaboration by researchers from all over the world. In this globalized world, researchers can accomplish their aims more effectively by communicating with their peers in other countries, and we need English for this purpose.

We also have to place a greater emphasis on English in both undergraduate and graduate education. Japanese readers of this paper would be surprised by the similarity of the problems discussed by Sullivan and Enever in their analysis of language usage in the Swedish education system to those raised in discussions relating to the G30 Project in Japan. In their study, the quality of teaching was also discussed. When the teaching takes place in English, there are two risks. The first is that teachers cannot teach effectively in their non-native language. The second is that students cannot properly understand what is being taught due to inadequate English ability. Although the English capability of Swedish students is the highest in Europe, this is still a genuine concern there. The English proficiency of the average Swedish student is much higher than that of the average Japanese student, so needless to say, a similar or more serious problem also exists in Japan.

Sweden's Umeå University views internationalization as a method of assuring quality ⁽²³⁾. The Swedish Minister for Education, Research and Culture said that "we need a bilingual policy in the academy. We, in Sweden, are so used to being monolingual that we are having difficulty thinking that there is a place for two languages at our universities."

Some Japanese universities are already conducting bilingual education programs. The International Christian University has long tradition of teaching in both Japanese and English. Akita International

University is now teaching its undergraduate business course entirely in English with very good results. However, with few exceptions, such a radical movement cannot be found at well-established Japanese national and private universities ⁽²⁴⁾. Very similar concerns to those raised in Sweden are being voiced regarding the lectures in English: the quality of lectures has been discussed ⁽²⁵⁾, as has the capability of students to learn in English ⁽²⁶⁾.

Observing these simultaneous movements in Europe and in Japan, it is clear that initiatives such as the G30 Project are not exclusive to Japan. The move towards English becoming the language of education will surely continue, and there is no alternative but to follow this course.

5. Conclusions

This paper's focus has been limited to the necessity and durability of the G30 Project. The G30 Project is not an isolated movement peculiar to Japan. It is being undertaken in parallel with similar initiatives to cope with the globalization of education in other countries and regions of the world.

In which direction will the G30 universities proceed? Japanese students tend to shrink from international experience, and so it is necessary to move forward and create an educational environment which encourages it. A discussion of the efforts required for the internationalization of Japanese students, however, falls outside the scope of this paper. In addition to the G30 Project, the Japanese government hopes to increase Japan's cooperation with China and Korea in the area of higher education. In the long-term, such an initiative will surely contribute to establishing a regional education area in Asia, and to improving the region's research and education quality. The G30 Project in Japan is still facing a great many obstacles. However, it is one of the main initiatives which will open Japan to the rest of world.

Notes

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- (2) Policy Speech at the National Diet on January 18, 2008
- (3) Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) of Japan (2009b), Prime Minister Fukuda explained the reasons for G30's implementation in his speech to the 169th Session of the Diet and MEXT summarized the reasons on its website.
- (4) Nikkei newspaper (2010c)
- (5) Friedman (2006)
- (6) METI (2010)
- (7) Shukan Diamond (2010)
- (8) Noguchi (2010, 274)
- (9) Noguchi (2010, 289)
- (10) Noguchi (2010, 304)
- (11) Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) (2010), Item 8 of "21 National Strategic Projects for Revitalization of Japan for the 21st Century"
- (12) Robertson (2009, 66)
- (13) Robertson (2009, 70)

- (14) Robertson (2009, 71)
- (15) Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2010)
- (16) Knight (2008, 25)
- (17) Knight (2008, 28)
- (18) Enever (2009, 183)
- (19) Enever (2009, 184)
- (20) Nikkei newspaper (2010a)
- (21) Nikkei newspaper (2010b)
- (22) Enever (2009, 187)
- (23) Sullivan (2009, 216)
- (24) Waseda University has been offering an international course in its School of International Studies since 2004.
- (25) Sullivan (2009, 218)
- (26) Sullivan (2009, 220)

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留学生 30 万人計画と我が国の高等教育に持つ意義

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要旨

2009年に自由民主党のもとで日本政府は「留学生30万人計画」(以下、G30)を立ち上げた。計画は日本の大学の国際化を進めるものであり、13の大学が国際化拠点大学として選定をされた。2009年の政権交代により当該予算の削減があったが、13大学はそれぞれの計画を進めつつある。本論文は、G30が国際的に孤立した動きではなく、日本政府や大学にとって高等教育の国際化が必然的な動きであること、英語での授業導入に伴う問題点など非英語圏の大学が抱える共通の問題を持つこと、そしてG30の持つインパクトが日本の大学の将来に決定的な意味を持つことを分析する。

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