

Using “Tuning” To Boost International Mobility for Students and International Validity for Education Programs

interview with **Kazuyasu Ochiai**

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The real reasons students aren't becoming more internationally mobile

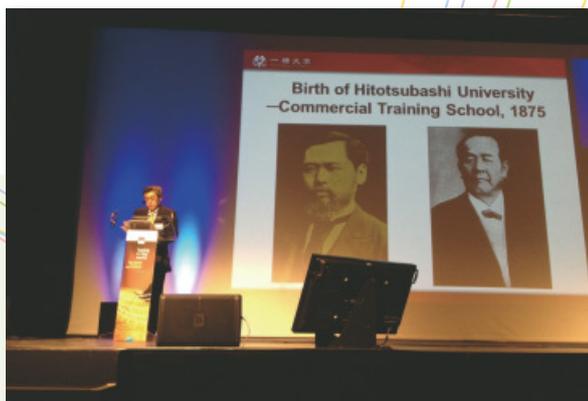
The key words for Japanese tertiary education in the years ahead will be “mobility” and “validity”—or, more precisely, the international mobility of students and the international validity of education programs. Universities need to direct their energies into enhancing both these aspects.

It has been noted that today's Japanese youth are introverted, with fewer and fewer students seeking to study abroad. Certainly, the number of Japanese students studying abroad has continued to drop since the 2004 peak of 82,940. It is statistically true that students' international mobility is declining. However, if our young people really are becoming more introverted, finding a solution will depend on understanding the causes.

Studying abroad is the experience of learning in another country and earning credits and degrees. In the past, a student's motivation for studying abroad needed to be no more than a vague expectation of broadened horizons, the development of an international perspective, or even just life experience. But times have changed. Now, many young people already have overseas experience before they enter colleges. Over half of Japanese high school students now go on to university, and their economic backgrounds are also becoming more diverse. Despite this, students

and their guardians are not being presented with specific merits incentivizing study abroad. Universities have been remiss in terms of explaining how the experience of studying abroad will assist students in their futures and repay the cost burden to them and their guardians. Back when study abroad was exceptional, universities only had to ride on the back of the sentiment that experience takes primacy over cost. These days, however, students need to be convinced of the merits of devoting the considerable time and money required to study abroad if their motivation is going to increase. This is one reason why the international mobility of Japanese students is not growing.

At the same time, young people in their teens and early 20s today have the option of using the Internet to watch classes provided free by renowned overseas universities, known as Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs. One example in another format is Harvard Professor Michael Sandel's “Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?” course, which became a public phenomenon when it was broadcast on television. Japanese young people therefore presumably already have a good idea of what learning overseas entails—albeit drawn from virtual experience. They can also partially undertake the equivalent of studying abroad right here in Japan, while a growing number of high school students are looking to enter straight into overseas universities at the end of their secondary education. Given this situation, it is critical for Japanese universities to make clear to students even before



President Susumu Yamauchi speaking at the “Tuning in the World: New Degree Profiles for New Societies” Conference held November 21, 2012, Brussels



Hitotsubashi International Forum “Tuning Educational Structure in Japan,” held February 28, 2013, Tokyo



they enter university exactly where study abroad sits in the curriculum and what significance it will have in terms of their career development, supplying information that will encourage them to select Japanese universities and enable them to recognize study abroad as an option in their career paths.

At Hitotsubashi University, students can apply for a range of study abroad programs, and those who are accepted receive financial assistance from the university to undertake short- or long-term study. Close to 20 percent of the students who enroll at Hitotsubashi will have participated in one of our study abroad programs by the time they graduate. Our challenge across the university is to increase that ratio still further, and we will redouble our efforts to communicate to students even more clearly the value and importance of studying abroad during their student years in terms of their completion of the curriculum in the university as well as post-graduation career development, which will provide a positive basis for students' motivation.

“Tuning” to unknot self-sufficiency and boost the international validity of education programs

Obviously, simply encouraging study abroad will not be sufficient to increase the international mobility of Japanese students. As a precondition for that, we need to boost the international validity of our education programs in order to internationalize them and to encourage more students to study abroad and more international students to come to Hitotsubashi. And this in turn will require the process known as “tuning”.

Just as the various instruments in an orchestra are tuned before a performance, where a group of universities are seeking to work together they need to coordinate properly prior to interoperation. Specifically, they need to affirm with each other attainment targets, specific learning content, the particular skills to be fostered, the necessary human and material

resources, and the expected outcomes at program completion. Using that foundation of mutual understanding, universities can bring their particular strengths to creating joint programs and enabling credit transfers.

Universities have a range of functions, including education, research, and partnership with society. Research is borderless—researchers work with colleagues around the globe, bringing to bear friendly rivalry in pursuit of the truth. At the social partnership level too, universities are engaging in multi-faceted off-campus cooperation, including joining forces with industry and government, and working to contribute to the community. When it comes to education, however, Japanese universities have an historic propensity toward self-sufficiency, and a strong self-containment has simply been regarded as the norm, with universities shepherding their student flocks right through from university entrance exams to lectures and credit acquisition, career guidance, and graduation assessment. However, self-sufficiency as the ideal of Japanese college education has been an obstacle to student mobility as the declining number of students studying abroad to which I referred earlier shows. From now on, universities will need to stop trying to do everything themselves and instead aim for sharing of education to fulfill the mission of each university, engaging in competition and cooperation with other selected universities and making skillful use of external education resources. To achieve this, we will need to employ tuning as a method of controlling the sharing of education and course alignment.

Hitotsubashi has a tradition of using exposure to the outside world as a way of nurturing smart and tough students. We offer long-term study at those overseas universities with which we have concluded academic exchange agreements, short-term overseas study and overseas language study programs, internships, and study in the multi-disciplinary courses operated by the four-university alliance we have formed with the Tokyo Institute of Technology, the



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Tokyo Medical and Dental University, and the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. We also have credit transfer agreements with other universities, including the other members of the Tama Region Five-National University Educational Alliance, Tsuda College, and Ochanomizu University. On top of this, we have developed joint degree programs with overseas universities. We need to pursue this controlled opening and sharing still further to enhance our education quality without losing our academic identity and integrity, encouraging the globalization of both university education and students. Regional tuning networks have already been developed in the European Union, the United States, Russia, Australia, Africa, Canada, and Latin America, but Asia lags behind in this regard. That’s why Hitotsubashi University has elected to lead the way in forming networks with selected overseas universities that we view as partners in cooperation and competition and engaging in a tuning process that we believe will enhance the international validity of our education programs.

Augmenting recurrent education and establishing “Tuning Asia”

Tuning can also be used to augment recurrent education. Recurrent education is taking on growing importance around the world as a means of building robust knowledge societies and economic foundations. But in Japan, the ratio of adult students to the entire student population is extremely low compared to the rest of the developed world. For example, in 2009, where the OECD average for students over 25 entering tertiary type A education institutions was 21.1 percent, in Japan it was a mere 2.0 percent. Encouraging adult students to go back into tertiary education geared to their particular life stages and the place in which they happen to be living at the time will require not only concrete social recognition of the value of graduation and program completion, but also a mechanism whereby adult students can accumulate credits in a manner that suits their individual circumstances, as well as the inter-university tuning on which this will rest.

Tuning is clearly becoming an increasingly vital and urgent task from a whole range of perspectives.

To meet this need, Hitotsubashi launched its own tuning research in 2011, with Professor Yukari Matsuzuka, a specialist in the economics of education from our Research and Development Center for Higher Education, spearheading the preparations for putting tuning into practice from an international perspective. In November 2012, Hitotsubashi University President Susumu Yamauchi was invited to the “Tuning in the World: New Degree Profiles for New Societies” Conference convened by the European Commission in Brussels, where he gave a presentation to the plenary session on internationalizing, upgrading, and tuning education at Hitotsubashi University. In March, 2013, Hitotsubashi reached agreement on joint research with the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, Peking University and Tsinghua University. We plan to work with these Asian partner universities to set up a “Tuning Asia” project, taking the initiative in jointly developing Asia’s own tuning model and guidelines.

In addition, we are exploring possible partnerships with tuning networks in the EU and North America recognizing the difference of the concept from area to area. We are also looking at designing a credit accumulation system whereby credits and degrees are harmonized with international standards so that students can add and accumulate credits across national and university boundaries to satisfy their degree requirements. If all goes well, it should become possible to establish double degree and other joint degree programs and confer degrees across multiple countries and educational institutions and, moreover, chart the stable expansion of these. Another possibility would be a mechanism whereby joint programs are created among multiple universities so that students at participating universities can aim to travel back and forth overseas to complete their programs. Even the pan-Asian expansion of the number of degrees conferred and the number of adults in recurrent education is not just a dream.

Japanese universities must break out of their pronounced self-sufficiency and self-containment to establish the foundations for international comparability and compatibility of degrees and credits and boost student mobility. At the same time, we need to pursue international recognition of the validity of our locally highly evaluated education programs. Undertaking tuning as a foundation to that end seems a fitting endeavor for Hitotsubashi as an institution which has turned its eye unerringly outward throughout its long history.

