

Title: Difference – The Quest for Creating Institutional Value

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Introduction

The global rankings of universities have, in part, been a catalyst for an “arms race” amongst universities in East Asia, a race not focused on weapons, but on human capital and status. It would be easy to accuse the ranking organisations (such as QS or the THES) for the quest. This, I believe, would be both erroneous and naïve.

University ranking tables have been acceptable domestic practices in the U.S. (Ivy League, State universities, Colleges), the U.K (Oxbridge), Australia (Sandstone universities) and Japan (Todai, Kyodai) for decades. With the arrival (and demand) of the international student, or as often referred to in Japan, global human capital, it would seem only natural that the human tendency to rank and organise data would eventually result in global rankings of universities. Moreover, higher educational institutions, particular in the global era, have always sought to create an add-on value, a quest to acquire the global human capital. Perhaps, an understanding of that quest needs to be revisited, and the Japanese backdrop provides a good case to study.

As Mok (2006) highlighted, the intensity and the extent of activities in higher education is greater than every before. Globalization has intensified the pressures on many institutions and countries. Higher education is expected to globalize, adding new forces, creating rhetoric for diversification, expansion, privatization, and marketization, which have become the focus (Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Mok, 2006) for many institutions. Responding to the challenges, governments have started to make *international understanding and cooperation* more central to university teaching, research, and service (Mok, 2007). Universities in East Asia have become increasingly concerned about their rankings on the global university scales. Japan, as a case for discussion, has also recognised this need. Their results are confusing, but part of the meagre ‘real gain’ in developing human global capital may relate to misunderstandings about what is meant by developing the human global capital.

Establishing the Quest

From the outset, there is a somewhat immature child-like reaction in some societies when once ‘elite’ institutions suddenly slide down the rankings ladder, with accusations of foul play, incorrect measures, amongst others, thrown at the ranking methodologies. I am not arguing that the rankings methodologies and criteria are not without concern, quite the contrary; however, accepting the results has become akin to ‘cherry-picking’ research data, accepting only that which supports the stated (self-fulfilling) hypothesis.

For example, OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 15 year olds suggest that Asian students, namely from Singapore, Korea and Japan¹, outperform students from other countries across maths, science and literacy measures. I will not debate whether youth from these societies are able to achieve this or not, although I suspect with other anecdotal evidence from the US, Canada and Australia,

¹ Although students from Shanghai also perform well, this is a poor indicator of education in China as a whole.

Asian students have a propensity to work hard and excel on standardized testing. Whether these kinds of students are necessarily the optimal for future societies and how much deep learning is being achieved are questions that need to be addressed in another paper. There are two points, however, to draw from this example. Firstly, the reasons for the results cannot be attributed to the schooling system alone, as is the habit of politicians and bureaucrats, whose motivations are questionable. Japan's results, with the possible exception of literacy, are more likely a result of the cram school system that most students attend outside school. The second, and more pertinent lesson to draw for higher education is, with a few exceptions, such as Singapore, the higher education rankings seem not to correlate with the PISA results. Taking Japan as an example, the PISA results for Japan are exceptional; however, Japanese higher education global rankings are quite the opposite. The result is that the latter is ignored and the former is promoted². This discrepancy has yet to be addressed in any depth, although we could simply highlight the goal of Japanese education is, and has always been, to develop productive and diligent human *domestic* capacity – citizens that can be productive in the Japanese methodology. If that is the primary goal then higher education in Japan (and elsewhere for other societies) has successfully achieved its mandate. However, serious questions about the claims of creating human *global* capital need to be addressed.

Brief Review of the Quest

Japan's Ministry of Education (MEXT) is responsible for the formulation of basic policies for higher education, the establishment and authorization of universities, junior colleges and colleges of technology, selection of new students and the conferring of degrees, amongst others. In order to advance higher education MEXT is also responsible for approving the establishment of educational corporations and the promotion of international exchange. During the 1970s, the mediocre quality of higher education, something in complete contrast to the perceived excellence of the elementary and secondary systems, became a major concern. The mediocrity and state of higher education was even criticised in an OECD report in 1970 and reform was strongly suggested. The reforms that followed are considered as the 'Third Educational Reform', following the Meiji and post-World War II transformations (JICA, 2004). Unfortunately, it would be hard to defend a position that the reforms have been successful in higher education (also see McVeigh, 2000, p.76).

The reforms throughout the 1990s and early 2000s were driven primarily by three concerns: the stagnated economy, the pressure to reduce the public service workforce, and the fall of the premier institutions on global rankings. Knowledge as central and critical for the Japanese society is the rhetoric that appears in nearly every official report, in one form or another – the current *human global capital* providing another spin on the same concept. The belief is that the “creation and transmission of knowledge, which has been the central task of the university, is going to assume the central role in the economy” and “society will more likely criticize universities' ability to respond to the challenges facing them” (Kaneko, 2004, p.133). Unfortunately, knowledge is no longer the sacrosanct domain of higher education or the privilege of the learned professor, contrary to the philosophy held by many Japanese teaching staff. The classroom is no longer the world; the world is the

² I agree with some UK academics and educators who have written an open letter to OECD arguing that PISA tests are damaging education worldwide. (The Guardian, 6 May 2014)

classroom, and students have faster and greater access to that world (if allowed). Put simply, although many in higher education correctly recognize the need for reform, the processes and application, or the road forward to create those futures, allure them. I do not explain away lightly the wicked nature of this dilemma, although two factors need to be mentioned. First, there seems to be an inability by the gatekeepers to accept that the needs for society have changed. University systems, with few exceptions, remain parked in a mythical history, devoid of context and time. Second, the peripheral ‘rules’ and ‘regulations’ that have controlled the system have changed little, and administrators continue to control the wherewithal, limiting possibilities.

Another significant factor affecting Japan’s higher educational futures is the shifting demographics; namely, the ageing and shrinking population. Given Japan’s success in creating systems and tangible infrastructure, the changing demographics provide Japan with opportunities to show global leadership by developing solutions, as other countries will also face the same concerns. According to the United Nations (2007, p.286-287) Japan’s population will contract from 127 million in 2000 to 109 million by 2050. In 2000, the percentage of persons aged over 60 was 23%, with current trends suggesting this will rise to 42% by 2050. Added to this burden are increasing rates of lifestyle-related diseases, such as diabetes, cancer, etc., suggesting that one possible future might place even a greater burden on those under fifty – unless rapid advances in robotics occur³. An obvious solution, although not trouble-free, would be for Japan to loosen its strict foreign immigration policies. In 2008, the government announced its intention to increase the number of ‘foreign’ students studying in Japanese universities to 300,000, a nearly three-fold increase. The plan’s outline (MEXT 2009a, p.15) included inviting international students to study in Japan, improving entrance and admission to universities in Japan (an area I can personally attest needs overhauling as both an examinee and creator), promoting the globalization of universities (“to make universities more attractive”), creating an environment for international students, and promoting the social acceptance of students after graduation, including opportunities for employment. Evidence (Martin, 2011)⁴ is emerging that these may prove to be more difficult.

Japan’s higher education sector has suffered in the global race. In part, to address the slide, selected universities were to receive 200 to 400 million yen (between U.S.\$2~4 million) with which they were to “strive to recruit between 3000 and 8000 international students” (MEXT, 2009). University programs were to be expanded so that degrees would be earned through studies in English-only classes, or in some cases, Japanese + Other Language programs. Numerous universities, attracted by the Ministerial incentives, are rushing to join the ‘global’ system. It is at this juncture we need to realize that the strategy is a *structural* adjustment, not necessarily a *practical* reality. For example, in one university, which received a generous Ministerial global grant, a 30% capping of research funds granted to full time faculty for abroad travel is applied. From my calculations, that would not enable a researcher to present their work in Europe or in North America. In another case, the Ministry gave an award to a web-based e-learning system that only runs on Internet Explorer. I believe this is the

³ Although I recognise the value of need for robotics in many spheres of society, I personally believe it is a sad reflection of a society’s values when robotics are believed to replace *human touch* – a basic human need.

⁴ See also discussions on Shack Attack

‘take away’ message from the fallout: minor adjustments that have little relation to creating human global capital.

Tilling the Quest

The global rankings of universities around the world are a source of much angst and emotion. As a graduate from one of the top universities in the world, I am keenly aware of the different capabilities and capacities of the top x to the lower y . Should a real audit of higher education based on a common rubric be forthcoming, I am confident numerous ‘universities’ (not only in Japan) would lose ‘university’ status, more so in some countries than in others. I am aware of some of the ‘games’ and strategies institutions have adopted to improve their ranking. I also have some concerns about methodology, especially when an institution’s ranking is different on the global ranking scales. For example, the University of Tokyo ranked 32nd on the 2013 QS Ranking and 23rd on THES 2013-2014 rankings. Although QS have a different methodology to THES, should this trend continue, questions about validity should be raised. Notwithstanding, I also recognise the effort by these organisations to improve methodology with the hope that the results will provide a better reflection of institutional quality. I believe the rankings provide indications of patterns that may exist, indicators that more evidence is required, an audit of kind, to determine one way or another the actual education-research-community effectiveness, thus providing a guide to improving or maintaining existing good practices.

In the QS Rankings of 2013, all institutions ranked in the top 20 were outside Asia. The National University of Singapore (NUS) topped at 24th, with the University of Hong Kong coming in at 26th, while the *University of Tokyo* was 32nd and *Kyoto University* 35th. Surprisingly, two Asian universities and two Australian universities (Australian National University and Melbourne University) moved ahead of the Japanese flag bearing institution⁵. Moreover, most of the Australian “Sandstone” universities were in the top 100, far more than Japan by number and rate. A brief look at the rankings for East Asian universities reveals the shifting dynamics in the region. I have *italicized* the Japanese universities. Seoul University, 35th; Chinese University of Hong Kong, 39th; Nanyang University, 41st; Peking University, 46th; Tsinghua University, 48th; *Osaka University*, 55th; KAIST, 60th; *Tokyo Institute of Technology*, 66th; *Tohoku University*, 75th; National University of Taiwan, 82nd; Fudan University, 88th; and *Nagoya University*, 99th. The 2014 QS Global Rankings for Asia have NUS, 1st; KAIST, 2nd; University of Hong Kong, 3rd; Seoul, 4th; Hong Kong University of Science & Technology, 5th; Chinese University of Hong Kong, 6th; Nanyang Technological University, 7th; Peking, 8th; Pohang University of Science & Technology, 9th; and the *University of Tokyo*, 10th.

A similar picture emerges with THES 2013-2014 Global Rankings. Again, no Asian university ranked in the top 20. Contrasting to the QS rankings, *Tokyo University* ranked 23rd, NUS 26th, University of Hong Kong 43rd, Seoul 44th, Peking 45th, Tsinghua University 50th, *Kyoto University* 52nd and *Tokyo Institute of Technology*, 125th!

⁵ I will be particularly parochial about this result as I was one on the end of very sarcastic put-down remarks about Australian universities by a president of a Japanese university about five years ago.

One of the better adjustments to the ranking methodology is the QS Stars, which is aimed at highlighting certain areas of excellence. The QS web page states:

The system allows for specialisation and uses devices such as student satisfaction surveys that are not part of international rankings. Successful universities are awarded between one and five Stars... A typical one-star university may be less than 20 years old and will be providing a good standard of education while building a domestic reputation. Those awarded five stars must be world-class in a broad range of areas, enjoy an excellent reputation and have cutting-edge facilities and internationally renowned research and teaching faculty. Almost 30 criteria contribute towards the maximum 1,000 points awarded in the assessment of QS Stars... They are grouped into eight categories: research, employability, teaching, infrastructure, internationalisation, innovation, engagement and the institution's standing in specialist subjects. This can be demonstrated either through QS ranking positions or through internationally recognized accreditation.

The only institutions in Asia granted five (or any) stars are Korean universities, with Seoul University leading. It must be noted that other Asian institutions may have not yet nominated themselves for evaluation for QS star accreditation.

As means of evaluating more than individual institutions, a comprehensive approach would be to consider the complete higher education system of different countries. Understanding the complete system enables a better picture to emerge of the individual institutions, such as whether certain universities are isolated outliers or examples of general excellence. The U21 Ranking of HE Systems attempts to evaluate a country's complete educational system by considering resources, the environment, connectivity, etc., as well as research output.

...the *Universitas 21* Ranking of National Higher Education Systems is the only one in the world to assess national higher education systems, and meets a longstanding need to shift discussion from the ranking of the world's best universities, to the best overall systems in each country. U21 developed the Rankings as a benchmark for governments, education institutions and individuals, and the project aims to highlight the importance of creating a strong environment for higher education institutions to contribute to economic and cultural development, provide a high-quality experience for students, and help institutions compete for overseas applicants. (U21 Ranking)

Using the U21 measure, the United States tops the ranking; Sweden follows, with Canada and Denmark tie for third. The United Kingdom and Australia were ranked in the top ten, and Singapore was 10th, the best performing Asian higher education system. Hong Kong's system followed at 15th, then Japan at twentieth. Japan was considered an efficient tertiary sector and ranked 3rd for quality of the best university in the country and educational qualifications of the workforce, although the overall score is below expectations for the income level of the country⁶.

What emerges is a more accurate picture of higher education in Japan. The top universities (Tokyo and Kyoto, and I will add Keio and Waseda from the private sector) are reasonable institutions individually (although the two private universities do not rank highly on either QS or THES, possibly due to their research output). However, when considering the complete higher educational system, these institutions

⁶ Other Asian systems Korea 21st, Taiwan 22nd, and China 35th

can be recognised as outliers and not representations of the whole. Reciprocally, it should be highlighted that Sweden (Lund University, 67, and Uppsala University, 79) and Denmark (University of Copenhagen, 45) higher education system outperforms individual institutions. Many questions could be raised by the contrast. I would posit that one of the variables that can account for the difference is a focus on the clientele, the student's experience, and not on isolated institutional cases.

Understanding the path for the quest

The 'massification' of higher education was created around Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution patterns. Until recently, many students who could afford university study still had the luxury of studying for the sake of learning and discovery. Economic forces have facilitated a refocusing on the necessity for a higher education. Until the 1990s, pathways to enter a 'white collar' career without a university qualification were still accessible. Today, many of those access points no longer exist, requiring prospective employees to obtain a higher education qualification. In some fields, such as medicine, health, engineering and computer science, this pattern is understandable, although the loss of apprenticeships needs to be readdressed. In other fields, such as becoming an office worker or an administrator, the necessity for a higher education degree is tenable and this needs objective discussion at all levels. Added to these changing dynamics in higher education are government trends to reduce financial commitments to institutions. As institutions still need to meet their commitments, the fiscal burden is passed on to the student through increased fees, as evidenced by recent government decisions in the United Kingdom and Australia.

To become more internationalized, Mok and Tan (2004) argue that higher education systems in East Asia have begun to change their teaching and learning strategies. They point to universities in Hong Kong and Singapore that have changed the university admission criteria, reducing the weight of academic scores, with more emphasis being given to extra-curricula performance, including leadership, community service, or other skills. In some respects, that approach mirrors the Admissions Office system in Japan, which has shown positive results for the higher ranked institutions, but has been less effective for the lower ranked institutions, other than helping institutions achieve the requisite student admissions quota.

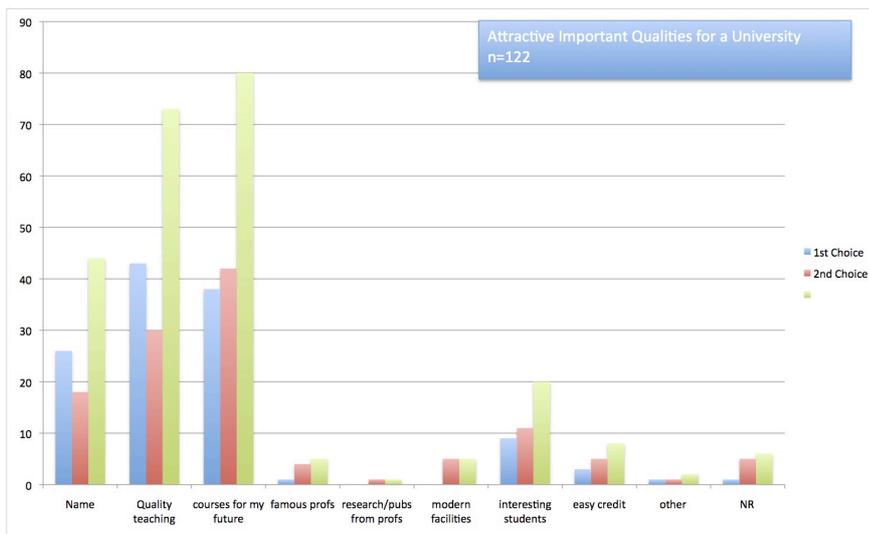
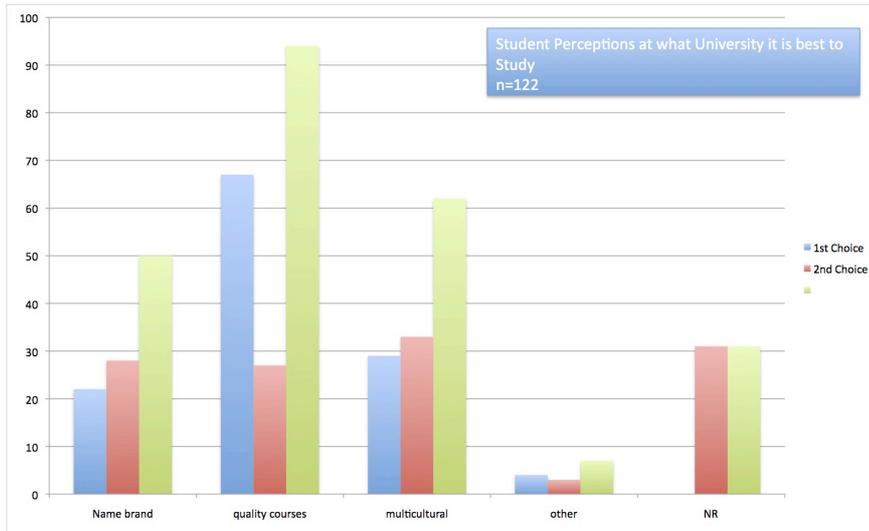
The top universities will always be attractive for the best talent - the outliers. These universities will allow a certain level of attrition, sacrifices, in a sense, to maintain their academic quality and credentials. The top institutions have developed a self-fulfilling cycle, a brand, matched by a perceived quality from perspective clientele. Their freedom also attracts quality researchers and academics from various fields. The 'brand' they create enables graduates to be a valuable commodity in the employment market, with many being offered a position before graduation or finals are taken. The battle for the top ten is more about pride, if at all taken too seriously.

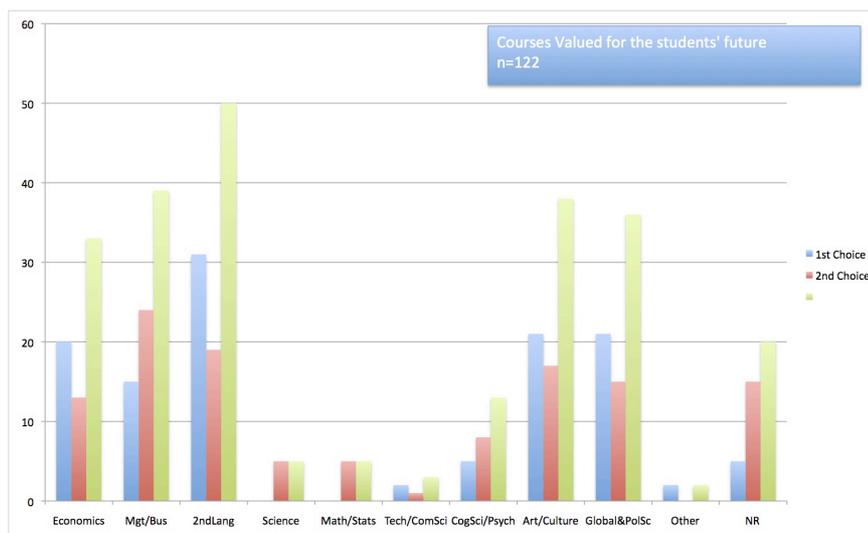
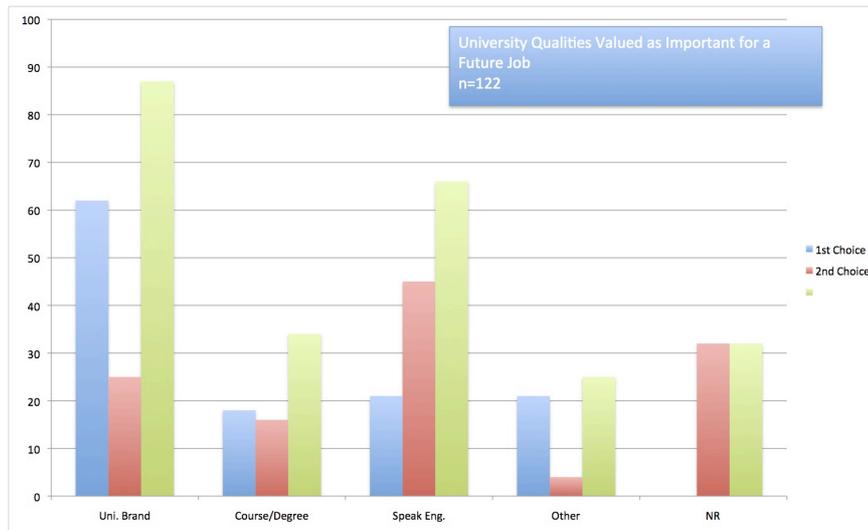
What about the rest? How much global is necessary? And, what is meant by global human capital? In Japan, this predominantly means a capacity to speak a second language. Understanding communication, the mind, and other intangibles are often ignored, when, in practical terms, they may actually be more necessary, especially given the advances in technology, such as speech recognition and translator software. These skills are not mutually inclusive.

Given that much of the rhetoric surrounding higher education has adopted marketing and economic speak, although the proclaimed goals remain on utopian Enlightenment ‘discover your navel’ ideals, based around an Industrial Age production structure, I wondered what students sought in choosing a university. Putting it in marketing terms, crafting a future without understanding what the clientele value or what their reality of the world might be could result in wasted resources and a future that is no different to the histories no longer desired. For example, Recruit, a market research organisation, has highlighted that high school students obtain 90% of their information about a university from the Internet, and yet institutions continue to spend huge resources on analogue (paper-based) promotion and curricula outlines that almost no student reads. The quest to create global human capital could, therefore, simply be fruitless, if the market needs differ to the services provided.

Marketing today is more complicated than fifty years previous. In the past, more emphasis was put on manipulating consumers to purchase a product because of what the product did, such as ‘tastes good’, ‘cleans well’, ‘removes odour’, ‘enables word processing’, ‘plays digital games’, etcetera. Breaking into the market today requires convincing consumers ‘what difference the product will mean for their lives’ and ‘how the *brand* makes them feel about themselves’. For example, purchasing an Apple product is as much about what the brand does for your identity as what functions it can perform. (Most iPhone owners utilize only a small capacity of their phones capabilities. Most, if not all the knowledge in the world can be accessed from the phone, but we spend most of the time using it for social networking and watching cats). The top ranked universities provide this identity – an intangible add-on that is difficult to quantify. So, would efforts to internationalize through a ‘global human capacity’ slogan be recognised as an intangible difference in the lives of the students?

Motivated by marketing and cognitive science literature, students at a well-respected higher-ranked institution in Japan were asked about their understanding of and attractiveness to a university. 122 students from different countries including Japan, Korea, China, Australia, USA, Canada, Taiwan, Sweden, Hong Kong and the Philippines completed the protocol. Gender was not considered as an important factor as I adopted the assumption that pathways were comparable, not different, based on gender equality. An attempt to identify ethnicity (for statistical purposes) was made, however, after implementation, classifying numerous multiple identifications (Japanese American, or Chinese Canadian, or Japanese returnee, or parents of different ethnicity, etc.) made compilation complex and any statistical analysis irrelevant. For this paper, I will outline responses to four questions: Student perceptions at what kind of university is it best to study, what are the attractive qualities of a university, what factors of a university are important for a future job and what courses are valued for a future job. The students were studying at what is considered one of the best Liberal Arts universities in Japan. It was therefore no surprise that a bias against science and math (STEM) was evidenced.





Consistently, name brand, quality teaching and quality courses of future relevance were considered as the most important factors, although whether they were ranked as most important or second most important changed on the different questions posed. On aggregate, the next most important factor was learning and using (multicultural environment) a second language, and as a credit-bearing course, outranked Global Studies/Politics, Art and Culture and nearly Management and Business combined. This preliminary data suggests that marketing and cognitive science research may also be important to attracting higher education students: simply, the Japanese university is no longer merely a place where one can get a degree but it must also add some intangible value to the students future (how it makes them – and future employers – feel). These desired intangibles for Humanities (non-Science) may be as important as

in the STEM or professional courses, as much of what will be learned about the real workings of any organisation still occurs after employment, but getting the attention of employers will require showing intangible assets, which also add potential capital to an organisation.

One important contrast is that unlike the heavy weighting in global rankings methodologies, research publications and output were not a primary concern for the students. This could be a reflection of the kind of students and the degree they were undertaking as research output might be a more prominent factor for prospective STEM or graduate school research students. I suspect, however, that research output affects academic peer perception and industry than students directly. Quality courses and teaching, brand, a second language and usefulness for the future all were seen more important. Implications to both teaching and academic output need discussion.

This data provides some evidence that attempts to create human global capital without modifying other institutional structures (and adding intangibles) is not sustainable. Although global rankings do influence student perceptions of quality, unless the 'wannabe' universities recognise that other add-ons are essential to attract and create global human capital, their efforts will be fruitless.

Crafting the Future

In spite of personal hopes about the nature of university, this initial survey (driven by personal inquisitiveness) shows some evidence to corroborate beliefs that universities are pathways, or necessary steps, to attain future employment, rather than institutions providing opportunities to delve in higher learning for the sake of discovery. The goal is to obtain the intangible asset that a university can provide. Although I am cautious to extrapolate much from this for higher education globally, universities offering degrees in non-STEM disciplines, at least in Japan, though I suspect in much of Asia, need to reconsider their *modus operandi* in their effort to create human global capital – not merely create compliant domestic capital. The following suggestions may be commonplace in some societies, but in others, they are mere façade, if at all.

Firstly, quality assurance rubrics and audits need to be implemented, and results disseminated globally. These standards need to promote flexibility in teaching pedagogy, as long as practice can be substantiated by the literature in Education, Cognitive Science and/or other disciplines on learning. Current practice, providing content without regard to the emerging science on learning, needs to be replaced if global human capacity is to be allowed to develop. Institutions should provide objective criteria for what will be taught, how it will be taught, what outcomes are expected and how units are applicable or relevant to the possible futures available to students. Other institutions, academic peers - not government administrators - should conduct an evaluation of a university's degree courses. An independent body, funded by the universities themselves, could manage the coordination and management of such a global system. This body would only report on whether institutions were adhering to the rubric that they designed. Evaluating institutions would therefore also become responsible for the quality, or otherwise, of the university degree course evaluated. Moreover, if we are to be serious about creating global human capital, evaluations should be conducted by a team, of which at least the majority should come from an outside country. What should not be implemented, as has been the practice in the past, are merely more quantitative bureaucratic items to be 'checked' -

often having little educational or add-on value. Any rubric or evaluation would need to be measured and weighed against cultural norms and practices, as long as quality is not lost. Quality research and measurable output factors would continue to separate institutions, for numerous reasons. However, open global accountability would improve human capacity, both locally and globally, and competition might be supplemented with greater cooperation and collaboration.

Secondly, institutions that claim to be developing global human capital need to provide more content-specific (academic discipline focus) courses in a global language. For Japan specifically, a degree course should not be recognised as being global unless more than 75% of credits required for the degree are taught in another language - over and above language classes, unless linguistic skills are specifically required for a future vocation. For Australia, it would require degrees to be offered in languages other than English. Of course, a scale of 'global stars', from 0 to 5, for example, could be used for courses claiming to be 'global', providing more opacity, clarity and accountability to prospective and existing students.

Developing a brand is complex and difficult. Moreover, the rapid changes in the market can make consumers fickle. Furthermore, it is unlikely that tsunami-like movements of a university's image will ensue, especially for the current top 100 ranked institutions. However, quality branding, matched by quality education, will enable institutions to attract quality students regardless of the global ranking – even more so if employers recognise the human capacity. Prior to Apple's resurgence as the major player, its products attracted a loyal and dedicated clientele. To achieve it, however, major structural changes in some societies, such as Japan, will be required.

As a final proposal for the quest in developing global human capacity, I would argue that global human capacity could be represented by the mathematical symbol pi. The Industrial model is training and educating "T" type students – knowledge and skills in one discipline, well suited to developing economies and production-based societies. As technology developed, and especially since the Internet became commonplace, educating "T" type students became essential: students who were experts in one discipline but had a good general knowledge as well. T-types could draw on general knowledge to explore and further understanding in their (usually) single expertise.

Developing global human capacity means we need to cultivate "*pi*" type people, experts in (at least) two fields with a good general understanding of other fields. The *pi* Model that encourages inter-disciplinary teams and studies. Being *pi* is more than inter-disciplinary, as *pi* people are able to speak and understand the concepts of the other, not merely bring a perspective from one discipline to another without fully grasping the concepts being presented in the other, which is what might occur when two "T" types collaborate⁷. Possibly, the *pi*-type person is the "anti-discipline" type person that Joey Ito, head of MIT Media Lab discussed at a recent public interview (Churchill Club).

⁷ I believe it is better for "T" types to collaborate than not, and it is even more desirable than all "T" types, who may miss many important peripheral variables that "T" types may identify. I argue that currently "*pi*" type people are ideal when discussing human global capacity.

The analogy of *pi* provides further reason for its use for the person universities should be developing as global human capacity: it is mathematically pure in the sense that it is a never ending number. Global human capacity means people who have an unending desire to learn and create new knowledge – assets for any organisation. Global human capacity means ever learning with an open mind to new possibilities, discoveries and development. Developing *pi* capacity is the road to building a brand that convinces consumers ‘what difference a university degree will mean for their lives,’ ‘how the *brand* will make them feel about themselves’ and *pi* will improve and expand their potential futures. This is the quest: building institutional value and human global capital. The real question is whether institutions are serious about the quest.

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