

**Enhancing Student Mobility:  
A Comparison of Strategies in Taiwan and Japan**  
『学生の流動性を高める』～台湾と日本における戦略の比較  
《提高學生的流動性》：臺灣和日本的戰略比較

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**Summary**

This paper compares trends in student mobility in Taiwan and Japan. Whereas 3.7% of all tertiary students in Japan are non-Japanese, 8.3% of all tertiary students in Taiwan are non-Taiwanese. Why has Taiwan been more successful than Japan in terms of recruiting overseas students? Three factors are examined. The relative low cost of studying in Taiwan, growing popularity of Chinese worldwide, and effective use of SNS are considered as possible reasons for Taiwan's success in recruiting students from overseas.

Keywords: student mobility, study abroad, academic tourism, internationalization

本稿では、台湾と日本における学生の流動性動向を比較する。日本で高等教育を受ける海外からの学生数は、学生全体の数の3.7%にとどまる。一方、台湾では学生の8.3%が非台湾人である。台湾が留学先として選ばれる理由として、3つの要因が挙げられる。1つ目は、台湾での留学費用が相対的に安価な点。2つ目は、世界的な中国語ニーズの増大。そして3つ目は、SNSの活用が功を奏している点である。これらは、台湾が留学生の招致に成功した理由と考えられる。

**キーワード**：学生のモビリティ、留学、アカデミック・ツーリズム、国際化

本篇報告比較台日學生的流動趨勢。在日本，3.7%的高等教育學生不是日本人，而在臺灣，8.3%的高等教育學生不是臺灣人。為何臺灣在招生方面比日本更成功？探索了三個因素。在臺灣留學的成本相對較低，在世界各地漢語的普遍成長，還有SNS的有效使用等被認為是台灣成功的原因。

**關鍵字**：學生流動性、出國留學、學術旅遊、國際化

Universities in Japan and Taiwan share some interesting similarities. Both countries have rapidly aging populations and are competing to “internationalize” by attracting more foreign students. A decade ago, less than 2% of the post-secondary level students in Japan were non-Japanese (JASSO, 2018). Today this figure is closer to 3.8%. However, as Table 1 attests, Japan lags behind other countries such as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the UK and the USA in terms of attracting students from abroad. It also lags behind Singapore, Germany, France, Korea, and mainland China in terms of sending students overseas.

Table 1. *Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students in Some Countries in 2017*

country	inbound students			outbound students		
	total	domestic %	world %	total	domestic %	world %
Australia	335,512	17.5%	6.6%	12,713	0.7%	0.3%
Canada	189,478	11.9%	3.7%	50,222	3.1%	1.0%
China	157,108	0.4%	3.1%	869,387	2.0%	17.1%
France	245,349	9.9%	4.8%	90,717	3.6%	1.8%
Germany	244,575	8.0%	4.8%	119,021	3.9%	2.3%
India	44,766	0.1%	0.9%	305,970	0.9%	6.0%
Japan	143,457	3.7%	2.8%	31,702	0.8%	0.6%
Korea	61,888	1.9%	1.2%	105,360	3.3%	2.1%
Russia	243,752	3.9%	4.8%	56,837	0.9%	1.5%
Singapore	53,122	27.2%	1.0%	24,793	12.9%	0.5%
Taiwan	116,416	8.3%	0.3%	63,270	0.9%	0.3%
UK	432,001	18.1%	8.5%	34,025	1.4%	0.7%
USA	971,417	19.1%	5.0%	72,830	0.4%	1.4%

(Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019; Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2018; World Education Services, 2018)

Can Japan learn anything valuable from Taiwan about recruiting overseas students? This article compares how some Taiwan and Japanese universities attempt to recruit overseas students. Specifically, it notes how comparative education costs, target languages offered, and institutional branding are being used to attract international students. It concludes by considering some ways to enhance study abroad enrollment.

## Higher Education Costs

Cost has been suggested as a key factor in making study abroad decisions (Brown, Boateng, & Evans, 2016; Liu, Kamnuansilpa & Ando, 2018). Is the cost of obtaining a university degree in Taiwan significantly lower than Japan? Answers to that question vary widely from source to source, underscoring the need to carefully evaluate what purports to be “factual”. According to the Ujerumni (2013), study abroad costs in Taiwan are merely half of what most tertiary educational facilities in Japan charge. Aakiriti (2016) concurs, citing that total living expenses for one year at an average Taiwanese university is ¥915,000 [USD \$8,257]. This represents about 43%

of the average Japanese cost, which is reputedly ¥2,124,000 [USD\$19,164]. However, the “You x Study x Japan” website claims that studying abroad in Japan is actually a bargain since foreign students are legally permitted to work 28 hours a week, defraying many of their expenses. Moreover, Ryuugaku Kuraberu (2019) estimates that students need to pay an average of ¥275,000 [USD \$2,582] per month to study abroad in Taiwan. In short, prospective overseas students are often confronted with conflicting cost estimates. As Sasank (2018) points out, study abroad decisions often involve information asymmetries and perhaps many consumers do not realize how information providers pad the costs of their programs to increase their profits.

Overall, the picture that emerges is that tertiary education in Taiwan is significantly less expensive than Japan. According to Grant (2016) Taiwan is the 5th most affordable country to study based on *Times Higher Education* ratings. Thanks to government policies promoting post-secondary education, Germany, Sweden, and South Africa are even less expensive. By contrast, Japan is the 10th most costly place to study. The United States ranks as the most expensive study abroad destination and is 3.15 times more expensive than Japan or 5.96 times more expensive than Taiwan. Other destinations such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada are more expensive than Japan.

Although the cost of living in Taiwan is 28% lower than Japan (Numbeo, 2019), government policies regarding inbound student mobility also have a significant impact in determining how many foreign students visit a given location. Whereas the United States and post-Brexit Britain has taken increasingly isolationist policies, making it more difficult for overseas students to study in those countries, Japan and Taiwan are attempting to make it easier to overseas students to study there. Increasingly isolated diplomatically, Taiwan’s Ministry of Education recognizes that recruiting many overseas students can be potentially a useful human capital investment and a means of gaining “soft power” (Nye, 2005). It was in this spirit that Tsai Ing-wen launched Taiwan’s “New Southbound Policy” in 2016 to recruit more students from places such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and India as students from mainland China dwindle. Both Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education have scholarship programs that enable overseas students to study Chinese and/or attend university level classes in Taiwan. Moreover, since 2015 the Taiwan Experience Education Program (TEEP) has been promoting short-term professional internships in Formosa to help participants “connect with the Asian job market” (Study in Taiwan, 2015).

Japan also has a wide variety of programs designed to attract international students. The Japan Association of Overseas Studies (JAOS) and *Tobitate! Ryuugaku Japan* Program both seek to promote Nippon as a suitable study abroad venue. In recent years, those programs have had a modicum of success in recruiting students from Viet Nam, Nepal, and China (Serizawa, 2018). However, as the global rankings of Japanese universities continues to decline and living costs in the land of the rising sun remain relatively high, Japanese

universities have found it difficult to attract students from many parts of the world.

One thing that Japan can learn from Taiwan is the value of providing low-cost student housing to help defray the cost of living overseas. Moreover, whereas many Japanese universities have student housing exclusively for foreign students, in Taiwan the norm is to mix domestic and international students in the same rooms, facilitating cross-cultural learning and linguistic exchanges. Another way education can be made more affordable is through tuition waver policies. In Taiwan, these frequently exist between sister schools, and not surprisingly many students who do study abroad opt for sister schools.

## Exploiting the Worldwide Chinese Language Learning Boom

According to Yang (2016), foreign language learning is one of the main reasons that many university students study abroad. At this point in history, a boom in learning Chinese as a foreign language is occurring (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2018; Shao, 2015; US Census Bureau, 2013). Four examples of this will be briefly mentioned. In 2018, for the first time Chinese eclipsed German to become the third most popular foreign language studied in the UK as measured by the number of A-level examinees (Turner, 2018). In the USA, the number of people studying Chinese at a tertiary level rose 176% over the last twenty years, from about 30,000 in 1996 to 53,000 in 2016 (Looney & Lusin, 2018, p.16). In Russia, tertiary-level Chinese learners increased from 5,000 in 1997 to 56,000 in 2017 (Ryukyu Shinpo, 2018). Finally, in Japan the number of people taking the Chinese Proficiency Test (汉语水平考试) increased by over 500% during the last decade, a gain from 5,815 in 2008 to 34,018 in 2018 (HSK Nihon Jisshi Iinkai, 2019).

Despite the fact that Mandarin as it is spoken and written in Taiwan differs somewhat from the standard in mainland China, many Taiwanese universities are attempting to market themselves as venues to learn “traditional Chinese”. In short, they are shrewdly taking advantage of the growing popularity of Chinese worldwide. Currently 45 language centers affiliated with universities in Taiwan offer Mandarin instruction courses (ROC Executive Yuan, 2017). By contrast, the number of students learning Japanese worldwide has been shrinking since 2012 (JAC Recruitment, 2018). Although the Japanese government is attempting to promote the Japanese language studies through agencies such as the Nihongo Kyouiku Kiken and the Kokusai Kouryuu Kiken, it should be conceded that as Japan’s economic power dwindles, fewer and fewer foreigners are likely to come to Japan to learn Japanese. However, niche market growth opportunities certainly exist. According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2009), many people who are studying the language and hope to visit the country have a particularly keen interest in popular Japanese culture. Even as Japan’s economy cools down, some aspects of its culture still garner worldwide interest.

Perhaps one thing Japan can learn from places such as Taiwan is to recognize how languages can be

effectively “branded” as market commodities. In a sense, study abroad is an experience that consumers “buy” and Japan can be skillfully portrayed as a safe place to have exotic, life-enriching experiences. As Aronczyk (2013, p. 28) points out, a degree of fictionalization is involved in “selling” a country to overseas consumers.

## Institutional Branding on the Web

The ways many students make study abroad decisions today differs somewhat from how such decisions were made a generation ago. As Dentzel (2019) suggests, Internet use is changing social interactions across borders and now students often make virtual visits to places where they are considering studying. To make such online visits as appealing as possible, universities should think carefully about how to showcase their websites.

At this point it might be useful to compare the websites of the largest universities in Taiwan and Japan. This provides a partial glimpse of how some institutions in both countries brand their products.

The Chinese Culture University (中國文化大學) is the 367<sup>th</sup> most active website in Taiwan (SimilarWeb, 2019). In the last six months it had 1.41 million visits, many of which were repeat visits. Over 94% of its traffic is domestic, but 1.08% of it is from Vietnam and another 0.89% from mainland China. Social media feeds generate merely 1.26% of its website referrals.

This university’s main website offers eight language choices: traditional Chinese, English, simplified Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Korean, French, and German. Moreover, the information available in traditional Chinese and English vary markedly from the content that is available in other languages. The traditional Chinese version features detailed, up-to-date information about the school’s activities, its staff, and outreach programs. The English version has a prominently placed login user ID request. Beneath that is some outdated information about a fire drill, an earthquake drill, and dormitory evacuation drill. Simply stated, the English homepage is designed for current students rather than to recruit new students. The Japanese, Russian, Korean, French, and German websites offer sparse descriptions of the university’s history and a brief overview of its “special features.” They all require the Adobe Flash. Since only about 3.75% of all web browsers currently use that plug-in (W3Techs.com, 2019 February 19, cited in Vasquez, 2017[2019]) the value of requiring this should be questioned. For Japanese applicants, a potentially more serious issue is that about 10% of the school’s online Japanese language content contains ISO coding errors. That is to say, a good portion of it is gibberish (*moji-bake*).

By contrast, the Nihon University (日本大学) website —now the 1,369th most popular website in Japan —attracted 2.24 million visits within the last six months (SimilarWeb, 2019). Although 97.5% of its traffic is domestic, 0.76% of the visitors are from the USA and 0.22% are from mainland China. As a result, it appears that international traffic to this site is sparse.

Nihon University’s top page offers just five language options: Japanese, English, simplified Chinese,

traditional Chinese, and Korean. The Japanese page provides comprehensive information about the school, with a special focus on school admissions and sports. It also makes use of CSS-driven sliders not requiring any plug-ins. Although the English page has less content overall, it does offer detailed information about Japanese language courses and admissions procedures. However, the Chinese and Korean webpages provide only skeletal details about the university's history and admission procedures.

What can we learn by comparing the websites of these two institutions? First of all, we should consider how effective both institutions have been in terms of attracting *foreign* students. Although Chinese Culture University is Taiwan's largest university overall, in terms of *foreign* student enrollment, it ranks merely 54<sup>th</sup> (Taiwan Ministry of Education Dept. of Statistics, 2016). Other institutions such as Ming Chuan University, National Taiwan University, and National Cheng Kung University have been far more successful at luring foreign students. According to ICEF (2017) a university's academic ranking has a significant impact on its foreign student enrollment. Chinese Culture University is ranked as Taiwan's 35<sup>th</sup> most prestigious university and 1671<sup>st</sup> worldwide (QL2, 2019). Naturally, other ranking systems suggest different figures, but overall this university appears to be lackluster. This university's website could also be aptly described that way also.

The Nihon University website, in contrast, has a strong focus on admissions and on internationalization. However, in terms of attracting foreign students this university has also had limited success. Less than 2% of its 68,817 undergraduates are non-Japanese (JASSO, 2107). In fact, Nihon University ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in terms of foreign student enrollment among universities in Japan. In 2019 it was ranked by QL2 as Japan's 17<sup>th</sup> most prestigious university, although the figures by other ranking systems vary somewhat. Overall, the image that emerges is that of a large middling university with a strong emphasis on sports. By contrast, Waseda University has nearly five times more foreign students than Nihon University. Other institutions such as Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Tokyo University, and the Tsukuba University have also been much more successful in terms of attracting students from overseas.

Why do some schools do particularly well at recruiting foreign students while others do not? Various attempts have been made to answer that question. Tesar (2016, par3) points out that universities with high academic rankings, excellence in fields that applicants are interested in, reasonable costs, and attainable admissions requirements are in optimal positions to attract overseas students. Di Maria (2018) also underscores the importance of analyzing the demographics of international students to effectively tailor each institution image to consumers. He further recommends that marketing materials be designed for broad spectrum of students. This is particularly important because, as van Rest (2017) suggests, global economic and political shifts can significantly impact foreign student enrollments. For example, recent anti-immigrant policies in the USA and UK have been reducing foreign student enrollments in those countries. However, this might indirectly be a boon to Japan

and Taiwan: more and more Asian students are now looking for places outside of the USA and UK to enhance their global competitiveness. Zuo (2017) suggests that by 2050 Asia is likely to shift from net outward-bound student mobility exporter to become a hub attracting more incoming students if the overall economic power of Asia continues to increase and that of the many previously leading countries declines. Though such long-term predictions are highly speculative, there is no reason countries such as the UK, USA, or Australia should rest assured that they will indefinitely attract large amounts of foreign students.

Although the website of the Chinese Culture University website is far from exemplar, it does get two things right. First, It utilizes SNS links to the university's Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube websites. This makes it possible for prospective students to experience a wider range of content related to the university. Nihon University, as an example, has no SNS links and most of its incoming traffic comes from search engine inquiries (SimilarWeb, 2019). Second, the Chinese Culture University website offers a greater variety of language choices than most Japanese universities do. When deciding which language interfaces to offer, educational institutions probably should analyze their incoming web traffic patterns. From this standpoint, more universities in Japan and Taiwan should probably be providing information in Vietnamese and Indonesian. By contrast, the need for information in Russian or German should be critically questioned in light of how many students from those countries actually end up coming to Taiwan or Japan.

## Conclusion

This article has offered a brief overview of some of the different ways that post-secondary education in Taiwan and Japan is marketed to post-secondary foreign student populations. The success of schools in terms of enrolling overseas students varies widely in both Taiwan and Japan. For example, whereas 11% of the students at Tokyo University are non-Japanese (UTokyo, 2019) and 7.1% at Taiwan University are non-Taiwanese (Taiwan University, 2018), other institutions have insignificant foreign student populations. Toyo University, for instance, ranks domestically as seventh in terms of overall student enrollment, but 26<sup>th</sup> in terms of foreign student enrollment (JASSO, 2017). As Tesar (2016) suggests, branding schools in a way that appeals to overseas students takes financial resources, time, and a creative awareness of niche opportunities that are arising.

When interpreting this paper, two caveats are called for. First, since there are 781 tertiary educational institutions in Japan (MEXT, 2018) and 151 in Taiwan (Taiwan Min. of Education, 2018), the data offered here is by no means comprehensive. Although it is possible to generalize about macro-level trends in both countries, conditions from institution to institution vary significantly.

A second caveat is that conditions in Taiwan and Japan are far from static. This paper has provided a snapshot of inbound student mobility trends in both countries within a 2017-2019 time frame. As the domestic student

populations in both countries continues to shrink and as the academic rankings of most institutions in both countries continues to slide, their success in attracting foreign students in the coming years ahead will be open to question.

Chinese Culture University and Nihon University can both be regarded as cautionary tales of recruitment programs that have not been effectively managed. In order learn more about how to attract more international students future research on this topic should include more first-hand accounts by international students about how they their study abroad decisions were made as well as interviews with international exchange coordinators. Moreover, whereas this paper has highlighted two universities which, despite their large sizes, have only had modicums of success in attracting foreign students, future research could also focus more on small institutions that have been especially successful in this regard. It would be useful to contrast their activities other schools which have been exemplary in this regard. In this way, the educational costs, language advertising and webpage designs from both types of institutions can be compared to learn how college and universities can more effectively manage recruitment programs for international students who are looking to study abroad.

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