

Policies for ‘Internationalization’ in the Contemporary Japanese Education System

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Introduction

For the past twenty years ‘Internationalization’ or *kokusaika* has been one of the most often heard buzzwords of the Japanese education system. It has come to be associated with the transformation of a system that was originally developed to serve national developmental needs but is now being faced with the challenges of ‘globalization’. If the education system is changing, what are the ideas and the agenda that lie behind this change? In order to respond to this question, it is the purpose of this article to examine both the declared aims and the practical implementation of the education policies that have been put under the heading ‘internationalization’ by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Before this can be done we must take a closer look at the meaning of this key word.

Definitions

What do people mean when they talk about ‘internationalization’ or *kokusaika*? In either language the term is notoriously ambiguous and open to differing interpretations. On one level it is a very woolly term referring to a vague inter-mingling of people, things and ideas made more widespread at the end of the Twentieth Century by increases in international trade, tourism and migration. Perhaps a start can be made at constructing a more useful definition by contrasting the term ‘internationalization’ with two similar terms: internationalism and globalization.

One dictionary definition of ‘internationalism’ is “the advocacy of a community of interests among nations” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary). As an ideology this is often contrasted with its opposite: nationalism, a belief that the interests of one’s

own nation must always come first – even at the expense of people from other nations. In the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries internationalism became associated with the growth of the global communist movement. The International Working Men’s Association founded by Marx in 1864 became popularly known as the First International and its successors were usually referred to as the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals respectively. The slogan of supporters of this movement was “Workers of all countries unite!” and their anthem was the *Internationale* an originally French revolutionary song that was translated into many languages. The more idealistic members of this movement looked forward to a day when the concept of the nation would be abolished. They believed that nationalism, fascism and imperialism were corrupt ideologies that artificially kept the majority of the people divided against themselves for the benefit of the minority. Perhaps the clearest expression of this idealism in practice was the formation of the international brigades during the Spanish Civil War, units on the Republican side that were composed of men from many countries who wished to fight against the spread of fascism. It should be clear from the above that in its origins internationalism was very much an ideology of the Left. This tradition has been continued by the progressive movements of the second half of the Twentieth Century. Environmentalism, the anti-nuclear movement, organisations for the promotion of respect for human rights and feminism have all presented themselves as international movements. In contrast nationalism is more often associated with the political Right.¹ It is common for right-wing political parties to boost their popular appeal by wrapping themselves in the national flag and presenting themselves as defenders of national sovereignty.

There are many competing definitions of the word globalization. One very good, working definition would go as follows. “Globalization refers to processes whereby social relations acquire relatively distanceless and borderless qualities, so that human lives are increasingly played out in the world as a single place.”² One key difference between globalization and internationalism would be that the former is a process that is taking place (seemingly with a momentum all of its own) whereas the latter is a programme for change that requires people to act as conscious agents of change. Globalization and internationalism are therefore clearly very different phenomena. Clear differences can also be seen when comparing globalization to internationalization. Baylis and Smith make a very useful distinction between the two.

'Internationalization' refers to a process of *intensifying connections between national domains*. . . . Global phenomena can extend across the world at the same time and can move between places in no time; they are in this sense *supraterritorial*. While the patterns of 'international' interdependence are strongly influenced by national-state divisions, the lines of 'global' interconnections often have little correspondence to territorial boundaries. International and global relations can coexist, of course, and indeed the contemporary world is at the same time both internationalized and globalizing. [Emphasis in original.]³

From this comparison it can be seen that the key distinguishing feature of internationalization when compared to either internationalism or globalization is that it is not a process or an ideology that in any way foresees or advocates the abolition or even the diminution of national borders. The sovereignty and identity of the nation state are in no way threatened by the ideas or processes of internationalization.

Policies for Internationalization in the Contemporary Japanese Education System: Underlying Ideology and Practical Implementation

An understanding of the ideas underlying Japanese government policy on internationalization related to education can be gained by reading official statements of policy and by examining how this policy is put into practice. Chapters relating to internationalization usually begin with a statement about the contemporary international situation – a situation that forms the backdrop against which policy is drawn up. The statement in 1992 began with the sentences: "Today, nations in the world are more and more interdependent. If they are to develop together it is necessary that each nation learn about the history, culture, customs and value systems of other nations and strive for mutual understanding."⁴ The statement goes on to stress the important role of exchange and co-operation in the fields of education, culture and sports. In keeping with the above discussion about the meaning of internationalization, it is clear from this statement that the world is a place that is divided between nation-states. They are increasingly dependent on one another but remain separate entities. The 1994 government statement repeats this theme and adds an extra cautionary note about the inherent dangers of the international environment.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War were expected to bring peace and stability to the world. In actuality, however, there have been numerous outbreaks of economic friction and ethnic conflicts. *The international situation surrounding Japan is harsh.* [emphasis added]⁵

This harshness means that Japan must, at the same time that it is striving for ‘mutual understanding’ with other nations, also “make an active international contribution in keeping with its international status”. This phrase is expanded on shortly after by a reference to increased efforts to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of its Official Development Assistance (ODA). Unstated but clearly implied by this kind of language lies the conservative political agenda of promoting Japan as a ‘normal’ country in the world i.e. one that can have a political and diplomatic international role in keeping with its economic power. This has implications for areas of government policy like foreign policy and defence that are not covered by the remit of the education ministry.

As far as educational policy is concerned, the Ministry of Education literature divides internationalization policies into the following five categories.

1. The development of Japanese citizens who can live in the international community
2. Promotion of international exchange and cooperation in education, sports and culture
3. Promotion of student exchange
4. Expansion of Japanese language education for foreigners
5. Improvement of education for Japanese children overseas and children returning from overseas

We will now consider these policies one by one.

1) The development of Japanese citizens who can live in the international community

Policies in this category are aimed at nurturing Japanese citizens who can “earn the trust of the international community”. The presumption behind this statement must be that at present there are sections of the international community that are less than forthcoming with their trust for Japan or its people. Japanese leaders are aware that in international negotiations they sometimes “come across as being ambiguous, hard to understand, untrustworthy or even deceitful.”⁶ This problem be-

came an issue in recent trade frictions with the United States. This has led to a feeling among Japan's bureaucrats and political leaders that there is something lacking in Japan's international image, and now it has fallen to the education system to put this problem right. What specific policies are required for the Japanese to earn the trust that is deemed to be lacking? Policies in this area can be divided in two – those related to a general promotion of 'international understanding', and those related to foreign language acquisition. Official information under the first of these headings tends to be confined to announcements of the total number of university courses with the word 'international' in their title (in fiscal year 1994 there were eighty-two⁷). The second of these headings covers a much more substantial area – indeed it is certainly the area of 'internationalization' that has the biggest direct effect on the education system – and must be considered in more detail.

Over the years, Japanese schooling has received international recognition for its achievements in the teaching of numeracy, literacy and science. In contrast, however, there is one subject area where it has received little praise. In the area of foreign language education the Japanese education system has mostly come in for sustained criticism both at home and abroad. In the West the perception is widespread that Japanese professionals cannot communicate as well in English as those from other developed nations. Foreigners visiting Japan find that even basic English is not widely spoken. It is a frustrating experience for Japanese young people to study English hard for six years of secondary schooling followed by two or four years of higher education only to find at the end of their efforts that they are unable to communicate in even simple conversational English. Japanese people who do succeed at mastering spoken English do so in spite of the formal education system not because of it.

The Japanese government has been aware for some time of the shortcomings of foreign language education and has initiated several policies to try to improve the situation. Because they are aimed at increasing communication and understanding between Japanese people and foreigners the Ministry of Education includes them in its 'internationalization' programme. In the 1980s the main innovation in this area was the creation of the 'Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme'. In 1987, the first year of the programme, 848 graduates from the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia were invited to Japan to further the twin goals of the programme, viz. to improve foreign language teaching (in these early days this was only English) and to "promote international understanding". Most participants on the

programme became AETs, i.e. Assistant English Teachers (this title was later changed to ALT, Assistant Language Teacher, when the programme was expanded to include other foreign languages) working in junior or senior high schools throughout Japan. A minority (about 10%) were employed as CIRs (Coordinators for International Relations) who worked for local government offices in various capacities related to international exchange programmes, translation/interpretation work and foreign language education. In order to create a national centre to co-ordinate the JET programme the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) was set up in the following year. CLAIR's remit was to "assist the implementation of a variety of local authority international exchange policies".⁸ As well as its JET responsibilities and other international exchange work CLAIR also carries out research into local fiscal and administrative systems abroad.

The JET programme is now ten years old. It has expanded fivefold and the number of participating countries has increased.⁹ With the expansion of numbers more and more high schools were able to get a full time foreign assistant teacher (instead of having to rely on infrequent 'one-shot' visits by peripatetic AETs). There is no doubt that in one respect at least the JET programme has been successful. With its emphasis on international exchange and teaching at the local level the programme has been able to provide almost every community in the country – however geographically isolated – with the presence of a foreign national in its midst. This represents a very significant departure from the past. For most of its modern history the vast majority of Japanese citizens have had no personal contact with foreigners. Any contact there was tended to be highly controlled or regulated by the government, and it was not until 1964 that Japanese citizens were allowed to leave the country without needing approval for their trip. Therefore foreigners venturing into Japan's hinterlands often received a reception that they might consider more in keeping with that reserved for visitors from another planet. The expansion of the JET programme means that this 'exoticness' surrounding foreigners has been reduced, if not eliminated altogether.

The success of the JET programme in supplying foreign teachers to remote areas has led to some ambitious claims by its sponsors. One official pamphlet makes the claim that the programme "represents one of the greatest initiatives in the field of human and cultural relations."¹⁰ I remember a speaker at one JET conference asking us to imagine our countries inviting a similarly large number of foreigners to teach in our state school systems. Whilst it is true that the programme, viewed

as one single government policy, is an impressive and far-reaching achievement, it is disingenuous to do so without taking the wider context into account. The fact is that there is no similar programme in a developed western nation for the simple reason that there is no *need* for such a programme. If a school in the USA, the UK, Canada or Australia wishes to improve its foreign language or international studies programme all it needs to do is hire a foreigner either as a full or part time member of staff. If the Japanese government is sincere about wanting to encourage more international exchange why doesn't it make it easier for foreigners to live and work in Japan? One of the reasons for the necessity of the JET programme is that in Japan it is against the law for a local board of education to employ a foreigner as a full time teacher (or for that matter in any other capacity as a local government employee). A centrally controlled initiative to place foreigners into Japan's schools was required because local initiative was always severely constrained. This state of affairs is reinforced by the way that schools are financed in Japan. Local boards of education administer schools, but the purse strings are tightly controlled by the Ministry of Education and by the centralised nature of Japan's system of public finance. If a city board of education decides to employ its own assistant foreign teacher (and some do) it is quite an expensive proposition. It is far easier for the local authority to join in with the nationally subsidised JET system.

Government bureaucrats are interested in expanding international exchange and improving foreign language learning, but only so far as this can be done without sacrificing any of the discretionary powers of the Ministry of Education or local bureaucracies. This centralisation of control means that the government and local boards of education actively *discourage* individual initiatives aimed at furthering foreign language ability or international exchange. The most common example of this problem can be found in stories related by Japanese teachers of English who would like to visit foreign countries in order to improve their own English. National and local government officials acknowledge the vital importance of improving the English ability of Japanese teachers through foreign study and they sponsor many schemes to help a certain number of teachers benefit from this every year¹¹. However, if any teacher wants to travel in their own time and at their own expense they are usually prevented from doing so.¹² As with the centralised textbook authorisation system it seems that education bureaucrats in Japan are unwilling to trust teachers making too many decisions on their own initiative. Therefore, the achievement of the JET programme in bringing a lot of Japanese into face-to-face

contact with foreigners only looks impressive when viewed in the context of a very inflexible environment that stifles international initiatives from individuals.

Bringing foreigners into face-to-face contact with ordinary Japanese people was an important aim of the JET programme, but this was always secondary to the main aim of improving foreign language teaching in schools. Considering the amount of money and effort that have been put into the programme results here have been quite disappointing. Comparative international surveys that flatter Japan's achievements in science and maths make rather embarrassing reading when attention is turned to the teaching of English as a foreign language. In 1997, Japan ranked near the bottom of a table made up of 165 countries that compared national TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores.¹³ Sadly, this dreadful result was typical for recent years. It could be argued that it is still too early to assess the effect of the JET programme on English (and other) language achievement, and that improvements will eventually manifest themselves. However, there are certain structural flaws with the programme that are bound to hinder any progress. Firstly, participants in the JET programme are not required to be language teaching specialists. Typically, new ALTs tend to be young recent graduates with little or no experience of either Japan or language teaching. Since the programme sets a time limit of three years on individual contracts it guarantees the presence of a large number of inexperienced assistant teachers in the classroom at any one time. This would not be a serious problem if the ALTs were working with Japanese teachers of English who know exactly what they are doing in promoting practical, communicative English. However, partly for the reasons mentioned above, Japanese teachers often have problems with their own command of English and with classroom techniques appropriate for teaching communicative English. Even if the Japanese teacher is very good at teaching the kind of English that makes the presence of a native speaker in the classroom more than just an amusing distraction, he or she will often be hamstrung by a system that necessitates the teaching of English, not for communication, but for the passing of paper exams.

In Japan the entrance exam system is the graveyard of communicative English. For teachers, students and parents the overriding importance of English study lies in the importance of English as a subject that comes up in virtually all entrance exams in the Japanese formal education system. Most entrance exams are taken by thousands of candidates and in order to facilitate marking, questions are restricted to those that require short or multiple-choice answers. Also, in the name of fair-

ness and consistency each answer must have a clearly defined correct answer (or a very limited range of correct or acceptable answers). Therefore it is impossible for the people who set the exams to include open-ended questions or questions that require the expression of individual ideas or opinions. Short exam questions therefore tend to be about grammar constructions or vocabulary; longer ones are reading comprehension or translation exercises. American expert on Japanese schools, Thomas Rholen noted in 1983 that the vocabulary required of high school students trying to enter a good university was huge.¹⁴ The situation has, if anything, deteriorated since then. This means that students spend a lot of their 'English study' time memorising lists of words and details of complex grammar structures. No wonder that they regard time spent on spoken English as a trivial distraction. In order to go some way to counter this problem more and more universities have introduced listening comprehension tests into their entrance exams. Unfortunately this encouragement of listening skills without a concomitant stress on speaking has often resulted in the classroom use of the ALT as a human tape recorder whose job is to recite listening comprehension passages. The achievement of a school environment where genuine communication in a foreign language is taught is as far away as ever and will remain so until communication is included in entrance exams. This will never be achieved within the present structure of the entrance exam system.

2) Promotion of international exchange and cooperation in education, sports and culture

The policies under this heading overlap with those policies of the JET programme related to the encouragement of international exchange at the local level. The Japanese government also cooperates with non-government agencies and international organisations to sponsor and encourage a wide variety of exchange programmes in various artistic, educational and sporting fields. The Agency for Cultural Affairs (an agency under the wing of the Ministry of Education) is responsible for the "promotion of International Artistic and Cultural Activities". It is made clear that one of the aims of this activity is "taking Japan's traditional cultural activities into the international arena."¹⁵ One of the consistent themes in Japanese government policies on internationalization is the perceived need to improve Japan's ability to promote itself in the international arena. Japan, it is argued, needs to present a better case for itself in the court of world opinion. One Japanese commentator has made the following point.

“When [Japanese] businesspeople go abroad, they are often asked about such aspects of Japanese culture as traditional performing arts, Zen Buddhism, *ikebana* flower arrangement, and the tea ceremony, but few are able to satisfy the questioner’s curiosity. This is embarrassing. It suggests that our educational system is not teaching students enough about the fundamentals of Japanese tradition. When people go out in the world, they should have a ‘Japanese face’ they can show to others.”¹⁶

In this way government policies in the area of language education and the promotion of cultural events can be seen to be connected. The perceived problem is that Japanese people when they talk to foreigners are letting themselves and their country down in two main ways: they are failing to communicate effectively and clearly; and they are failing to present the proper ‘Japanese face’ to the outside world. Government policies in internationalization are designed to deal with this problem by, on the one hand, improving language teaching and, on the other, promoting the international dissemination of Japanese ‘culture’. The meaning of culture here – referring as it does to traditional arts and crafts – is highly conservative. Furthermore, it is clear from the policy statements that there can be no confusion between domestic, *Japanese* culture and *foreign* culture. There is a clear line between the two. One of the main purposes of Internationalization policy is to help Japanese people to properly inform foreigners about Japanese culture. In order to do this there must be an officially sanctioned definition of what Japanese culture actually *is*.¹⁷ The hope is that this will help preserve Japan’s identity in a potentially threatening international environment. The preservation of Japan’s cultural identity also involves nationalist policies aimed at fostering pride in one’s own nation. The enforcement of the singing of the national anthem and the hoisting of the national flag at school ceremonies can be seen as an example of this policy.¹⁸ In other words, through the logic of its approach to internationalization, the Ministry of Education is able to present nationalistic policies as part of an internationalization package.

3) Promotion of student exchange

It can be difficult to devise numerical yardsticks by which internationalization policies can be measured. However one such yardstick publicly selected by the Ministry of Education and other government offices is the number of overseas students studying in Japan. In the 1980s the Japanese government drew attention to the fact that the number of international students in Japan was far fewer than the number in western countries. In 1982 there were less than 9,000 international stu-

dents in Japan compared to over 300,000 in the USA, nearly 120,000 in France and over 57,000 in West Germany.¹⁹ The following year, Prime Minister Nakasone, who made internationalisation a key plank in his reforming administration, set the target of 100,000 international students in Japan by the year 2000. In other words he wanted to achieve a ten-fold increase in only seventeen years. At first progress was very good and it seemed that this very ambitious target might not only be reached but even surpassed. By 1991 the number had increased to 45,000 students and by 1995 there were 54,000 overseas students in Japan. However, after 1995 the number of students failed to increase further and actually declined for two years in a row. A slight recovery in 1998 left the figure of foreign students enrolled in Japanese institutions of higher education at 51,298. By this time official government publications had quietly dropped the target date of the year 2000. They still stick to the target figure of 100,000 students, but now talk about achieving it sometime "by the beginning of the 21st Century."²⁰

In order to increase the overseas student population the Ministry of Education had to investigate the reasons why students from foreign countries who study abroad continue to be reluctant to choose Japan as a base for their studies. In 1997 the Ministry established a committee to look into this issue and propose solutions. The committee found that the following factors were significant in keeping students away.

1. The comparatively high cost of living in Japan and the difficulty in finding housing.
2. A lack of information in other countries on higher education in Japan, application procedures and scholarship availability.
3. The failure, in some instances, of the educational and research systems at Japanese universities to adapt to the needs of foreign students.
4. A continued lack of acceptance of other cultures in Japanese society as a whole.
5. The establishment of more universities in Asian countries with a consequent shift in student needs towards the graduate level.
6. A preference for study in English-speaking countries and difficulty of learning the Japanese language.
7. The Japanese recession, which has reduced expectations of finding jobs with Japanese companies.²¹

It is interesting to note that in point four the committee has decided to mention the problem of "a lack of acceptance of other cultures" in Japan. The other factors

on the list could be regarded as out of the Ministry of Education's control (the Japanese recession; the expansion of universities in other countries) or amenable to fairly straight forward policy reviews (more information about Japanese universities can be sent to foreign countries; university courses can be adapted to suit the needs of overseas students etc.). Problems of 'acceptance' in Japanese society, however, are far less susceptible to quick fixes and, if they persist, strike at the heart of Japan's whole policy of internationalization. Racial discrimination has been a problem that many overseas students have complained about, particularly those from neighbouring Asian nations. A poll of 488 Asian students taken in 1988 found that only half of them had a favourable view of their decision to study in Japan.²² If this result is typical then not only is Japan condemned to be an unpopular choice for Asian students (the biggest potential source of overseas students in Japan's case), but also those who do come are likely to be left with negative feelings about their experience.

What does the Ministry of Education propose to do about the problem of "lack of acceptance of other cultures" – a problem which, after all, has been identified by its own bureaucrats? In 1998, the ministry began the "Foreign Student Exchange Model Areas" programme. The aim of this programme is to coordinate efforts by local governments, private companies and universities designed to help foreign students interact with the local community.²³ It is too early to tell whether this will amount to more than just window dressing. Meanwhile the ministry is also active in trying to alleviate problems in another area where discrimination against foreigners is, at least, a contributory factor. Finding suitable accommodation has consistently been a serious headache for many overseas students coming to Japan. As well as the cost of housing – a problem shared by Japanese students – there is the problem that many landlords simply refuse to let their property to foreigners. The government's response to this problem is to build more purpose-built accommodation for overseas students. The jewel in the crown of this policy is the "International University Village" in Tokyo, a project jointly sponsored by MITI and the Science and Technology Agency. This project will cost 100 billion yen and will provide accommodation for foreign students and researchers as well as scientific facilities the purpose of which is to "communicate Japanese scientific and technological information to the world at large."²⁴ Here again we find the familiar rhetoric of a policy that is designed to present a good 'face' of Japan to the world. The "International University Village" will be a safe, controlled arena where Japan can

meet the outside world. The fact that it will be built on the shoreline of a bay could invite comparisons with the island of Dejima in Nagasaki the only place during Japan's long period as a 'closed country' where foreigners could trade with Japanese. The habit of keeping foreigners in Japan restricted either spatially (in 'international' villages, lodges, houses, dormitories etc.) or temporally (through limited contracts or visas) seems to be a hard one to shake off.

4) Expansion of Japanese language education for foreigners

As we saw in the previous section, one of the factors listed among the reasons for the lack of overseas students in Japan, is the difficulty of the Japanese language. Until recently it was common for many Japanese people to believe that it simply was not possible for foreigners to learn Japanese. However, roughly in line with the emergence of Japan as a major international economic power, the number of foreigners studying the Japanese language has increased. A 1993 survey by the Japan Foundation (the government sponsored organisation with responsibility for encouraging the study of Japanese abroad) indicated that about 1.5 million people were studying Japanese. In the same year over 80,000 people took the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. Although the structure of the proficiency test is similar in some ways to entrance exam English tests (the questions are all multiple-choice for example) it is common for most students of the Japanese language to study for these tests *as well as* studying communicative Japanese. The vast majority of students of Japanese are studying the language for a practical purpose whether it is related to business, academic research or the requirements of daily life in Japan. Thus a similarity in the structure of the most important tests has not allowed the study of Japanese to fall into the same trap as the study of English in Japan. The motivations of the students in each case is the key factor. Unlike Japanese school students who are forced to put a premium on the passing of paper tests, foreign students of the Japanese language are able to organise their language study primarily for practical purposes. As a result, it is now common for ordinary Japanese people to encounter foreigners (in person or on Television) who are fluent or near fluent in the Japanese language. The belief that foreigners cannot learn Japanese has quietly died, and the promotion of Japanese language study is one non-controversial area where the policies of the Japanese government are genuinely helping in the internationalization of Japan however that word is defined.

5) Improvement of education for Japanese children overseas and children returning from overseas

Ministry of Education literature cites increases in the number of Japanese children living overseas as proof of Japan's increasing internationalization.²⁵ If one reads these words with the understanding that 'internationalization' refers to little more than an increase in the amount of contact between people of one country and people of another then there is no question that this statement is true. If, however, one is looking for something more from the use of the word 'internationalization' – something perhaps related to a decline in the importance that a person's nationality has on defining their identity – then one will be disappointed by a closer examination of educational provision for these children. Japanese children who are abroad for any length of time will attend either full-time or supplementary schools established to provide them with an education as close as possible to what they would receive in Japan. The parents of boys of post-elementary age in particular are anxious for them to receive an educational experience as close as possible to that they would receive in Japan. These parents believe that only Japanese schools can properly prepare school students for Japanese university entrance exams. There is evidence (that will be discussed below) that the university entrance system is in the process of becoming less rigid. However, parents are understandably unwilling to take risks with their children's future and if it is within their power they will stick to the tried and tested methods for getting their children (especially boys) a good start onto a successful career path.

Ministry of Education literature describes the ways that Japanese schools abroad "foster contact with local communities"²⁶ but the nature of the entrance exam system renders such contact peripheral to a student's overriding educational goals. For many children the opportunity to have a genuine experience of living in a different country is squandered. I have met Japanese students who have been to the Japanese school in west London for a couple of years and who cannot speak a word of English.

Of course there are many Japanese children who, while they are abroad, are able to take advantage of the opportunity of living and studying in a foreign country. Many of these children become fluent in the local language – often adopting local accents and mannerisms. For these children, problems tend to start with their return to Japan. Their problems give us an insight the practical purposes and effects of Japanese government policies on internationalization. These children are known

in Japan as returnees or *kikokushijo*. When numbers for primary and secondary school children were combined, the total number of *kikokushijo* in 1993 was about 13,000.²⁷ The Ministry of education says that it is encouraging more schools to establish special quotas or modify their selection methods to accommodate these children.²⁸ Special policies are considered necessary because of the difficulty many *kikokushijo* have had in re-adapting themselves to Japanese schools. There are, of course, the practical problems of fitting into different curricula and course syllabi. As well as these problems there is another category of problem that seems to associate itself particularly with children returning to Japanese schools from schools in western countries. Hall describes it in the following way. "What the returnees found most difficult to express, since it had become second nature to them – and what offended their classmates most – was their carefree and unadulterated proclamation of their own ideas, tastes, and personalities."²⁹ Traditional Japanese schooling encourages conformity and the acceptance of guidance and information from one's superiors. Many children who have become accustomed to, say, a French, American or Brazilian classroom have trouble adapting themselves to this new restrictive environment. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that *kikokushijo* are often the target of bullying.³⁰

The Ministry of Education says that it is working to make Japanese schools more able to cope with the "diversity" and "individually targeted teaching" that the growing number of returnees require.³¹ It would be wrong to assume that this is mere rhetoric for there is more at stake for the government and for educational institutions than just the welfare of this particular group of children. The declining number of school age children in Japan is a serious threat to the viability of many higher education institutions. Universities, therefore, can ill afford to alienate any significant group of potential candidates. Many institutions have responded by liberalising their entrance requirements and some have already created special entrance exams for Japanese children applying from overseas.³² In a related deregulatory move the Ministry of Education in 1999 announced that students of foreign schools within Japan (these are mostly Korean schools catering for about 27,000 students in all) would be allowed to take the annual state-run test known as *daiken*.³³ This allows students to attain the same status as high school graduates. (If they pass this test they therefore become eligible to apply for Japanese universities.) It can be seen, therefore, that the government is genuinely trying to open the doors of Japan's universities wider. A further reason for this deregulation is the desire to supply Japan's

economy with personnel who can function in an internationalized environment.³⁴ The significance of this policy will be discussed below.

Conclusions: Internationalization and Education in Japan

Throughout Japan's modern history a willingness to learn from other countries has been one of the nation's strengths. This has made Japan open to foreign ideas and ways of doing things. In this respect (especially when it is considered that the foreign innovations were accepted voluntarily – not imposed upon the country by a colonising western empire) it could be argued that Japan, since the Meiji restoration, has been one of the most internationalized nations on earth. Ivan Hall, however, points to the main weakness of Japan's style of internationalization: it is to do with things rather than people. He argues that "the downside of this formula is that it deliberately minimises human contact – the pattern first set by the Meiji government when it sent students abroad and invited foreign teachers to Japan, putting each of the two groups back on the return steamer as quickly as possible."³⁵ He goes on to say that this is not the sort of internationalization most of the outside world expects today. The forces of economic globalization are making it easier for businesses and individuals to ignore national borders as they buy and sell not only physical products but also various services ranging from investment packages to telephone accounts. Exchanges of information for every imaginable purpose have also drastically increased without regard for national boundaries. In such an environment the separation of people from things is much harder to achieve. The way that Japan's education system is seeking to adapt itself to the challenges of this new age has been the main subject of this article.

Although the Japanese government's response to the challenges of internationalization has followed a clearly conservative agenda, this does not mean that it is concerned with trying to prevent change. It accepts the fact that today there are more foreigners living in Japan and more Japanese living abroad than ever before and that in the future these numbers are likely to increase rather than decrease. In reacting to these trends the government is showing signs that the old egalitarian ideas (that dictated that the educational experience of every Japanese person must be as similar as possible) are being abandoned. Instead we can now see that the nurturing of an 'international' Japanese elite has become a priority. Policies aimed

at helping Japanese children returning from overseas and helping overseas students come to Japan can be seen as examples of this process. Policies for increased flexibility in higher education are also part of this process. Education policy is now aimed at creating an elite with the language skills, experience and international contacts that will help them work as equals with the financial, diplomatic and professional elites of other countries.

What about those who are excluded from the elite? This is the area where the government's conservative agenda can more clearly be seen. For the majority of children and young people education policy provides some basic language teaching, but does not seem to be serious about developing the spread of real communicative ability in foreign languages. Instead a great deal of emphasis is placed on teaching the difference between domestic and 'foreign' culture. This explains the importance attached by the Ministry of Education in ensuring that the national flag and anthem are properly respected throughout the Japanese school system. The Ministry is afraid that globalization may be a threat to the identity (and therefore the loyalty) of Japan's youth. Policies of cultural and national self-defence are necessary if the world is viewed as a harsh and threatening place. This basic view of the world is one that accepts internationalization and globalization as basic facts of life for a modern nation, but it is one that rejects the ideals of internationalism. In its education policy, Japan's policy makers are concerned to protect their nation's prosperity and unity. This does not mean keeping things the same as before. Instead Japan is in the process of building a new kind of nationalism for the 21st Century.

Notes

1. In the case of anti-colonial campaigns, however, nationalist loyalties and sentiments have often been exploited by basically left wing movements (examples would be the IRA, the Viet Minh and the Sandinistas). This should caution us against trying to analyse political nationalism in an over-simplistic way.
2. Baylis and Smith (1997), p. 14.
3. *Ibid.* p. 15.
4. MOE (1993), p. 137.
5. MOE (1995), p. 193.
6. Yagura (1993), p. 29.

7. *Ibid.* p. 194.
8. CLAIR (1995), p. 1.
9. In July 1999 there were over 5,200 participants (ALTs, CIRs and people who come under the new category of Sports Exchange Advisor) from a total of 37 countries. In spite of this increased diversity the overwhelming number of JET programme participants are still primarily engaged in English teaching in junior and senior high schools.
10. CIEE (1994).
11. The Ministry of Education sends approximately 5,000 teachers a year abroad for varying periods of time although these are not all language teachers. MOE (1994), p.195
12. A letter to the Japan Times of 20th October 1999 tells the story of an English teacher who was denied unpaid leave of absence to study on a master's programme in the United States. If he wanted to do such a thing he was informed that he would have to resign from his job completely. I have heard of other English teachers who have had to tell white lies to their schools about their whereabouts during summer vacations in order to visit foreign countries. If they told the truth they would be denied permission to leave the country.
13. Asahi Evening News, September 11–12, 1999.
14. Rholen (1983), p. 100.
15. MOE (1995), p. 197.
16. Yagura (1993), p. 29.
17. Ivan Hall records that some Japanese university students complained to him that they were being plied with too precise a definition of Japanese culture – “a regression, in other words, to the official defining that went on in the prewar educational system, when Japanese citizens were incessantly being told by their own rulers *who* they were.” Hall (1998), p. 175.
18. See Aspinall (1999) for an examination of the issue of the flag and anthem in schools.
19. For the statistics in this section see Kanisawa (1999).
20. MOE (1993), p. 139.
21. Kanisawa (1999) pp. 5–6.
22. Hall (1998), pp. 140–1.
23. Kanisawa (1999) pp. 8–9.
24. Kanisawa (1999) p. 10.
25. MOE (1995), p. 209.
26. *ibid.*
27. MOE (1995), p. 210.
28. *ibid.*
29. Hall (1998), pp. 143–44.
30. According to one survey two thirds of returnees reported that they had been bullied because of their overseas experience. See Yoneyama (1999), p. 169.
31. *ibid.*
32. See *The Daily Yomiuri*, February 1st 1999 for a special advertising supplement dedicated to these exams.
33. *The Daily Yomiuri*, July 10th 1999.

34. See Goodman (1990) for an account of how Japanese school policy aimed at helping *kikokushijo* is also helping to create a new internationalized elite.
35. Hall (1998), p. 174.

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