

Chapter 6

Challenges in the New Century

Meeting the different needs of students entering the university Japanese program with varied levels of advanced knowledge is but one challenge that Japanese studies departments will continue to face in the 21st century. There are a number of other issues which require on-going attention in the new century. One of them will be the internationalisation of education and the other, the development of IT-based teaching practices.

6.1 Internationalisation & Student Mobility

Internationalisation of education is in the mind of every university administrator today. The recent survey undertaken by IDP Education Australia found that between 1998 and 1999, the number of international students studying in Australian universities increased by seventeen percent (17%) to an estimated 93,424. This figure included an estimated 25,158 students studying in Australian university programs offered offshore, mostly in students' home countries. As the student number in Australian universities in 1999 was estimated at 722,629, the number of international students represented nearly thirteen percent (13%) of the total student population.²²

Students of today are increasingly mobile. Students' mobility is particularly noted amongst the Asian countries. The same IDP survey found that, of the total number of international students, 73,281 students, or seventy eight percent (78%), are from Asian countries, with Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong forming the top three locations from which students originated.

Students' mobility also include increased opportunities for Australian students to go abroad. In terms of strengthening students' Japan skills and literacy, sending them to Japan is a most logical component of any curriculum. In-country study opportunities, however, were not widely exploited by Australian universities until the 1990s. In 1989, Stockwin

from Oxford University observed that, compared with British universities, Japanese studies departments in Australian universities offered students fewer opportunities for going to Japan on in-country programs (Stockwin 1989:19). If Australian universities were slow in developing this area of activities in the 1980s, they caught up with a remarkable speed during the 1990s and have not stopped since.

The 1997 survey found that Australian universities collectively now have exchange agreements with one hundred and one (101) Japanese universities. A number of Japanese universities have agreements with a multiple number of Australian universities. Kansai Gaikokugo University, for example, has a signed agreement with nineteen (19) Australian universities and Sophia University with eight (8). As a result, by 1998, two hundred and twenty six (226) agreements have been concluded between Australian and Japanese universities (The Japan Foundation and AJRC 1997:458-560).

Considering that the number of Australian universities that offer Japan-related courses stood at thirty four (34), the figure is impressive. Although some universities were more active than others in operating exchange programs, the survey found each Japanese studies department in Australian universities has exchange agreements with an average of four Japanese universities. The University of Queensland, The Australian National University, and Macquarie University, for example, each has agreement with more than ten (10) Japanese universities. In addition to students' exchange programs, Australian universities now offer a number of other in-country programs, including short term home-stay programs, immersion programs for teacher education and work-experience (internship) programs.

In terms of cultivating students' Japan skills and literacy, the educational benefit of an in-country experience is invaluable. Although this had been recognised by Japan scholars for many years, due to a number of factors Japanese studies departments had been hesitant about a large-scale introduction of such programs. The ever rising exchange rate of the yen in relation to the Australian dollar has been one of the crucial factors. A lack

of infrastructure within Japanese universities to receive international students was another.

The general push towards internationalisation of university education in the 1990s, however, resulted in a number of new initiatives towards solving some of the major issues. International scholarships specifically targeted for the exchange programs, such as the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) program and the Monbusho-sponsored Association for International Education in Japan (AIEJ) Scholarship program, were introduced in the 1990s. These scholarships eased some of the financial burden of students studying in Japan. In addition, many Australian universities now provide scholarships of their own for those students going overseas on university-sponsored programs, including exchange programs.

Looking at the receiving end of these programs, in Japan during the 1990s internationalisation of universities has progressed at a remarkable pace as well. An increasing number of Japanese universities are now equipped with facilities to receive international students in numbers, such as living accommodation, international offices to look after visa procedures, and staff members who are trained to assist international students.

It is encouraging that an increasing number of Japanese universities now offer a well structured Japanese language program for foreign students. In many such programs, the language courses are offered at multi-levels, and students from overseas are placed at the level most suitable to their knowledge already acquired in the home country.

All this rapidly developing environment encourages student mobility. Students of today have much more expanded opportunities to participate in an in-country program than those of the previous generation. From the educational point of view, there is no dispute about the fact that students receive significant benefits from their stay in Japan. Several areas of research verify that the benefits students receive from an in-country program are multi-dimensional. They not only advance knowledge of Japan and improve their language skills, but also develop cross-cultural understanding and skills to live and work with people of a culture different

to their own (Chow 1996). The benefits, therefore, generally contribute to the students' holistic education not only of Japan, but of their own lives.

One area of in-country benefits that is particularly worth mentioning is the benefit to postgraduate research candidates. Australia suffers from a chronic shortage of Japan scholars to cater for the increasing demand by postgraduate students whose research interests are extending wide. Further difficulty is that, in a large continent with small population, the limited number of Japan scholars are scattered all across the country. Consequently, most of the Japanese studies departments in Australia, with a possible exception of the Australian National University, which enjoys an enviable concentration of Japan scholars, have difficulties in offering research supervision in a wide area of Japan-related topics. The lack of expertise in a particular area often means insufficient research materials as well, because the library, for example, will not have sufficient accumulation of materials relevant to the field.

In this situation, postgraduate research candidates are often restricted in the choice of a research topic. If a candidate finds that academic supervision is not available for his/her chosen research topic at the home university, options are either to change the topic or to move to another university where the scholar in the particular field is available. Changing universities often means moving interstate, which itself presents hardship. Many postgraduate candidates are mature-aged with a full-time occupation and a family. From the university's point of view, on the other hand, this lack of expertise risks losing a number of very good candidates, who have the potential to become Japan scholars and join the ranks of Australia's Japan academia in the future.

In-country programs present solutions to this difficult issue in more ways than one. Firstly, in-country programs can take advantage of the wide range of academic expertise that exists in Japanese universities. If an Australian university lacks expertise in the candidate's chosen field of research, expertise can be sought amongst the partner universities in Japan. Under a well-structured exchange program, joint supervision can be arranged in collaboration between the Australian and Japanese scholars. A

further advantage is that, at a Japanese university, candidates will normally have access, not only to one area expert, which is usually the case in the home university in Australia, but to a number of Japanese scholars in the specific area, and also in wider related areas.

Secondly, candidates will have access to the research materials housed in the host university, such as library collections, which are normally much more extensive than those in Australian universities. Candidates will also have easier access to other primary sources of information, such as the latest government publications and other materials which are usually obtainable only in Japan. Being in Japan, more flexible and multi-dimensional approaches to the research subject become possible. In addition to literature based studies, candidates can expand their research activities by including interviews with key persons, visits to the relevant sites, and interaction with experts in the subject area.

In a more globalised and increasingly borderless world of the 21st century, universities around the world have to reassess what they aim to achieve in their graduates, both in academic training and graduate qualifications. The graduates of the 21st century have to meet the new and expanding demand placed upon them by the emerging global community. Internationally recognisable graduate qualifications will become increasingly important. To achieve this, a university has to provide professional training which is applicable not to one specific country, but to multiple locations around the world.

Graduates also require training in cross-cultural understanding. In their profession they will be required to live in a country or countries outside their own. Even staying within their own country, there will be an increasing chance that they will be engaged in a multi-national project, or work with members from many different countries and cultural backgrounds. To conduct professional activities effectively in a multi-cultural context, they have to be well equipped with cross-cultural skills and understanding.

In the area of Japanese studies, requirements for Japan skills and literacy also

have to expand to include literacy in the global context. It is fortunate that inter-university collaborations between Australia and Japan are rapidly developing. Industry-collaborative training programs in Japan are also available, although the number of such programs is still limited. Australian students in the Japan-related area today have vastly expanded opportunities to participate in one of these well-structured in-country programs.

The educational benefits students receive from an in-country program are multi-dimensional. Advantages they gain are not limited to the improvement of academic knowledge and language skills, but also extend to the whole spectrum of living skills. In short, what they gain through an in-country program contributes greatly to the expansion of Japan skills and literacy suitable for the globalised community of the 21st century.

The next step for universities to take will be the introduction of internationally recognisable degrees. Dual degrees accredited in more than one country are increasingly being introduced. In Japan, the Ritsumeikan University, for example, has made a precedent by introducing a dual Master's degree with the American University in Washington D.C. In Australia, the trend so far is to recognise international components in the degree structure at the home university in Australia.

Another trend in Australian universities is to offer courses outside the country - normally termed as offshore programs. Encouraged by the national awareness of the importance of the Asian Pacific region, Australian universities are now offering an increasing number of off-shore programs in several locations in the region. The idea of university consortia in the region is also being discussed amongst university administrators. These are all initiatives directed towards internationally recognisable academic qualifications.

Japan scholars in Australia often consider Japan literacy in the larger context of Asia literacy. As student mobility is ever increasing in the Asia region, the time is ripe to put this concept into practice. Bilateral agreements between Australian and Japanese universities can be expanded to multi-lateral arrangements that include universities in a number of

Asian countries. The multi-national and multi-cultural environment in which students study would benefit both Australian and Japanese students. They will be better trained to meet the demand of a globalised community, that of the Asia Pacific in particular. If the graduates of the 21st century are better equipped to deal with the affairs of the globalised community, the whole world will be the beneficiary.

6.2 Teaching in Flexible Mode

The concept of Flexible Learning is a revolution in education, which started in the 1990s and will certainly continue into the 21st century. The ideology behind the concept is to make education accessible to a larger population by removing time and distance barriers, and thus meeting the requirements of diverse student populations. Students do not have to be on-campus regularly. They will be able to carry on their study off-campus, in remote locations in the country, or even while travelling overseas.

The concept became applicable to education with the advent of information technologies, especially the World Wide Web. By integrating the Web facilities into teaching programs, it is now possible to expand teaching methods in a variety of ways. The Web facilities make it possible to deliver information, provide academic content, manage students' learning, and make an assessment of individual student's performance, all on-line. In addition, collaborative learning experiences and general communication can be provided through e-mail and bulletin board facilities. Advanced information technologies applicable to education are not limited to the World Wide Web. Usage of video conference systems, for example, widen the scope of education and facilitate interaction between academic staff and students, or between student bodies located in distant places, even in different countries.

In terms of teaching quality, flexible mode teaching bridges the gap between on-campus courses and the traditionally termed 'distance education'. By combining a variety of flexible delivery modes, providers of education can now aim to offer all students substantially the same quality in teaching content and in learning experience.