

## International Student Policy of Japan

This article illustrates incoming international students and outgoing Japanese students. The Japanese government sets the numerical goal for the former and dispatches the latter to strengthen Japanese human resources for international competition. The policies for international students are reviewed in this article by summaries of their brief history and today's trends, followed by the related issues and roles of international students in Japan, especially after the Great Earthquake occurred in March 2011.

### **Brief History**

It seems to be the 6th century that the first Japanese crossed the sea to study the teachings of Buddhism. The official records started with the government-organized dispatch of the Japanese Buddhism learners to Sui Dynasty and Táng Dynasty - present-day China - in the 7th and 8th centuries. Their missions were to collect holy books and documents of Buddhism, to learn the new technologies of the Dynasties, and to bring them back to Japan. The present Japanese term *Rugakusho* [international student], which literally means “a student who stays to study,” was used then. The dispatch to the Táng Dynasty was cancelled in 894 and terminated as the Dynasty was taken over, although private communication continued actively thereafter.

Communication with foreign countries was prohibited after the 17th century. However, the Netherlands was the only exception - within the limited area in Nagasaki - to when accessing the information out of Japan, even in the age of the national seclusion policy by the Edo government (1612-1858). The official dispatch started for national defense and new technologies and knowledge in 1862 as the end stage of Edo, when European Powers came to Asian countries. The Netherlands was selected as the first choice to dispatch, but Japanese officials came to prefer the general knowledge and applied technologies of the United States of America to the traditional knowledge and academic studies in Europe.

The Meiji era (1868-1912) opened up the nation to foreign countries and called for quick modernization at the beginning because the Japanese already knew China was occupied by the Powers. Studying abroad became very important and the system of dispatch was established. The students dispatched by the system became leaders of Japan. At the same time, many foreign experts were hired at the initial tertiary education institutes in Japan and given with tremendously high salaries for their knowledge and technologies from the Western world at the initial tertiary education institutes in Japan. But they were gradually replaced by the returned Japanese returnees gradually. The government wanted more specialized and sophisticated knowledge and systems, and the dispatches started to shift toward Prussen – present-day Germany – whose constitution became

the model of the Japanese Empirical Constitution.

On the other hand, at around this time, foreign students were starting to come to study. The first official students, who were from Korea, went to Keio University in 1881 (<http://www.keio.ac.jp/ja/contents/mamehyakka/41.html>). Japan received much attention as a model of modernization for winning the Japanese-Sino War (1894-1895) and Japanese-Russo War (1904-1905). There were 13 official students in the first group from the Chinese Qing Dynasty, dispatched in 1896, followed by many more; and the peak number of the students was more than 10,000 in 1906 (Abe 1990: 57; 70). This figure is considered the highest number of international students in this era. The reasons that the Chinese students headed for Japan were that it was a closer distance to Japan, there were cultural similarities, an easier written language, and many publications from the Western world were translated in a more accessible language.

However, the students started to look to the United States of America for study. One of the reasons was that there were too many Chinese students in Japan, and hence not enough Japanese education institutes to respond to all of their needs. Both Japanese and Chinese sides identified problems of low qualified dispatches, which was not always advantageous to both societies. So they set up a high standard of study to send/receive the Chinese students, and the figures fell to between 3,000 and 4,000 in the 1910s.

The Japanese dispatch again shifted to the USA from Germany after 1945 when the Second World War was over. The Fulbright scholarship and Rotary Club started to provide many opportunities. Many private corporations also sent their workers abroad. Today, the strong Japanese yen encourages studying abroad for MBA degrees, language learning, and working holidays.

For non-Japanese students, the Japanese government started to provide official scholarships first for the Indonesian dispatch in 1952. The government also established its system for non-Japanese students in 1954. It was recognized as international cooperation, or compensation for the war, and the Japan Foundation for Intercultural Exchange (<http://www.jees.or.jp/>) was established in 1957. The dispatches by foreign governments started from China in 1978, Malaysia in 1984, followed by Brazil, Thailand, and Singapore.

## **1. Incoming Flow to Japan**

### **1.1. Governmental Initiatives: from International Contribution to National Interests**

In 1983, the Japanese government declared an international commitment that aimed to accept 100,000 students from all over the world by the beginning of the 21st century. There were just above 10,000 international students in Japan at the time, and the number rose to 52,000 by

1993. The increase of incoming international students slowed down because a new principle in November 1994 concerning the students. It required a rigorous examination of the financial background for those Japanese learners who wanted to come to study in Japan. The number remained the same level up to 1999 (Fig. 1). According to the international section in MEXT at the time, this was because of the high cost of living, lack of information about studying in Japan, inadequate conditions at the receiving institutes, low awareness of different cultures on the Japanese side, and their preference to English-speaking countries. There could be an additional reason that fewer non-Japanese students came in preparatory and Japanese courses because of stricter examinations after 1994, because about 90% of the students came without official scholarships and 70% of them entered the course before the program of tertiary education institutes.

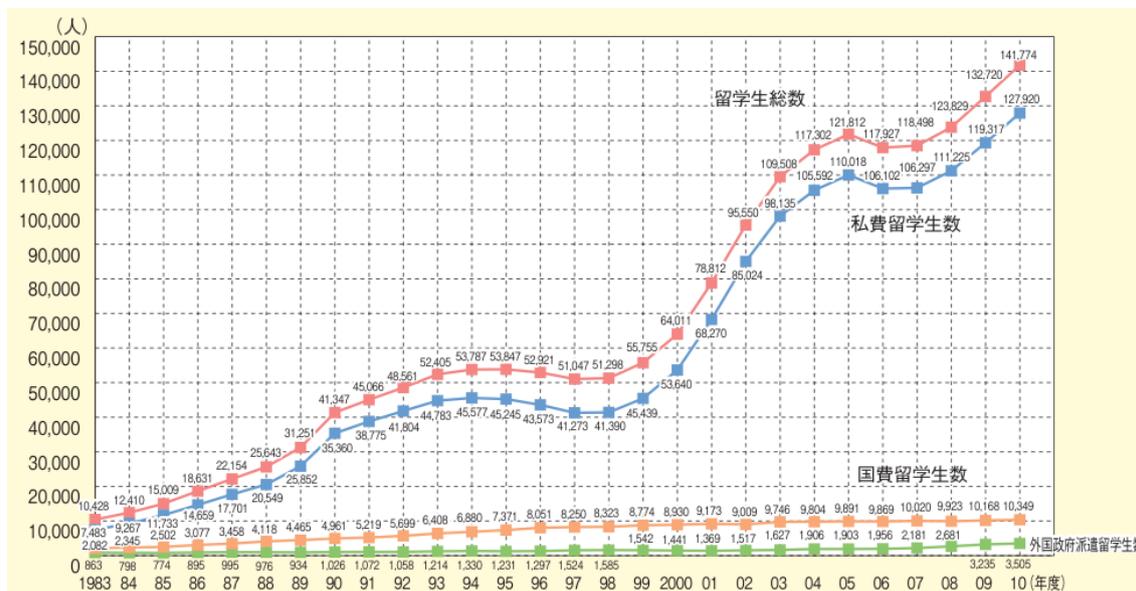
The number of international students was 55,000 in 1999, which was far behind the goal of 100,000 international students. Therefore, related organizations and institutes coordinated to ease the procedure of application documents at the Immigration Bureau of Japan if the language school had a proper registration management. Thanks to this arrangement, the number of the students jumped up starting in FY2000, when those who completed the Japanese course entered tertiary education institutes. By 2003, the goal was achieved with 110,000 students. Universities also made many efforts by building dormitories for international students and setting up English-only courses.

The discussions heated up even more around 2007. Policy initiatives in 2007 were a strong driving force to welcoming students in the process of economic and financial reform, in which the government prioritized the international student policy for the nation to be a network-hub in Asia. And the proposed 300,000 International Students Plan was established in 2008, with a target date of 2020. There was a shared understanding between the Japanese business sector and the government that Japan needed to recruit talented students to succeed in international competition. Policy initiatives in 2008 decided to allocate the concentrated budget to certain universities to strengthen their capacity and development of an international student program called Global 30. (*For the details, see "Higher Education in Japan."*)

## 1.2. Trend of Incoming Students

Fig.1 shows the trend of incoming international students in Japanese tertiary schools from 1983 to 2010. The number of non-Japanese students with Japanese official scholarships was about 2,082 in 1983 and rose to 10,349 in 2010 (shown in orange). The private students increased from 7,483 to 127,920 at the same time.

Fig. 1: Trend of International Students in Tertiary Schools



Note: The top red line is the total number of international students who came to Japan. The blue line indicates those who came without official fellowships. The orange is for those in the Japanese official scholarship program, and the green represents those with official scholarships from the government of their origin. (MEXT 2010: 340)

The total number of international students in the world, according to OECD, was 2,349,190 in 2008. The United States of America received 624,470, and there were 341,790 students in the United Kingdom, 243,440 in France, 230,640 in Australia, 206,880 in Germany, and 115,280 in Japan (Table 2). The share of Japan was 4.9%, calculated from this table

Table 2: International Tertiary-Level Students in OECD countries, 2004-08

	A	B		A	B
Australia	230,640	15.9	Netherlands	30,050	3.0
New Zealand	31,570	10.4	Finland	9,620	2.9
Austria	44,140	8.4	Portugal	18,580	2.9
United Kingdom	341,790	8.4	United States	624,470	2.8
Switzerland	31,710	7.0	Denmark	6,390	2.1
France	243,440	6.1	Hungary	13,460	2.1
Ireland	16,760	5.1	Italy	60,450	2.0
Belgium	29,840	4.6	<b>Japan</b>	<b>115,280</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Germany	206,880	4.2	Norway	4,470	1.5
Canada	92,880	4.1	Spain	36,860	1.4
Czech Republic	27,910	4.0	Korea	40,320	1.2
Sweden	22,650	3.9	Slovak Republic	5,200	1.2
Greece	26,160	3.9	Poland	14,970	0.5
Iceland	820	3.6	Turkey	20,220	0.3
Average for all countries taken as a whole				2,349,190	3.3

A: Number of Student in 2008

B: Per 100 persons aged 20-24 in the destination country (from OECD 2011:64)

## 2. Outgoing Flow from Japan

### 2.1. Trend of Outgoing Japanese Students

Table 1 indicates the number of international students by their origin in 2008. The Chinese students were the largest group at 58.7%, followed by Korean 15.2%, and Taiwan 4.1%. With the exception of the USA, all top origins were from Asian countries, making up 92.2%. This trend has stayed almost the same for the last decade.

**Table 1: Number of International Students  
by Country/Region of Origin as of May 1, 2008**

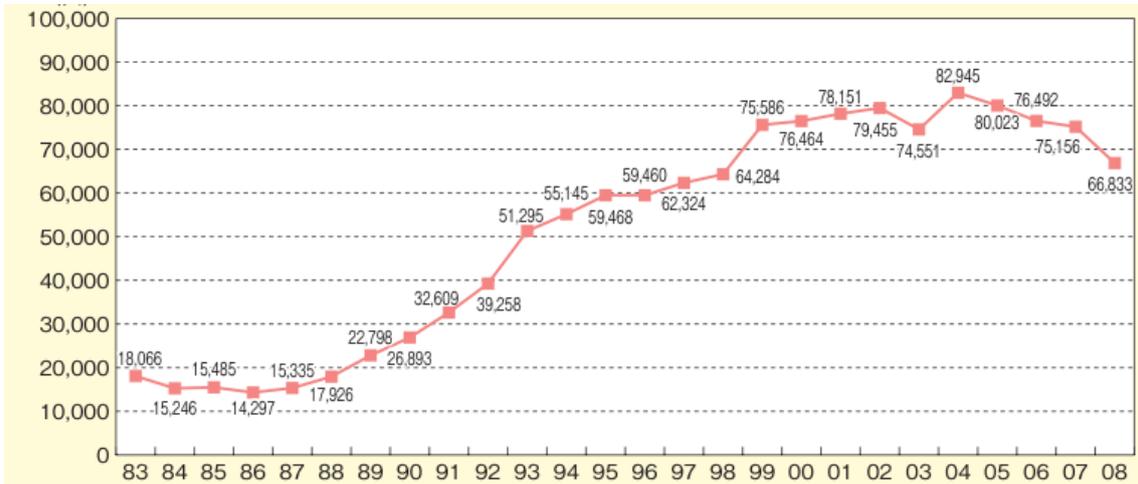
China	72,766	United States of America	2,024
Korea, Rep.	18,862	Indonesia	1,791
Taiwan	5,082	Bangladesh	1,686
Vietnam	2,873	Nepal	1,476
Malaysia	2,271	Others	12,795
Thailand	2,203	<b>Total</b>	<b>123,829</b>

(from the Cabinet Office, et. al. 2009: 22)

The trend of outgoing Japanese students is shown in Fig. 2. While the number was between 15,000 and 20,000 in the 1980s, it curved up to 80,000 in the 2000s. It seems to be falling recently, as the media has pointed out many times. There are many reasons that Japanese students avoid studying abroad. For example, studying abroad would bring them financial difficulty and they feel little guarantee that they will be able find a job after their return, or the Japanese social security is better than those in foreign countries. There is also a tendency of introversion among the Japanese youth today.

The OECD survey shows the origin of students in tertiary schools in 2009. The largest number was 409,840 students from China, followed by 462,960 from India, 109,980 from Korea, 80,540 from Germany, 49,820 from Japan, 49,770 from France, 43,360 from Malaysia, 43,120 from Canada, and 42,910 from the USA (OECD 2011: 66).

Fig. 2: Trend of Outgoing Japanese Students



(MEXT 2010: 343)

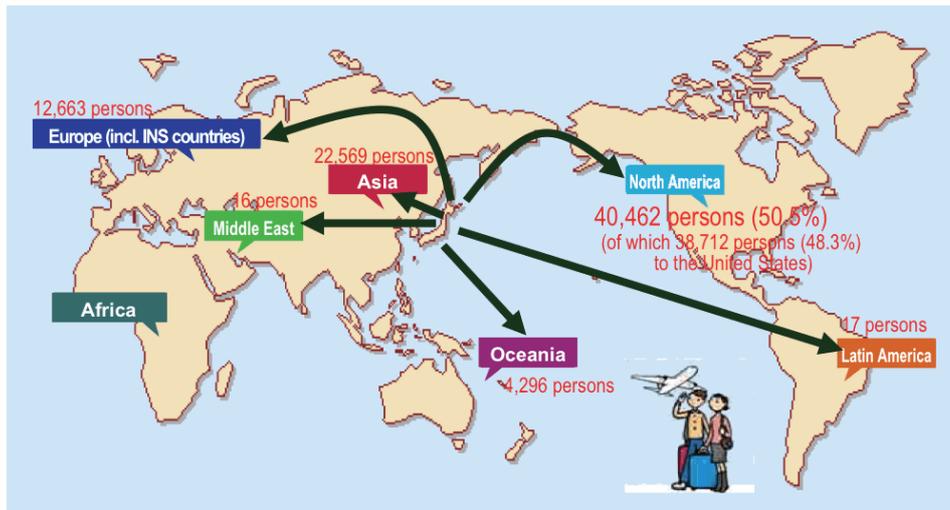
The top 30 destination countries for Japanese students are shown in Fig. 3. Half of them (50.5%) or about 40,000 Japanese students went to North America. About 23,000 of the rest go to Asian countries (28.2%), and 13,000 went to European countries (15.8%).

Fig. 3: Destination for Japanese Students in 2005

### Number of Japanese Students Studying Abroad by Region

Total: 80,023 persons (30 major countries)

as of FY2005



Sources: IIE "Open Doors," Chinese Ministry of Education and OECD "Education at a Glance," and Taiwan Ministry of Education (all-year 2005 edition)

(Cabinet Office, et. al., *ibid*: 26)

## 2.2. Official Dispatch and International Program for High School

The eight students for masters and 22 for doctor programs were dispatched with the MEXT official scholarship in 2011, although the dispatch system does not always send the same number of students every year. The official short study program, between 3 and 12 months, sent 693 (JASSO 2011). 500 or so were accepted in fellowship programs provided by destination governments in 2009. Exchange programs between universities are also popular today.

In 2008, there were 3,190 high school students who stayed at foreign schools for more than three months. Those who visited a foreign country for a school trip program numbered 27,025 in 2008. School trips (*see "Secondary Education in Japan"*) sometimes target educational effects by visiting foreign countries. The 1,357 schools (25.8% of all schools, 529 public and 828 private schools) brought 179,573 students to foreign countries in 2008 (MEXT 2010: 344). The destinations for these trips were mainly Asian countries.

## **3. Issues Today**

### 3.1. Goal of "the 300,000" International Students Plan

How was the goal of 300,000 incoming international students established? One of the estimates came from research contracted with MEXT in 2007. According to the conclusions of the research, 32,000 international students could come to Japan in 2025 as long as the Japanese share of total number of international students remains the same as the 2004 rate, 5% (MEXT 2007), based on a prospect by IDP Education Australia (Böhm et al 2003). MEXT decided to set the goal of 300,000 for 2020, an earlier expectation. But the research, at the same time, mentioned that universities were not yet capable of receiving that number and they would have to revise the whole system to achieve the goal as scheduled.

There is still a question of the nature and competencies of incoming international students even if the goal is achieved. One of the reasons is that, in the 2000s, universities have seen some international students register with universities but go on to work for money off campus. Some private companies also wanted cheaper labor and hired them without official permission.

There are many necessities such as globalization in higher education institutes and a new recognition system for the Japanese education institutes for the future. The ongoing Global 30 program would be more flexible than planned because its progress and outcomes are under discussion. It is also difficult to forecast the figures of incoming students because there are fewer short-term students coming, due to the Great Earthquake and the nuclear crisis of March 11, 2011.

### 3.2. International Students after the Great Earthquake

Many Embassies in Japan moved to secure their students after the earthquake. For example, the Indonesian Embassy on March 13 and the Chinese on March 15 came to the afflicted area to pick up their students at Tohoku University and help them return home from Yamagata through Sendai city. The university did not receive any notification from them, but the students had their own network for sharing information, which was considered an important communication tool during the crisis. April, which is the beginning of the Japanese general academic year, brought some students back to campus, but some of the short-term and undergraduate students did not return. Although the students who have returned seem to be fine today, there are potential problems. A PTSD examination taken by Tohoku University students revealed that 40% of 260 international students were considered "high risk" and 15% of 2000 Japanese students were the same<sup>1)</sup>. The international students could have more stress than the Japanese students.

There are many students who considered Japan to be their homes and chose to stay despite calls from their home countries to go back and the fact that many others had already left Japan. The Nikkei Youth Network (<http://nikkeiyouth.com/>), for example, is an active volunteer group of international students who go to Tohoku area every week and help its recovery and local development. The countless Japanese in the area are encouraged by the international students and feel thankful for their motivation and sentiments<sup>2)</sup>.

It is understandable that Japan is regarded as a dangerous country, after seeing repeated media coverage of the Tsunami and radioactivity concerns. However, it is also high time for the world to once again recognize Japan for having a rather more stable economy than Europe during the global financial crisis.

### 3.3. Population Decline and Multiculturalism in Japan

Japan must consider and take action to reorganize school education and local community's sustainable development in the age of rapid decreasing children population and increasing senior population. The media pointed out that the recent youth are inward-looking or satisfied with limited living conditions. For example, the most popular study program in the USA is currently decreasing<sup>3)</sup>. The Fulbright program is starting to look to more Japanese youth to study. Fig. 2 above could suggest the tendency of the falling number.

There are increasing Japanese enterprises that require more young Japanese workers to dispatch as leaders in foreign countries. But the students, ironically, realize that studying abroad is not advantageous for their careers because of strict procedures and timing; and

companies do not favor those with experience studying in a foreign country, because companies want new workers to follow Japanese rules. The companies tend to choose those non-Japanese students who have studied Japanese and are familiar with Japanese culture. For this series of reasons, the Japanese international student policies could be related more to economy and industry. The academic dispatches, which have little to do with industrial activities, are decreasing because of university's management and rigid personal evaluation for researchers.

It is important how universities reorganize to accept the increasing international students in the future. This system reform was pointed out during the Meiji era, but essential and speedy movements are still rarely reported. Japan will face the issue of "civic integration" sooner or later, because naturalized immigrants and foreign workers will certainly increase, as other countries have experienced. It is not yet too late to start preparing for the future.

#### Notes:

- 1) Report from Moriya, H. "the Response to International Students during the Great East Japan Earthquake: Case of the Graduate School of Engineering, Tohoku University" at The 2011 Winter Conference of Japan Association for Migration Policy Studies at Nagoya City University on 2011/12/10
- 2) Report from Uchimura, A. "International Student Volunteers and the Tohoku Disaster Relief," *ditto*.
- 3) The New York Times. Fewer Japanese Students Studying Abroad (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/21/world/asia/21iht-educLede21.html?pagewanted=all>); Japan Times, Don't be shy about study abroad (<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20070520a1.html>); Daily Yomiuri Online, Fall in students studying abroad bodes ill for future (<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/columns/commentary/T110116002145.htm>).

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**For further information:**

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25/12/2011  
(Hideki MARUYAMA)

## 日本の留学生政策

本稿は我が国の留学生政策について、つまり数値目標を伴う受け入れ、人材育成としての送り出しという両者を記述するものである。具体的には、それらの略史及び近年のグローバル化の影響の他、留学生の拡大と地域的傾向、今日の留学政策の課題、及び2011年3月に発生した東日本大震災と留学生について記している。

### 留学生制度の略史

遣隋使、遣唐使

民間交流と鎖国

明治時代における近代化と留学

戦後の留学生と国際貢献

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3.2. 大震災後の滞日留学生

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