

# **Balance between Quality and Quantity: the Evolution and Development of Japan's International Student Enrollment Policy**

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**Abstract:** The quantity and quality of international students, an important criterion for the internationalization of modern universities, has been paid more and more attention by more and more countries. Since the 1980s, Japan, at the national level, has gradually strengthened the acceptance of foreign students through the "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students", "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students", "Plans on International Infrastructure Project" and "Super University Support Plan". Through the analysis of the internationalization policies and international student enrollment policies of Japanese universities at various stages, it can be found that the foreign student based acceptance policies of Japan have completed the transition from pursuing quantity to pursuing quality.

With the economic globalization, knowledge economy has become a key aspect of the development of various countries. Among them, the internationalization of higher education has become one of the contents to improve the competitiveness of each country, and attracting more foreign students is an important means of its development. As one of the countries with more developed higher education, Japan has always attached great importance to the reception of international students. Since the 1980s, in order to accelerate the international competitiveness of universities, Japan has formulated a number of policies to promote the reception of international students.

## **1. "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students" and "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students"**

### **1.1 Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students**

In 1983, under the background of the need to improve the process of internationalization and strengthen international academic exchanges, the Japanese government proposed the "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students". The specific content of the plan is to adjust the university's receiving system, educational guidance, educational consultation and to promote education on Japanese language for overseas students by improving education on Japanese language in Japan and abroad. Besides, the contents also include ensuring good dormitory management and service for international students and to develop the diversity of non-governmental activities as well as to enrich the tracking support for returned students.

#### **1.1.1 Gradual Growth Period (1983-1992)**

In the early days when the Japanese government put forward the "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students", many students from developing countries took education in Japan as a life-changing opportunity due to the low admission threshold for foreign students, and a large number of foreign students flooded into Japan. In this context, in order to catch up with the number of foreign students in other developed countries, Japan had set up a large range of non-academic education based Japanese language education institutions to accommodate foreign students. However, due to the lack of strict supervision, Japanese language education institutions at that time randomly issued admission letters without confirming whether they had the qualifications to run the school. As a

result, the number of overseas students improved, which, however brought many social problems to Japan.

### **1.1.2 Stagnant Growth Period (1993-1999)**

With the collective of Japan's bubble economy, Japan's economy fell into a low development period in the early 1990s. The deterioration of the economy affected the enthusiasm of foreign students to study in Japan, leading to the stagnation of the growth of the number of Japanese students in the early 1990s.

A 1997 report by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology of Japan pointed out the main reasons for the stagnation of the number of overseas students :(1) The strict control policies for entrance caused by the illegal residence and employment of overseas students;(2) Due to the collapse of the bubble economy, the charm of Japan as a destination for study has declined;(3) Japan's high cost of living and low awareness on acceptance of foreigners;(4) There is little information about Japanese higher education institutions available to foreign countries.

### **1.1.3 Rapid Growth Period (2000-2005)**

Since the number of foreign students failed to reach the expected target, the Japanese education authorities further expanded the acceptance of foreign students after 2000. In 2004, the total number of foreign students in Japan exceeded 100,000, fulfilling the goal of "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students ".In its report "On the Development of a New Foreign Student Policy", the Central Review Council of Education of Japan analyzed the reasons for the sharp increase in the number of students studying in Japan in the early 21st century:(1) The sustained high economic growth in Asian countries, especially the large increase in the Chinese students at their own expense (2) A growing number of universities were eager to accept foreign students in order to ensure a steady flow of students and a stable financial base, driven by a decline in the number of Japanese students having fewer children;(3) Since 2000, the Immigration Administration had greatly simplified the procedures for international students to enter China and stay in China.

During the 20 years from the plan to the completion of "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students", many relevant policies and regulations have been introduced to assist the implementation of the policy.However, in the process of pursuing the growth of the number of overseas students, there are many problems, such as: the school enrollment qualification audit is not in place, the actual situation of overseas students in Japan is not consistent with the policy expectation, and it has caused some social security problems.Although there are many problems in the implementation of this policy, many of the programs introduced still provide reference value for the formulation and implementation of subsequent policies.

## **1.2 Plan on Receiving 300000 International Students**

After the implementation of Japan's "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students", the policy of accepting foreign students had not been improved and developed, which lead to a significant decrease in the number of students studying abroad in the future, a large outflow of talents was caused with a negative growth. At the same time, competition from other Asian countries was also increasing, and China and South Korea were also paying more and more attention to the development of knowledge economy. The position of Japanese universities in international rankings also puts pressure on Japan. Against this background, in 2008, the Japanese government put forward the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students".

Key elements of the plan include the launch of one-stop overseas study services. Simplifying admission and entry procedures to make studying abroad in Japan smooth. To promote the internationalization of the university and build a charming university. To create a receiving environment for international students to study at ease. To promote social acceptance after graduation and seek social globalization. In the process of implementation, we put forward the corresponding strategy. The definition of international students has been modified, which is conducive to the statistics and management of future international students. The scope of receiving foreign students has been expanded, and the limitation of Japanese as the threshold has been

lowered, which is conducive to the introduction of talents. The improvement and expansion of the short-term study abroad system, to some extent, has promoted the expansion of English courses in Japanese colleges and universities, and made educational institutions such as universities more internationalized.

The aim of "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students"

- 1.As part of the globalization strategy to expand the exchange of people, products, capital, information and other aspects with Asia and the world, the goal is to have the total number of 300,000 international students by 2020.
- 2.We attach great importance to talent attraction and cooperation, pay attention to the countries and professional fields where talents come from, and pay attention to the quality of talents in colleagues who focus on quantity.
- 3.Strive to provide knowledge contributions to countries, led by Asia.
- 4.Organically combining relevant departments and institutions to make the plan into a systematic and feasible plan, and comprehensively promote the implementation of the plan from entrance examination, enrollment to graduation and employment.

**Figure 1.** The aim of "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students"

According to the results of the survey on the status of overseas students in Japan and the number of Japanese students studying overseas released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology of Japan in 2020, as of May 2019, the number of Japanese students studying abroad was about 312,000. The results show that the program is a success, even reaching its goal a year early. However, in terms of current affairs, Japan was faced with a series of problems such as COVID-19, the Olympic Games and the economic downturn. The follow-up development of the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students" and the policies related to international students in the future still face many challenges.

## **2. International Infrastructure Projects and Super University Support Programs**

### **2.1 Internationalized Infrastructure Projects**

To support the implementation of the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students", both to students and international high-end sex, the Japanese government in 2009 began to implement internationalization infrastructure projects, pay attention to the quality of students plan Global30 (hereinafter referred to as Global30 plan) and, Global30 plans based on the body of the university to carry out policies and promote the development of internationalization of Japan, help the realization of the "students in 300000 people plan" and set the policy.

In April 2009, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Academic Studies published the "Conditions for Preparations for International Pilot Universities -- Globalization 30", in which the criteria for being selected as a pilot university were stipulated. According to the specified criteria, 7 national and 6 private universities were selected from the 15 national and 7 private universities that submitted their applications as the first batch of pilot universities under the Global30 programme.

According to the plan, the university identified as the pilot of Global30 plan will focus on promoting the reception of international students, and strive to build A first-class national university from the following five aspects :A. The degree is conferred in English; B. Improving the reception environment for international students and realizing the internationalization of the university; C.Office for overseas student was established; D. Improving the evaluation system of target;E. Establishing the operating system of an international university.

The launch of Global30 marked a shift in Japan's foreign student acceptance policy from a focus on quantity to a focus on quality. The program's all-English teaching program had attracted more excellent foreign students to study in Japan. However, due to the three disadvantages of the

program itself, that is, "limited covering area, in-sustainability, and lack of effectiveness", it was terminated soon after implementation. The lack of long-term implementation of the program also give rise to suspicions among the public on the government's credibility.

## 2.2 Super University Support Scheme

After absorbing the problems of the Global30 program, the Japanese government, aiming at building a world-class University, had formulated the Super Global University Support Program, which was called Super Global University (SGU Program). As an upgraded version of Global30 program, the Japanese government, in order to attract outstanding foreign students to study in Japan, set English teaching programs in universities under the SGU program, and recruited outstanding foreign students from all over the world through the English entrance examination. SGU program was officially launched in 2014. Compared with Global30 program, SGU program is larger in scale and has more diverse recruitment methods. The purpose of this plan is to vigorously promote "university reform" and "internationalization", "strengthen the international universality of the university, enhance international competitiveness, and improve the teaching environment of the university".

The main features of the SGU program can be summarized as follows

A. Positioned with A clear goal of internationalizing higher education. This plan divides the funded institutions into top TOPA with strong comprehensive strength and top ranking in the world, and internationally-led TOPB with outstanding characteristics and certain basis of internationalization mechanism.

B. Develop specific and detailed indicators.

C. Large funding. The Japanese government selected 37 universities from 775 regular universities nationwide and allocated 770 million yen to support their internationalization reform.

However, the SGU program also has some significant problems, among which the most serious problem is that universities attach too much importance to the world university rankings, blindly pursue quantitative indicators, blindly pursue growth, thus ignoring the essence of internationalization and changes in the external environment.

## 3. The Game between Quality and Quantity: An Analysis of the Evolution of Japan's Enrollment Policy for Foreign Students

Through the above analysis, we can see that Japan's foreign student policy has been continuously promoted and improved, and we can see that Japan has shifted its focus from the original "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students" and "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students" based quantitation-oriented policy to the policy of "Global30" and "SGU" in pursuit of international development. Japan's initial policy of enrolling foreign students was influenced by two aspects. First, with the rapid development of economy, Japan's internationalization process is slower than that of other developed countries. In addition, there are problems left over from history and increased trade frictions with many other countries, which make the situation more tense. Second, the aging of Japanese society and the problem of fewer children for the urgent need for talent supplement. Therefore, the expansion of international student enrollment policy as an important national policy to formulate and implement.

For these reasons, the policy of "Plan on Receiving 100,000 Overseas Students" was launched. Although there were social problems such as illegal overstaying of overseas students and illegal work during the implementation period, and Japan was in the period of bubble economy, and its economic stagnation led to the lost of the source of overseas students. The internationalization of Japanese higher education is still based on the "volume" of foreign student exchanges. In 2010, with the rapid development of economic globalization, the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students" was launched. On the basis of pursuing the number of foreign students, the plan was faced with problems such as the world university ranking and the competitive pressure from the development of higher education in Asian countries, which made the policy to embrace new development so as to cultivate high-end talents. Attracting excellent foreign students can be made

by improving the educational strength of domestic colleges and universities.

The Global30 project was launched in conjunction with the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students". By helping some universities improve their international competitiveness and building English teaching system, it has facilitated the recruitment of more talents. However, in the process of paying attention to "quality", this plan has caused too large a gap among universities, which has not played a helpful role in improving the international competitiveness of higher education as a whole and lacks permanence.

"SGU" not only takes into account the basic goals, but also makes plans that meet its own characteristics based on the needs of different types and levels of colleges and universities. At the same time, the plan was improved step by step, and the target was refined, quantified, clear and effective. Promoting the international common examination as the examination content of colleges and universities, strengthen the connection with colleges and universities and internationalization.

The above shifts of foreign student recruitment policy can reflect the shift of the Japanese government's emphasis in making relevant policies. In the early stage, due to the insufficient number of overseas students, the internationalization level of Japanese universities was low, which affected the ranking of Japanese universities in the World University Rankings. The Japanese government formulated the "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students" and the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students" to attract foreign students. At the same time, in order to ensure the economic source of overseas students in Japan, the Japanese Office of Immigration and Exiting Countries had formulated a "qualification permit" system that allowed overseas students to work part-time to earn money outside the scope of activities in Japan stipulated in the study visa. However, as a result of the large number of foreign students coming to Japan, the internationalization of Japanese universities had improved, but the quality of students had declined. Based on the demand for high-end talents, the Japanese government's demand for overseas students has changed from quantity demand to quality demand. The formulation and implementation of "Global30" and SGU program also signified that the Japanese higher education field paid more attention to the cultivation of high-quality overseas students in the enrollment process. In addition, after a brief analysis of the exam questions of Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students(EJU) in recent years, it can also be found that the difficulty of *Examination* for Japanese University Admission for International Students has been increasing year by year, and Japanese universities had raised the entrance threshold for foreign students. With the continuous improvement of the internationalization of Japanese universities, the ranking of Japanese universities in the World University Rankings has gradually improved. While strengthening the internationalization of higher education, Japan has also improved its status in the international community. To improve the quality of national higher education is to fundamentally enhance the country's knowledge economy in the international status.

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