

VIEWPOINT

International Students at Japanese Universities

by Mineo Nakajima, President, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

International Contribution

AT THE DAWN of the 21st century, the environment surrounding international relations in our country is changing drastically. International exchange activities at universities, especially national universities, have been growing rapidly, based around scholarly exchanges among universities and exchanges with foreign students. A report produced by the University Council of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in October 1998, titled "Vision for Universities in the 21st Century and Reform Measures: To Be Distinctive Universities in a Competitive Environment," highlighted the need for "international contributions through education and research." The report indicates that international exchange focusing primarily on the acceptance of more international students is being treated as a top priority for Japan's national universities.

In spite of this, however, the foreign student population at national universities in Japan, at 3.8%, has remained consistently low, and drops to 2% if private universities are included. These figures point to the closed nature and homogeneity of Japanese universities, which is the basis of outside criticisms of Japan being an "intellectually closed shop."

Given this situation, the University

Council produced a report in November 2000, titled "The Ideal State of Higher Education in the Age of Globalization," which discussed specific policies to encourage university admittance of international students and proposed the idea of supporting the activities of UMAP (University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific).

International Students and UMAP

UMAP, WHOSE immediate agenda is to increase exchanges among students and promote short-term exchange programs, was conceived in 1991 based on a proposal by the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee (AVCC).

UMAP initially set up its international secretariat in Japan in April 1994. Then, at the sixth general session held in Bangkok in August of the same year, the UMAP Constitution was adopted and the decision to establish the official international secretariat in Japan was made, with myself as secretary-general. As stipulated in this constitution, operation funds derive from contributions by each member country or region based on their respective GNPs, similar to the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) system.

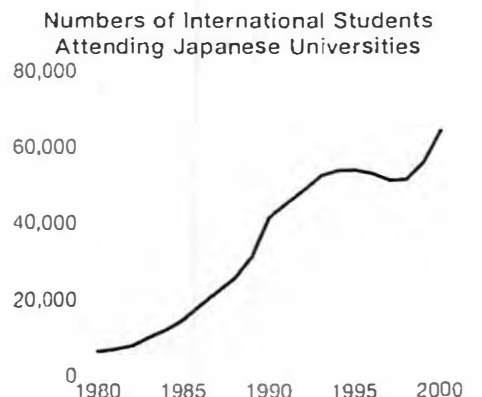
UMAP is modeled after an inter-university student exchange program in Europe, called the "Erasmus Plan." There

are vast differences, however, between the situation of Europe, where a unified network of nations in the form of the current EU is in place, and that of the Asia-Pacific region, not only on a social level but also on an economic and political level. This raises a number of issues with respect to exchange among universities that need to be addressed. An added issue is the very size of the program. UMAP's priority at the moment is to develop and implement the UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS). The development of this transfer scheme was promoted at an international meeting of specialists, where the program's technical issues were also discussed, and the pilot phase was initiated in the autumn of 2000.

At present, UMAP's student exchange primarily consists of a short-term study abroad program, one year in length, that is based on student-exchange agreements among universities. The Association of International Education, Japan (AIEJ) has agreed to allocate scholarship money to students accepted to this program. In addition, UMAP exchange students' expenses for travel to Japan were covered by part of the UMAP International Student Assistance Fund, established by the government in fiscal year 1999. In the summer of 2001, a UMAP Leaders Program will be held on a trial basis at the Tokyo University of Foreign



A program called "Looking at the World from the Classroom," conducted in Fukuoka as part of AIEJ's Multicultural Community Development Program with International Students. In this exchange program, international students living in Fukuoka Prefecture visit elementary and middle school classrooms as guest teachers to share information about their respective countries and stories about life as an international student in Japan.



Studies and at Kyushu University for the purpose of fostering young leaders in UMAP's member countries and regions. In view of the fact that UMAP is essentially a university version of APEC, Japan is sure to take on an important role with respect to making contributions to the world community.

Policy Issues

IN AUGUST 1983 and June 1984, a national advisory committee on foreign student policy for the 21st century, set up under then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, proposed the 100,000 Foreign Students Plan, which called for a ten-fold increase in the number of foreign students in Japan by the year 2000. However, since then, the number of foreign students who come to Japan has exhibited a downward trend, and although the figures have been rising as of late, the overall number has yet to go above 60,000.

Under these circumstances, the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology requested the advisory committee to look into this matter. The committee, chaired by Dr. Leo Esaki, President Emeritus of the University of Tsukuba, put together a noteworthy proposal in March 1999, titled "Toward the Development of International Intellectual Contributions and a New Foreign Student Policy: Japan's Foreign Student Policy for 2000." At the Köln Summit held in November of the same year, then Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, in reference to the G8 Communiqué, noted the importance of fostering human resources from all Asian countries along with in-

ternational exchange activities among students and educators. Concrete measures which have been taken include support for international students—the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the AIEJ, and various private support organizations have been making successive efforts, an example of which is the International University Village for Research and Exchange, to be realized soon on the coast of Tokyo Bay. However, attention needs to be directed toward the issue of Japanese universities' internal attitudes toward accepting international students. It is a problem that university instructors are not adapting their mindset sufficiently to the open age of globalization, as shown by, for example, the continued difficulties in conferring doctoral degrees upon international students in the areas of humanities and the social sciences.

Given the fact that international exchange centering on foreign students will serve as an extremely valuable intellectual tradition for Japan's future, forward-looking reforms are urgently required. Among these, it is essential to reconsider the requirement to sit the Japanese Language Proficiency Exam, which currently serves as a major obstacle to international students who want to study at Japanese universities. The first point of assessment for prospective international students should be their fundamental academic ability in the arts and sciences. As for language testing, importance should be placed on the sort of academic Japanese which would apply to students' actual everyday life and study situations. It is also important that the option of taking exams in English be made available, and

that exams be offered more frequently. Furthermore, students should be able to be admitted to a school without having to come to Japan first. Such ideas were deliberated by AIEJ's Research Cooperative Council, and, as a result, the New Examination for International Students in Japan will be offered as of 2002.

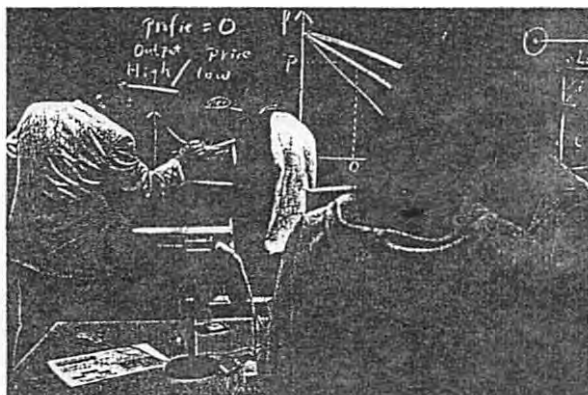
Japanese universities are facing increased international competition in the 21st century, and the surrounding environment is clearly becoming one in which they will have to cope with pressures from an international university marketplace. Not only in the West but also in Asia, the multinational and diverse nature of student populations at universities outside of Japan is quite conspicuous. Meanwhile, in most universities in Japan today, one sees the continuation of a system in which Japanese people are teaching Japanese people in Japanese.

The phrase "global standard" has many meanings, but with regard to universities, it implies an intellectual space unaffected by borders, race, and ethnicity. In that sense, Japanese universities have yet to reach a sufficient level of internationalization. These universities face the challenge of moving toward increased "globalization" and developing into schools that can withstand future international competition. In that context, international students will undoubtedly play an extremely significant role. □

Mineo Nakajima was born in 1935 and graduated from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies with a degree in China studies. He completed a graduate-level course of study in international relations theory at the University of Tokyo, and received his doctorate in sociology. His publications include numerous articles and books on China, East Asia and about international relations. He is the secretary-general of UMAP, the vice-chairman of the Association of National Universities, and the chairman of the University Seminar House.



A special lecture at APU for a course on regional understanding in the Asia-Pacific, held in a tea ceremony room.

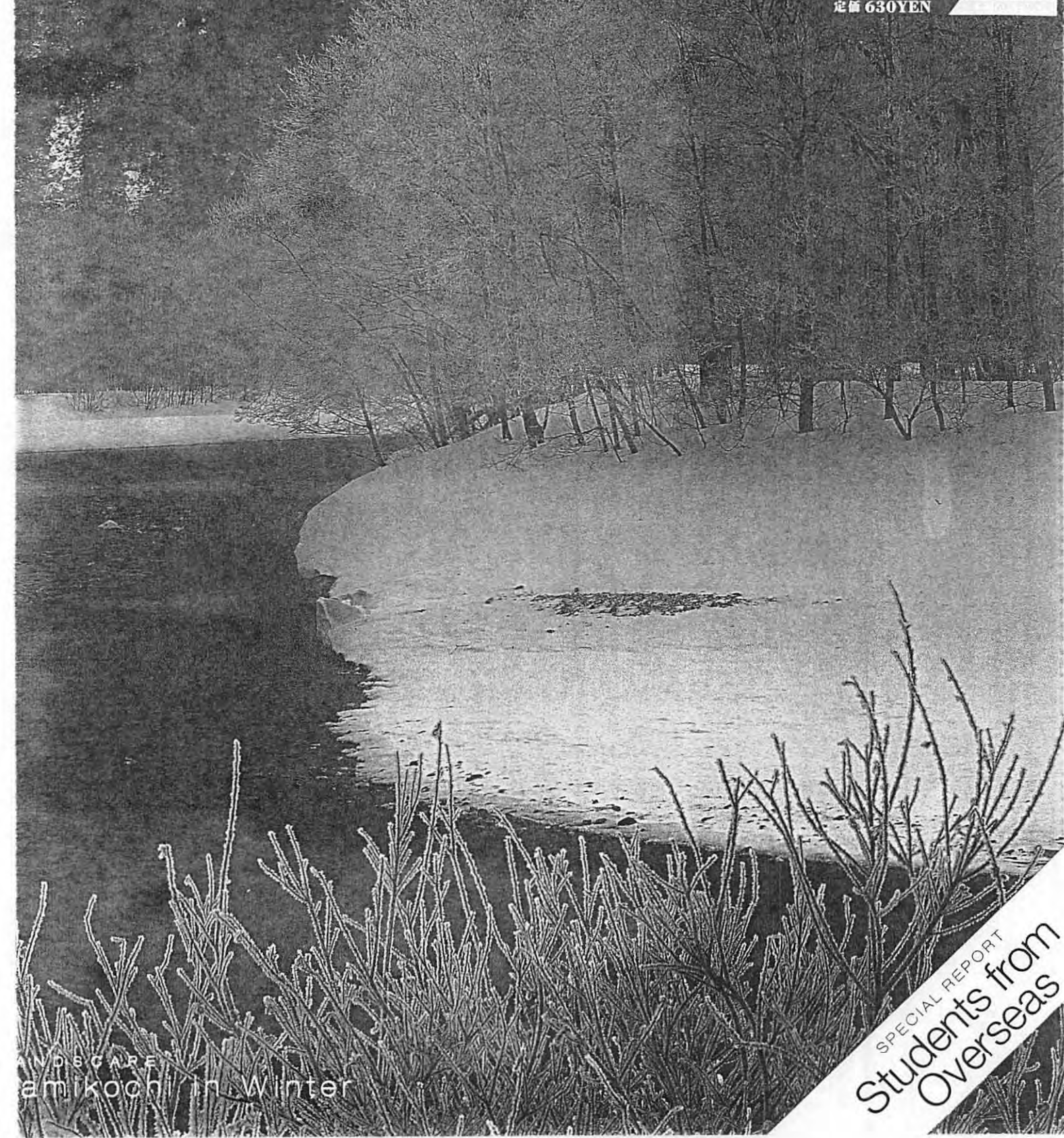


A lecture at APU by Professor Wei-bin Zhang from Sweden, titled "Economics and Society in Today's World." The lecture was followed by a series of questions from the students.

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LANDSCAPE
Amikooch in Winter

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