

## Internationalisation of Japanese and Finnish Higher Education

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This article aims to explore the social significance of higher education in Japan with special reference to growing interests in the internationalisation of Japanese higher education. We analyse the distinctive features of the Japanese higher education in comparison to the higher education in Finland. Both these countries seem to have entered in the 1990s a phase of re-evaluation of the basic principles of their national education systems and the needs for making the education more international in its nature. Moreover, we discuss different viewpoints concerning the challenges in the university-level education especially in regard to the instruction given in foreign languages and the influences of globalisation on the wider social and cultural environment in these two societies. In both Japan and Finland, the development of higher education institutions manifests social needs and traditions, and in both countries, the educational policies have traditionally been closely controlled by the central government and the Ministry of Education, in particular.

By the word "traditions," however, we do not mean any conservative resistance to change but rather an "intersubjective basis of certain understanding prevailing in a society". In a word, the traditions we refer to in our discussion can be a point of departure for either change or continuity in the long term. For example, all industrialised societies have had their own social discourses manifesting concerns and hopes on development of higher education. Still, what is meant by "universities" often differs a lot in each society because universities have naturally been developing as a manifestation of social expectation for higher education in a society.

In Finland, the university tradition originally owes much to the central European and Swedish models. The first Finnish university was established in 1640 in Turku and the University of Helsinki regards itself as its direct descendant. Linguistically, the major distinction in Finnish lies between *yliopisto* and *korkeakoulu*, which can roughly be translated as the *university* and the *polytechnic school*. In Swedish, the corresponding words are *universitet* and *högskola*. This distinction already points out that in Finland the "university" is reserved for academic and theoretical studies and for the preservation and development of the academic traditions.

In Japanese, *daigaku* does not always seem to have so clearly defined meaning: the fact that even some companies, such as *pachinko* parlours, use this word in their name, has made it difficult to judge only on the basis of name what sort of priorities this institution has in its educational philosophy. However, in Japan the most influential model for *daigaku* was set by the seven prewar national universities. Still the national universities continue to serve the role of setting many of the formal and informal criteria for academic teaching and research. In Japan, the traditions of education also combine the legacy of many different kinds of phases in Japanese history. In the heritage of the Japanese education, we may notice such aspects as:

- 1) the *sensei* (master)/student relationship and hierarchy reminiscent of the Edo period education and social relations,
- 2) the strong role of the central government in the education policy with a strong flavour of the Meiji era nation building politics,
- 3) a good number of special, usually private, universities searching actively for new solutions in social problems following the pattern of the Meiji era and immediate post-1945 "soul searching" periods,
- 4) decentralisation, democratisation and Americanisation owing much to the Occupation period, and finally
- 5) internationalisation period typical to the contemporary state of Japan, living under the influences of the globalisation processes.

What is significant is that all these aspects characterise the contemporary Japanese higher education system. Japan with its 576 universities (which is made up of 98 national, 53 public and 425 private universities), 598 colleges (96 national and 502 private ones) and 62 colleges of technology provides a wide menu for different kinds of students to choose from (figures for 1996 from *Japan Almanac 1998*: 247). Compared to Finland with only 20 national universities, there is more diversity in the university education available in Japan. Whereas the entrance examinations in Finland are used to keep the number of university students strictly controlled, the Japanese students usually find it easier to get themselves accepted into at least one university. When we try to make a comparison of higher education between Japan and Finland, we need to bear in mind from the very beginning that both the ideals and the reality of higher education in the two societies differ considerably. The social environment of higher education in Japan and Finland unveil some striking differences especially in the demographic volume and in the structural characteristics with education systems. Japan has a population of 126 million, while the population of Finland is 5 million. The Japanese language and Finnish are fundamentally different from most languages in the neighbouring areas, creating formidable linguistic barriers for international educational transactions. Already it is common sense that due to the giant discrepancy in size we should expect greater heterogeneity and more accomplishments from the Japanese educational system.

## Location of Languages in Finland

In the following section, we discuss the place of teaching of foreign languages in the cultural and social environment of Finland. A brief review is given to the historical background of the "language issues", the social significance and cultural meanings of languages—both national and foreign—in Finnish society where internationalisation has also been much discussed.

As to the relations between the Finnish language and culture, a Swedish-speaking Finnish sociologist Erik Allardt, the Grand Old Man of Finnish sociology, sums up as follows:

It is the Finnish language which has primarily given Finland its unique cultural features. As is well known, it is not an Indo-European language like Swedish and Russian but a Finno-Ugrian language related linguistically to Hungarian, Estonian and a large number of different languages spoken in the northern part of the Soviet Union. There is a rich and independent tradition of Finnish folk tales and folklore. But despite the unique feature of Finnish in relation to the other Nordic languages, philologists have emphasised that Swedish and Finnish are semantically rather similar. Each language has many loan words taken from the other. There is a strong purist tendency in Finland which produces attempts to find genuinely Finnish new words, and which has sometimes led observers to overlook the fact that many terms in Finnish are direct translations from Swedish. (Allardt 1989: 219-220)

Though the interest of Allardt is directed to cultural relations of Finland with other Nordic countries, not with cultures outside the Nordic countries, "a strong purist tendency" which he points out is an interesting element when we discuss questions related to cross-cultural communication in Finnish context. Finnish has had an essential role in building up the Finnish cultural identity, and behind this there are questions of national language and a nationalist movement (see e.g. Alapuro 1989).

From a historical viewpoint, it is important to know how Finnish gradually gained its legal status as an official language equal to Swedish in Finland during the second half of the 19th century. As a consequence of centuries of the Swedish era, it was in Swedish that administrative matters, including the church and taxation, were long handled in Finland. After Finland was shifted to the Russian empire as an autonomous Grand Duchy in 1809, the social economy of Finland that had developed with the influence of Sweden was maintained even under the Czar's supervision. Though *kieliasetus* (Language Ordinance) was given in 1863 in the era of Alexander II for ensuring the status of Finnish, it took decades before Finnish turned from a non-elite language of the peasants (*talonpoika*) into an official one, like Swedish (Leino-Kaukiainen 1989: 329-338).

The legal status of Finnish was also a symbolic element for the *suomalaisuusliike* Fennoman nationalist movement leading to the independence of Finland in 1917. This movement, which arose in the middle of the 19th century, was reactivated after independence and achieved its second peak in the 1930s in appealing to the spirit of *aitosuomalaisuus* (genuine Finnishness), which included Finnicisation of family names of foreign origin into Finnish, emphasis of the Finnish language instead of Swedish in academic activities at universities, and, in its most extreme forms, the ethnic principle of *Suur-Suomi* (Great Finland).<sup>1</sup> The movement had its peak in the 1930s and the 1940s, but it declined rapidly after the Second World War. However, the Swedish language, for instance, never regained its dominant position in Finnish universities or business life (see e.g. Häikiö 1989). At present, the small *Åbo akademi* which is located in Åbo/Turku<sup>2</sup>, the former capital city until replaced by Helsinki in 1812, is the only Finnish university where instruction is given entirely in Swedish.

Recently, in discussing the domestic language issues in Finland, attention has mainly been paid to coping with bilingualism, with the two national languages Finnish and Swedish, and with the requirements that bilingualism places on legislation and education and other public services. In the last decade, there has been a debate on *pakkoruotsi* (a Finnish word referring to forced, or compulsory Swedish for those whose first language is Finnish) and *tvångfinskan* (a Swedish word meaning compulsory Finnish for those whose first language is Swedish) in the Finnish education system; in short, whether or not Swedish should remain compulsory and from which grade it should be started. In practice, the number of Swedish-speaking (practically bilingual) Finns has slowly been declining, and there is no other quantitatively large and politically influential ethnic group who would demand the same rights that Swedish-speaking Finns have had. For example, according to *Statistical Yearbook of Finland 1997*, the number of Swedish-speaking Finns in 1996 was 294,233, making 5.74 percent of the whole population. There are also other minority groups such as Russian-speaking group (17,861), Estonian (8,876), English (5,487), Somalian (4,558), Arabic (3,298), Vietnamese (2,886), German (2,242), and so forth. Nowadays it is not the fundamental question of minority rights and bilingualism but rather the political bargaining in domestic power struggles between political parties that has most influenced the fate of compulsory Swedish.

In Finland, English has been the most popular foreign language in the postwar period. Especially at the universities German had gained the position of the most important foreign language and it took a long time for its status to erode. The period from the late 1960s to 1980s was the heyday of the English language in Finnish education. After that it has become clear that a wider language selection is needed. Both Swedish and English are on the defensive whereas other European languages and even non-Indo-European languages are in favour. However, no one is suggesting that English should be abandoned as the most important foreign language; the issue is how resources should be distributed between different languages. Recently, along with increasing interest in the European integration, especially German and French have been gaining more popularity. German is already the second most popular foreign language at school, followed by French. Russian has never been popular in Finland and the turmoil in Russia seems to have further diminished the popularity of Russian in Finnish schools. In comparison with these major European languages which have been taught in the Finnish education system from primary school to university and which seem to have secured their position in curricula already, due to strict legislation concerning the language requirements of high school degrees and academic degrees, non-European languages tend to remain in a marginal position as the *raison d'être* of each language course comes in for close questioning. Since the Finnish nationally uniform matriculation examination in the end of high school sets the same targets and criteria for all education and has limited room for personal choice, the education received at Finnish schools tends to be rather uniform and conformist. Moreover, most students have little choice when they are made to study English, Swedish and German/French, mastering all these languages well enough to get good scores on examinations (which decide whether one gets to university/higher education) is difficult enough for most students and does not leave much time to study additional languages.

## Language Teaching in the Finnish Education System

The primary education in Finland consists of six-year lower stage (*ala-aste*) schools and three-year upper stage (*yläaste*) schools. In the lower stage schools, students of the fourth year first start studying a foreign language like English in addition to a second official language such as Swedish for Finnish-speaking students (or, Finnish for Swedish-speaking students). In the upper level primary schools, most students study the second foreign language like German, French, Spanish, Italian or Russian. In three-year high schools called *lukio* quite a few students take a third or even a fourth foreign language. It is most likely that university students in Finland have already studied at least three foreign languages (in addition to the second official language) before they enter universities and specialise in their major subjects.

In Finland, the statistics of 1996 reports that 63,514 students got the final certification of a 9-year primary education, that 37,153 new students entered the first year of high schools named *lukio* (*Statistics Finland 1998*: 450-452). This implies that selections of students for higher education begins earlier in Finland, bearing in mind that in Japan about 98% of those students who completed the primary education continue to high school. In Finland, entrance to high schools already seems to be one of the crucial stages dividing students of about 15 years old into two groups—either those who seek academic coursework in high schools and possibly also in universities or those who concentrate on a vocational line for more practical training and education. In Japan, the percentage of students (of the age cohort) in 1996 who continued after high school to four-year universities is 33.4% (for males 41.9% and for females 24.6%); and in addition, some 12.7% (for males 2.3% and for females 23.7%) advanced to two-year junior colleges. The number of students who went to graduate schools was 9% (for males 10.7% and for females 5.4%) (*Japan Almanac 1998*: 248.).

On the other hand, when one graduates from high school in Finland, she/he usually takes the nation-wide matriculation examination in order to gain the certification of *ylioppilastutkinto* that gives her/him the eligibility to take entrance examinations given by respective universities. This nationally uniform matriculation examination, conducted at the same date and time in all the high schools all around the nation, consists of various sections: usually of the first and national languages, the first and second foreign languages, mathematics and the other subjects, such as biology, history, chemistry, physics, religion, psychology and geography (where there usually is more room for individual choice). In 1996, 34,695 students (58.2% girls) gained the *ylioppilastutkinto* certification by passing the matriculation examination and cheerfully marched in the sunny streets celebrating *vappu* (May-Day, national holiday in Finland) on the first of May proudly showing their *ylioppilaslakki*—a white cap signifying being a student candidate of a university. On the first of May, in fact, many of the people who have ever graduated from a high school still tend to wear their white caps (which tend to turn yellow when the years go by) to the annoyance of their less educated neighbours. Through the double-screening by two separate examinations—university departments usually make their own examinations (which usually require reading, memorising and applying the knowledge of a pile of books from the field of the specific academic discipline)—18,980 high school graduates were registered as first year students at one of 20 national universities (including both the *yliopisto* and *korkeakoulu*) (*Statistics Finland 1998*: 450-452), while about 50% of high school graduates with certification continued in the vocational schools and colleges instead of taking other entrance examinations given by universities. Also, the vocational schools and colleges usually require passing an examination. For students, it is possible to continue trying to get into the higher education institution of their choice by trying to get better results in the following year's examination. This is the reason why the number of applicants each year to universities is substantially higher than the number of new high school graduates.

It is noteworthy that instruction at universities has been given fairly dominantly in either of the two official languages—Finnish or Swedish. Instruction at universities can be given in English (or any other "foreign" languages) in rather exceptional circumstances: either in the case that English (or another foreign language) is the only common language between instructor and students, or in the case of special degree programs in which all instruction is given only in a foreign language like English. In Finland, it is only since the

late 1980s that some universities began to seriously consider and plan international degree programs by offering courses in English regardless of whether instructors were Finns or foreigners. Earlier, to master Finnish (or Swedish, and preferably both) was the only way for non-native students to survive and complete academic degrees in Finnish universities, and usually it took at least 1.5 or 2 years to sufficiently acquire the linguistic proficiency before one could actually start studying at any degree programs. To add degree programs in English has meant that more non-native students would be welcome at Finnish universities for getting academic degrees even without spending extra years in learning how to deal with the Finnish language. In a sense, to introduce the international degree programs was an attempt to improve reciprocity of international exchanges by accepting more foreigners in higher education at the same time as more Finnish students and researchers could enjoy studying abroad. Such a progressive idea of internationalising the Finnish academic community seems to have made a breakthrough to some degree even if it has also been faced with passive and active resistance in academia.

In Finland, all the universities are run by the government and it is seldom argued that the state monopoly on higher education should be replaced by some other system. In principle, the idea of this kind of education system is to maintain the overall state control over education, with the possibility to make sure that the number of students in each field is roughly in balance with the national needs in labour market. Moreover, all higher education is provided by state funds and is open on the basis of success on the entrance examinations. It is commonly understood that this system guarantees equality (in the sense of equal opportunity) and ensures that the universities get only those students whom they deem to be the brightest. However, it is easy to notice that under such a centralised system, as many European countries have, it is hard to diversify the curricula and develop distinctly new educational philosophies. On the contrary, the strong links with the government make it impossible to forget the "national interests" involved in the educational sector. Also, it is very rare to hear anyone talking about the education of international or cosmopolitan citizens or any kind of global responsibilities.

The national university system has a long history of promoting the national culture behind it. In the Finnish case, one may argue that even the nationalist movement that culminated in the establishment of the independent Finnish state in 1917 was to a high degree planned from above, among the educated minority who had received university education and who from the beginning saw the Finnish national revival foremostly in cultural terms. The Finnish language and the distinctly Finnish culture are something that has been seen to require state support, and the higher education system has been one of the pillars for the vitality of Finnish language and culture. The nationalist ideology has, therefore, been amalgamated into the Finnish higher education. Furthermore, the constitutional guarantees given to the Swedish-speaking minority, of giving equal status to Finnish and Swedish as official national languages, has to some degree lessened the Finnocentric emphasis on the educational system and has made the system inherently prone to further internationalisation when the time is ripe and new needs emerge.

In addition, the European academic traditions already require that educated people are able to use all the relevant foreign languages of their field. The traditional European university system was a system created for a small elite, many of whom became multilingual from their early childhood. Multilinguality has therefore been a norm for any person with a decent education. These criteria have largely survived the democratisation of education and the numerical increase in people attaining higher education. With the knowledge of several foreign languages most people get some kind of exposure to foreign ideas and more cosmopolitan thinking as well. One can argue that the end result does appeal to both the political conservatives, who are glad to use education as a way to maintain some of their status and privileges, as well as the political liberals who are generally in favour of more cosmopolitan values and regard the universities as having potential to change the world from above. The close contacts with the outside world have for a long time served to limit the narrowness of nationalist agenda in the Finnish universities.

This does not mean that the decision-makers of the Finnish educational system were blind to global and social considerations: the real task was to find out how all the good ideas could be implemented with the minimum of public funds. As a European Union member country (since 1995), Finland has become one of the first priorities of all policy fields,

including education, to make sure that the national policy is compatible with the European Union policies, and, preferably, would ensure the maximum financial and other benefits for its citizens and the state from the European Union funds. Moreover, the global agenda and internationalisation can also be seen to be commensurate with the general aims of the Finnish foreign and trade policies; and therefore, it is clear from the beginning that even from the point of view of the "national interests" the Finnish education system has to produce people who can deal with the rest of the world. The language used in explaining the educational choices is geared for bureaucratic use. This explains why the vocabulary of political realism is so prevalent among the higher education sector in Finland. Within the universities themselves, the fact that the universities and departments have to fight against each other for public funds has especially in the last ten years increasingly brought the methods of corporate management to universities. Most university departments are accustomed to the fact that they can always turn away some 90% of the applicants and there is no need to explain or advertize much the educational philosophies to potential students. On the contrary, they spend much more time explaining to different levels of administration how "efficient" they are.

Finland has no private schools in higher education, largely because it is the Finnish welfare state which runs the (national) universities mainly on the basis of taxation revenue. Annual student tuition still does not exist (although there is a compulsory membership in student union and its all exclusive health scheme with an annual fee of some 700 Finnish marks/ 120 Euros/ JYP 15,000), and university libraries have been offering basic textbooks (including all the required readings) to students. Books are readily available for those book exams through which students gain course credits and continue their study at their own pace. In Finnish universities, the length of study is not fixed at all. The only instrument used to speed up studies has been the policy of providing only seven years of state subsidised loans and support for one degree. Rather, how quickly or slowly one may complete a degree entirely depends on the academic performance of individual students. In humanities and social sciences, it usually takes about six or seven years before a degree of Master level is completed, but the same degree can well be received in three or four years if someone is in a hurry. When one gets admission to a university as a regular student, he/she can remain as a university student until he/she willingly completes the academic degree to which his/her admission was originally registered. Before completion of an academic degree, one may establish a family or get involved in working life, and he/she can return to study at university a few years later, and study a dozen minor subjects—or decide to never come back to the campus.

It may be pointed out that this kind of university system, which sometimes leads to waste and inefficiency, is in these respects similar to the education systems of many other European countries, particularly Germany. In 1998, the German conservative government seems to be determined to force through some kinds of reforms that would end the "easy life" of German students, and the issue has become one of the most divisive issues in current German politics. In Finland, the universities and the government have already for a decade tried to promote efficiency of university studies. The average time of earning a degree has indeed started to decrease gradually. Also, to make Finnish students better eligible to study abroad in English speaking countries the BA level degree has been introduced in recent years, although most students continue for a Master's degree, which is the requirement for most better jobs. However, it is often argued that a proper university education easily takes many years and that in many cases the years at the university are not altogether wasted. In Finland (as well as Germany), the main idea of getting the basic Master's degree is to demonstrate that one has the skill for doing original research and the knowledge and proved literacy (with most books being in foreign languages) in some specific field(s).

## The Finnish Higher Education in Transition

To further change the Finnish university system in a more pragmatic and efficient direction, the Finnish Ministry of Education is trying to develop vocational universities (*ammattikorkeakoulu*) as an addition to regular universities (*yliopisto* or *korkeakoulu*) (Finnish Board of Education 1996). This attempt is done primarily to increase opportunities for citizens to get higher education either through open universities or vocational universities.

Probably, this educational policy aims to reinforce citizens' right for education and to encourage people to be more engaged with life-long education and training as an escape from the elitist view on higher education. In general, as declared in a law concerning universities, the (regular) universities are expected to promote and conduct free research, to provide proper academic training for students in order to do research, and to contribute to culture and scientific civilisation (*Suomen laki II 1996: 657*)<sup>3</sup>. In this context, it is self-evident that university professors contribute to the society by doing research and giving instructions in the fields of their disciplines. Because of this principle, the emergence of vocational universities in Finnish higher education may not immediately mean popularising the higher education itself. On the other hand, to increase study opportunities can be part of the labour policy targeting young labour force who are in the greatest trouble due to the painful situation in the labour market. In Finland, the unemployment rate has been as high as 12 percent or over in 1997 as a consequence of the serious economic recession of the early 1990s. Although the Finnish economy has in recent years enjoyed an economic growth of more than double the European Union's average and is considered to be among the healthiest in the European Union, it seems like its booming economy and economic growth are not providing solutions anymore to the problem of unemployment since most investments are primarily concerned with increased efficiency rather than the creation of jobs. Under this kind of economic structure, new graduates find it difficult to enter the job market, and the competition is fierce for all available jobs.

In the meantime, it is also true that recently there has been more competition between the departments/faculty within the universities and between other universities in terms of organisational efficiency and distribution of resources. The national budget funds for higher education were cut by some 800 million marks in 1993-1995. Some 350 million of this could be replaced with outside funding, which was previously negligible in this sector. However, outside funding tends to cumulate in some narrow sectors and has its natural limits when all universities remain under tight central control. The new kind of competition, by which the total share of university funds is allotted between the departments and administration, has been controversial in many aspects. While some may welcome more competition and transparency, others take a more critical attitude towards the tendency of emphasising quantitative achievements in measuring the efficiency of education. Most departments are ready to blame the administration for wasting scarce resources on something of secondary importance while funds for teaching and research continue to fall. It has proved to be most difficult to introduce common standards to evaluate the achievements of the academic units, and even more so with the administrative ones. How does one objectively evaluate research results in a country where most people have some personal interest at stake in the evaluation and when it is virtually impossible to even find any impartial foreigners who would be fluent enough in the national languages to conduct the evaluation? The chosen method has, therefore, often been to do the evaluation as administrative work by using the standards set (and frequently changed) by the Ministry of Education. Some typical methods of evaluation are to count how many degrees or course credits are completed in respective departments, or to count how many research publications (and what kind) are published by researchers and professors in each department. Introducing collective competition to universities aims to clarify the economic responsibility of each unit (most usually department) rather than to just continue to let the Finnish welfare state compensate the university economy. The other part of the competition has been to reward the most "efficient" units with the idea of giving them more funds to develop their activities. All too often these reward funds have been addressed to the university as a whole which then has decided to use the money in pretty much the same and "equal" ways as in the past. This way, without any tangible improvements, both the "weak" and "strong" departments get antagonised: with each other and, in addition, the "weak" ones with the Ministry of Education and the "strong" ones with their own university administration. As for the outside funding, almost no department in Finland can afford to rely on these funds which are by their nature highly unpredictable. In some sectors, the European Commission funding shows promise of a more substantial role in the future. Some departments have started to market their research services to the public sector and the corporate world. Of course, there is always a danger that this kind of diversification undermines academic freedom and objectivity, and it definitely erodes the whole rationale of maintaining the central government's control over higher education. On the other hand, it has

been increasingly admitted that the centralised higher education system does not suit well with the rapidly changing new and diverse needs of the globalising world. It is equally clear that copying the models of some other system would just create new problems. (For the Finnish attempts to cope with the diminished budget funds for higher education and with needs to internationalise, Liiten 1997: A8 and *Helsingin Sanomat* 28 December, 1997, A 2)

Besides waves of quantitative reviews of university performance since the early 1990s, discussions on educational efficiency seem to have at least partly raised questions on how to improve teaching as an essential part of quality of students' life at university. For example, students' evaluation of teaching seems to gradually have become more commonplace at many Finnish universities though it is not yet as regular nor as institutionalised as at many universities in the USA. The choice of questions already seems to largely determine the results of any evaluation, as is the case with many other qualitative research results in general. The interpretation of the evaluation results is usually the most difficult part of all serious evaluation. At the University of Tampere, there have been several attempts to evaluate teaching. Some instructors on their own initiatives have asked students to write anonymously their opinions of courses to help make the next courses better. At some departments, the students have made their own questionnaires and passed them to all participants at courses in those departments. The idea of this type of evaluation has been mostly to compare teachers and their teaching skills to each other in a similar manner to the way teachers usually evaluate their students, and also to make teachers aware of their shortcomings. The student newspaper has also organised voting on "the best lecturer" and "the worst shithead lecturer" where anonymous voters should also give reasons for their choices. This newspaper has also published the verbally most innovative replies to the annoyance of the dismerited teachers—voting that has also caught the attention of the larger newspapers. Still, to question whether or not students have been well treated in teaching and supervision does not much change the power relations in universities as a whole because there is no change in the principle that universities in Finland are the place to conduct and develop research. It is purely on the basis of research/scholarly merit that individuals are most professionally evaluated in consideration of appointment for a teaching position in Finnish universities.

In Finland *luento* (lecture), which derives from a verb *lukea* (to read), tends to remain one-way communication where one reads manuscripts in front of an audience who are busy taking notes. This used to be a traditional way for those instructors who wanted to use these lectures more or less as an opportunity to present the achievements of their own research. Obviously, this lecturing-method can have both merits and problems. Those who have been able to secure their position and attain the top departmental hierarchy would usually rather continue to do research and take care of their administrative work than "waste their time on students". Improving practical lecturing methods tends to rely on the willingness of each instructor to make improvements on the basis of his/her personal experiences. However, by such a superficial description of problems with lecturing we should not make any excessive generalisation on nor neglect the endeavor of excellent instructors who are able to give scholarly presentations in most attractive ways. Even in a lecture-like classroom situation, instructor and students can enjoy inspiring communications, insofar as both parties are ready to do so. In brief, it is totally unfair and least academic to judge "all lectures in general" as outdated teaching methods on the basis of malbehaviour of some incompetent teachers who are indifferent to teaching or students.

In the case where a lecture does not appear too attractive, students can switch to another alternative, that is to say, a book exam, namely by reading books indicated in the assignment list given by the department and answering a few questions on the books in a written exam. Basically, one book compensates one credit: in some situations students might well read ten books at a time for a written exam in four hours. This book exam system has prevented fairly successfully the size of classes from expanding too much especially at the early stage of study. As book exams are made available as an alternative to attending lectures, the size of one lecture class usually remains rather small, approximately 20-40 students. In a sense, it is very rare in Finnish universities that students have to attend a big lecture class of more than 200 students. The actual class size usually varies on the basis of the popularity of the teacher and on whether there are alternative ways (usually book exams) to compensate for the lectures.



Since independent research work and academic writing is greatly emphasised in the Finnish university education, the compulsory seminars come to play a very important role in studies. A difference between seminar courses and non-seminar (lecture) courses is that students are requested to write a seminar paper for further discussion at seminar. However, much of the university teaching still takes the form of a traditional lecture series with a variety of attempts for improvements. Moreover, as universities are part of the Finnish welfare state, anyone can attend lecture courses regardless of whether he/she is admitted to the university. (However, in reality, it is rather rare to have any outside visitor to classes). One needs the official admission only when he/she wishes to gain the credits from the lecture course which is in principle always open for all the citizens and community.

## The Changing Status for English in Finnish Education System

As discussed previously in the internationalisation of the Finnish higher education, offering more courses and degree programs in English is one solution to accelerate the internationalisation of higher education in Japan, too, because instruction given in English can be shared by Japanese and non-Japanese students insofar as they all have a similar English proficiency. The main difference with Finland is that in Finland, if a university wishes to have foreign students, it is understood to be a *de facto* requirement to establish education first in English. In the Finnish case, a very significant factor contributing to the establishment of programmes and teaching in English was the reciprocity requirement that most European Commission programmes include. In short, if the Finns want to get (free) access to other European universities, they have to be able to lure enough other Europeans to Finland. There are already university departments in Finland where virtually all the students go to study abroad in a degree programme during their studies (and get full benefit of all the credits earned abroad).

We may conclude that the Finnish internationalisation strategy is, therefore, based on enlightened selfishness, but one could also argue that the selfish and nationalist arguments could easily be used to push through an irreversible internationalisation agenda that will do good for most of the parties concerned, and in reality is not as Eurocentric as its supporting arguments usually suggest. The Finnish universities have no shortage of foreign applicants and in many programmes the majority of foreign applicants are Chinese, not Europeans. Most teachers, of course, do not care too much about the nationality or financial contribution of their students; for them it is more important how well the students do and how they contribute to the class. The Finnish students studying in English are either regular students who volunteer to take classes or even the whole programme in English, or then they could have been accepted to a specific English language degree programme along with the foreign students. In both cases, the Finnish students have adjusted well to the change in the language of instruction. It should be remembered that in many fields all Finnish university students have all their required readings (which are an essential part of education) in foreign languages. In some fields in social sciences, the compulsory examination books include books in four different languages: English, Swedish, German and Finnish. In so-called international programmes, these requirements are made monolingual, just in English. Any Finn who enters a university is expected to be reasonably functional in at least four languages. However, using language only for reading is much less demanding than producing original writing or orally communicating in a foreign language.

The latest addition to internationalisation, therefore, concerns having the instruction, thesis writing and seminar work as well, in a foreign language. It is clear that, for the time being at least, it would be impossible to force all the students and professors to totally "abandon" their native language. Therefore, it is important to continue providing a full range of alternatives which would satisfy the needs and hopes of as many people as possible. One should also point out that even after all the years of foreign language teaching and passing all the examinations, many Finnish students still feel reluctant to use foreign languages, especially in spoken and written form. The Finnish language is a non-Indo-European language and doesn't provide such a good basis for a speedy attainment of fluency in Indo-European languages. Even on the basis of brief observations among the general population in Sweden, Norway, and Finland, one can easily conclude that the people of Sweden and

Norway, even those with shorter education, more often learn to speak fairly good English and German, languages that are closely related to their native language. However, when it comes to the TOEFL scores, for some reason the total scores of the Finnish students who take this exam tend to be almost identical to the Swedish students taking the same exam (and only slightly lower than the Dutch and German students who have the highest scores in Europe) (Saaristo & Salonen 1998: D 2.). One should be careful not to make too wide generalisations on the basis of any test scores since the cross-national testing samples always tend to be incomparable, and it is hard to know what these exams are exactly measuring. However, it seems like Finnish students are nowadays getting fairly effective English language education, and that through their English studies Finnish students by and large are able to overcome their initial handicap of not being native speakers of an Indo-European language. One could also argue that the extensive exposure that the Finnish high school students get to exam-taking prepares them for achieving good test scores in language tests. The Finnish language education tends to emphasise the basic reading, writing and listening skills. These are the same skills that are being measured in such tests as the TOEFL test. This does not negate the fact that there are many typically Finnish errors in the English used by the Finns. For instance, the Finnish language (like Japanese) does not use articles. Therefore, most Finns fail to understand why these are needed in the first place and, consequently, find it difficult to choose the right ones and put them in the right places. Fortunately the TOEFL test does not penalise too heavily this type of abuse of the English language.

In contrast, for some reason, the standard Japanese high school English does not seem to give a particularly good basis for excelling in any area in the TOEFL test. Furthermore, it is sometimes pointed out that Japanese students are particularly weak in listening skills (Clark 1998: 49-51). Both in Finland and in Japan, the language education in schools tends to downplay the importance of conversation practice. However, there is one notable difference between the oral English used in education in these two countries: the language teachers in Finland are usually required to spend lengthy periods of time in countries where the target languages are spoken. It is generally assumed that a fluency (and especially an oral one) in the language that they are teaching is a professional requirement of working as a teacher. In short, the teachers serve as fairly good models for their students when it comes to their oral fluency in foreign languages. Furthermore, most of the communication in class takes place in a foreign language from very early on. Some of the universities which are training Finnish language teachers have for many years, long before the current Socrates programmes, tried to maximise the time that their students spend abroad using foreign languages. There have even been standing arrangements between a German language department and a department store in Germany. This department store provided the German majors work for three months in summer time (when their regular workers were taking their long summer holidays). This way the students were, in fact, paid for their "Study Abroad" period. In addition, the opportunities for student exchange within Europe have rapidly increased in this decade and the language majors are among those who can benefit most from these opportunities.

It may also be noted that the language fluency among certain age cohorts is not only related to language education but to wider social developments and changes as well. For a long time in Finland, the girls tended to have better scores than boys in all language exams, including the matriculation examinations which largely decide their future. In international comparisons, there is, indeed, a pattern that is convergent with this phenomenon. Since languages make an essential part of the compulsory requirements, the universities in Finland have for decades had a clear majority of female students. However, in the past two years there has suddenly been a new, quite unexpected development: the boys have beaten the girls in the English matriculation examination (Saaristo & Salonen 1998: D 2). Possible explanations for this phenomenon include the fact that the current youth culture among boys requires them to possess better English language skills. Finland has nowadays the highest rate of Internet access in the world (82/1000 people, whereas Sweden, for instance, has only 40/1000 people [Astikainen 1998: D 3]).

However, the biggest motivation is provided by the simple fact that the boys feel that foreign languages are needed in order to succeed in current and future working life. In the past, being fluent in foreign languages certainly helped to get a good job, but now it seems like it is becoming more like a basic requirement, even in the "male dominated" fields, such as engineering. The Finnish economy has its share of successful globalised high-tech

companies, such as Nokia, Kone or Vaisala, all of which contribute greatly to the Finnish economy and provide good career opportunities for people in Finland. On the contrary, the Japanese economy is much less (and less directly) dependent on the foreign markets than the Finnish economy. The Japanese economy, in general, still does not put so much emphasis on foreign language fluency and the proportion of people who need to use foreign languages, including English, in their work remains much smaller than in most smaller European countries. The gender roles in most industrialised countries emphasise the need for males to succeed at any cost in order for them to meet the criteria set by the educational authorities and employers. Although these gender roles keep changing in all countries, and Finland, for instance, has both sexes roughly equally represented in the labour force,<sup>4</sup> the patterns of working life clearly reflect the differences that exist in gender roles. For instance, the technical field, the sales work and the administrative work are all fields where males are clearly overly represented in Finland, where one often is faced with the archetypes of competition-oriented male-centred gender roles (*Statistical Yearbook of Finland 1997*: 338). What is interesting is that now it seems that in Finland the male youth culture and traditional gender roles are supporting each other and helping the boys to outperform the girls in English.

## The Japanese Education System under Pressure to Internationalise

As earlier mentioned, higher education in Japan is provided by both public (national or municipal) and private sectors. The inherent diversity in Japanese higher education creates a good basis for seeking new solutions to new challenges and emerging needs. In the recent years the challenges of internationalisation and globalisation have created whole new discourses in Japan, and the education sector has been quick to meet the new expectations for more internationalised education. This has taken place against the background of the traditional types of education as being perceived to be too little concerned with the issues of internationalisation. However, in Japan there is room for different kinds of educational institutions and they can be complementary to each other.

Around the mid 1980s Prime Minister Nakasone tried to promote the internationalisation of the Japanese education system by increasing the number of Monbushō scholarships for foreign students and by inviting native English-speakers to English classes in junior high schools. The idea was to internationalise the Japanese higher education and to generate good will and knowledge of Japan abroad as well as to educate Japanese people who would be capable of satisfying the needs of internationalised Japanese society and economy. In 1983 the Japanese government also set up a numerical target to rapidly increase the number of foreign students in Japan, so that in the year 2000 there would be 100,000 foreign students. In 1981, the number of foreign students in Japan was as low as 7,179. For some years, the new policy of encouraging foreign students to study in Japan and Japanese universities to accept more foreigners seemed to work. In the late 1980s, there was a rapid increase in the number of foreign students, many of whom were apparently attracted by the reputation of the strong Japanese economy and employment opportunities in Japan. However, almost at the same time as the burst of the so-called Japanese bubble economy, the increase in the number of foreign students started to level off. The highest peak reached was in 1995 with 53,847 students, and after this, there has already been two straight years of falling admissions. The recent economic problems in other Asian countries are likely to make Japan an even less attractive study abroad destination to many of the potential students in those countries where the Japan-bound students have originated in the past. The vast majority of foreign students in Japan study at their own expense, and therefore, are directly influenced by the rising costs of their education. Of the foreign students in 1996, some 23 300 (44%) come from China, 12 300 (23%) from South Korea, 4,700 (9%) from Taiwan, 2,200 (4%) from Malaysia, and about 1,000 (2%) from each of the following three countries: Indonesia, Thailand, and the United States. (*Japan Almanac 1998*: 251 and Umakoshi 1993: 48-65). Therefore, the great majority of foreign students studying at Japanese universities come from neighboring Asian countries.

On the other hand, these governmental efforts for internationalisation have not yet led to fundamental changes in Japanese higher education. During the years, many so-called

returnees (*kikokushijo*), who have received part of their education abroad and wish to return to Japanese schools or universities, notice the hard way how little their skills are appreciated in Japan. If these bi- or multilingual students of Japanese origin have so many problems with the Japanese education system, how can one expect that this system would help others to internationalise? (For the problems of returnees, Goodman 1993 and Macdonald 1995: 249-269, where she talks with the returnee student Kowatari Akiko.) As for the foreigners who come to Japan, they also are often made to conform to the lay of the land. For example, the foreign students who come to Japan with Monbushô scholarship are expected to learn Japanese first so that they can adapt themselves to Japanese culture in Japanese universities. This may be an easy solution for those Japanese professors who are willing to travel abroad themselves but rather reluctant to reform or change the culture of Japanese academia in the name of internationalisation. The problem with this rigidity toward multiculturalism or multilingualism is that it effectively hinders many attempts to learn and to communicate. Since science is international in its nature, the failure to facilitate open international communication also creates an obstacle for an improvement in the academic standards.

Selection of languages in university instruction is very controversial in any society because it directly affects the power relations in the academic community. As education can be a tool of assimilating foreigners and minorities to a dominant subculture of the majority group in a society, schools tend to be involved in the ethnocentric project of a dominant majority group without questioning how to deal with cultural otherness and whether any other solution but linguistic assimilation can be made available for foreign students who see trouble in studying abroad. Attempts of improving the linguistic competency of non-native university students can well be legitimised as genuine help. It is miserable for anyone to run into trouble with landlords, neighbours, or authorities because of lack of a common language or being unable or inconvenienced to do shopping or travel due to an insufficiency of linguistic knowledge. In contrast, teaching the use of language to non-native students in universities can also be part of a hidden project of keeping the purity of national culture embodied in higher education. In the latter sense, the linguistic purism can be a conservative obstacle and an objection to multiculturalism that can nurture academia in a constructive sense.

If the internationalisation requires only the foreigners to assimilate in terms of culture and language, this kind of internationalisation just repeats the mistakes of the past colonialism and can hardly be expected to contribute to closer relations and better understanding between people. The problems that the foreign students have often faced in Japan reveal major problems in the chosen internationalisation strategies. In spite of all the efforts these students have to make to survive in Japanese society and universities, there are lots of reports of blatant discrimination in work life and in daily life, such as widespread practices by Japanese of refusing to serve foreign customers in a number of business sectors, such as in the renting of apartments. Since most foreign students come from Asia, and because the racism in Japan usually takes its harshest forms against "Asians," the unpleasant and arbitrary incidents of racism which are all too frequent in Japan definitely create a major problem for any attempts to bring more foreign students to Japan. It is deplorable that the task of "protecting" the foreign students from the ugliest and the most insular elements of Japanese society falls to universities when no other party seems to have an active interest to seek new solutions.

Many Japanese universities are not in the position to spend much money on foreign students, for instance, to provide the housing that in the first place is not easily available from private sources due to simple prejudices. If the acceptance of foreign students is seen to just cause problems for universities and to divert resources from the Japanese students, it is no wonder that some universities are seeking excuses to shift the trouble of internationalising students to other universities. It may be argued that since the university level studies in Japan usually require fluency in Japanese and because the Japanese universities have been slow and reluctant to increase instruction in other languages, notably English, the number of foreign students who may contemplate studies in Japan continues to remain low also in the future.

The main questions here are that for which purposes the number of foreign students should be increased and whether those expectations are realistic. Among the possible targets is the internationalisation of Japanese universities in general. That argument would be based on the assumption that the presence of foreigners would require the universities to change

their practices, including more diverse theoretical approaches in teaching and research, less focus on just domestic level, the hiring of more foreign teachers and researchers, and the use of foreign languages in teaching, research, and publishing. The obvious consequence of this kind of internationalisation would be that the Japanese university students and teachers would then become accustomed to presenting their work to other audiences besides just the domestic Japanese one. This would, in turn, make them eligible to stay and work abroad for extended periods of time and to be able to constantly bring new ideas back to the Japanese academic life. The emergence of a new kind of more internationalised faction within the Japanese academic community could perhaps also stimulate the rest of the academic community. It may be pointed out that in that kind of radical internationalisation quite a few members of the current Japanese academic community would feel themselves being threatened. Many eminent Japanese university professors have gained their position without much ability to communicate and publish in foreign languages, and for them, it would be a personal loss if these were suddenly made the most important items of academic credentials. Surely, the most important aspect in the internationalisation of Japanese universities is changes in the Japanese academic community itself. In the internationalisation scenario, the foreigners would have more or less the role of catalysts of change. It should be noticed that in many cases the "foreignness" of any particular individual is of no particular concern in academic life. If we are talking about individuals, university students, researchers, and teachers who have multicultural and multilingual background, their nationality is not the first concern. The real concern is whether the Japanese society is ready to have such an internationalised academic community and whether this is regarded as being desirable.

For the foreign students themselves, their motives to study in Japan can be as varied as their backgrounds. The favorite courses of study, for foreign students have been the natural sciences, engineering, and business studies. These are also the fields where the language barrier apparently is lowest to cross. It may also be argued that in these fields one may find it easier to avoid raising questions on culturally-based value conflicts. The consequence would be that in these fields the students do not necessarily have to learn to see things the "Japanese way" and they do not necessarily become lifelong good will ambassadors between Japan and their country of origin. Among the tiny minority of foreign students who come from other affluent industrialised countries, from North America and Europe, the humanities and social sciences have traditionally been better represented. However, this could also pose problems in some cases in the form of pre-understanding and frameworks of study being too strongly influenced by the "Japanology" traditions of these students' own academic communities which still often refuse to take Japan as any other country and prefer subjecting it to some kind of exotic Orientalist treatment.

## Challenges of Miyazaki International College

Miyazaki International College has declared as its goals being a "liberal arts college, international in scope, grounded in the social sciences and humanities, and emphasizing the study of worldwide human problems and issues in the spirit of collaboration, inquiry, and multicultural understanding. The fundamental purpose of MIC is to develop international citizens conversant in Japanese and foreign cultures and fluent in English." (*MIC Bulletin* 1997: 5). These high ideals are indeed guiding the teaching at MIC and make this college rather exceptional in Japan. The globalist agenda, reflected also in the curriculum, and the goal of producing international citizens/people (*kokusaijin*) with the required fluency in English language and the knowledge of both the Japanese cultures as well as the foreign ones, is an ambitious one and rare with its open references to multiculturalism and understanding of foreign cultures. These goals are further strengthened with a philosophy combining active learning with critical thinking, as well as with the college programme emphasising social responsibility for and moral commitment to protecting the environment, enriching human experience, improving social conditions, and encouraging world peace. The final goal is to prepare students to employ critical thinking skills with equal facility in Japanese and English, to work in corporate, governmental, or not-for-profit environments in Japan or in English-speaking countries, and to continue their academic or professional training at graduate level at home or abroad (ibid: 4-5).

When analysing these goals one may first notice a strong emphasis on the global obligations and the moral and social responsibilities that form the basis for the more concrete agenda and the curriculum. The welfare of people and peace are already ideas voiced in the Japanese Constitution (1947) and which are widely accepted in contemporary Japanese society. The strong emphasis on the environment may still be politically somewhat more controversial in Japan. Such progressive ideas, as the prohibition against smoking in all campus buildings, sends a strong message that this school is true to its social commitments and serious in its efforts to deal with worldwide human problems.

The MIC experience has demonstrated that there are constructive ways to promote internationalisation without resorting to boisterous activism or sectarianism. MIC can not fix all the problems of the world, but at least it helps its students to think in global ways and to be able to communicate in English. The endeavour in English language education has removed many of the problems that all too many Japanese universities still suffer from. At least the MIC students are not shy to express their ideas in English. One part of language learning is to become confident enough in using foreign languages and stop being afraid of making oneself a fool in the eyes of others. This process usually takes a long time.

It is not only in Japan or Finland that linguistic purism and cultural conservatism support each other, and that non-native students and scholars tend to fall into a category of a secondary group especially at the early stage of their academic life simply because of linguistic barriers. The only constructive way to alleviate or cope with this problem is to promote multilingualism. The practical choice for both the Japanese and Finnish universities is to provide a much larger portion of their instruction in English. Once a sufficiently large and a truly multilingual student body is created, it is only natural that all other types of international exchanges will flourish. Once people feel themselves comfortable using foreign languages, the perceived "threat" of foreign languages (and the cultural relativism related to them) can be expected to diminish rapidly. That kind of development would open up possibilities of enjoying more fruitful collaborations in academic community beyond the distinction between natives and non-natives. In this connection, MIC can be regarded as one of the most radical experiments in Japanese higher education, as it basically functions entirely in English both in teaching for a degree program and in administrative matters related with the teaching staff. In the sense that similar projects could hardly be realised in national or municipal universities, MIC can be located in the long traditions of Japanese private universities developing new solutions of education that fill new, emerging needs that are badly dealt with by the formerly established institutions.

Though it may take several decades before a newly-established school gains nation wide or international reputation, the basic principles of MIC maintain attractive elements in terms of the internationalisation of Japanese higher education. It is most desirable that other Japanese institutions of higher learning would make use of the positive experiences of MIC and go ahead with their internationalisation strategies. The MIC experience shows that the entire student population can be made to use English language effectively in their studies. However, MIC is still a relatively young institution and can not be expected to provide all the solutions to the internationalisation of the Japanese higher education field. For instance, the number of foreign students at MIC has remained rather small. It seems like a Miyazaki-based private liberal arts four-year college can not expect to suddenly attract many foreign applicants, even if the language of instruction is English. Since the great majority of students will continue to be Japanese at Japanese universities, the internationalisation strategies will have to cater foremostly to these students.

## **Concluding Remarks**

As a conclusion, we point out that there are no easy solutions for internationalisation and that all the existing traditions already lay out a good basis for improvements and modifications. In Japan, there is already a 50-year history of widespread teaching of English in schools. The Japanese high school students already have a demanding education, both in content and language, behind them when they enter the higher education. With few modifications one can easily upgrade the quality of English language teaching and combine it with methods of active learning and critical thinking to arrive at a more international end

result in higher education. The need for bilingual people with globally oriented education is bound to multiply in the near future.

In Finland, the problems of internationalisation are related more to the conformity and rigidity of the whole education system. Compared to Japan, one can also claim that the Finnish university system is rather elitist and all too competitive since it allows only a small minority to enter the universities. In Finland, Thatcherism and similar economic doctrines and the continuing European integration are likely to erode the insular and nationalistic basis of university education. It seems that in terms of research and study abroad programmes the Finnish universities and students are already in a fairly good position since most students have few problems in adjusting to studies abroad or in foreign languages. In fact, most smaller European Union countries and their citizens are in a good position to gain support from most EU educational programmes and for the removal of preferential treatment for citizens in favour of equal treatment for all EU residents, as these countries have traditionally emphasised foreign language teaching, unlike countries, such as France, Italy, and Britain, where many people still see little reason to study foreign languages. However, in Finland, it continues to remain a special problem that the Finnish language is so different from the Indo-European languages, making it difficult and time consuming to attain fluency in European languages. In this respect, we have at least one more similarity with the Japanese case.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Alapuro 1988: 92-95. In the 1840s and 1850s J. V. Snellman, a member of Swedish-speaking Finnish intelligentsia, was the founding father of the Fennoman ideology (and internationally well known for his philosophical work on Hegelian thought) which aimed to establish a Finnish nation state united in language, culture and loyalty. This was to be done by placing the Finnish-speaking peasantry and its culture at the cultural core of the nation. As a senator in his older days, Snellman was able to put into practice the essential part of his political programme.

<sup>2</sup>Turku is Finnish name of this city, and Åbo is Swedish name of the same city. Older cities in Finland have double names in Finnish and Swedish such as Helsinki/Helsingfors, Tampere/Tammerfors, Hämeenlinna/Tavastehus, Pori/Björneborg, Lappeenranta/Vilmanstrand, Vaasa/Vasa, Oulu/Luleåborg, and so on.

<sup>3</sup>This is according to the law on development of universities (*Laki korkeakoululaitoksen kehittämisestä*) of which Article 2 defines the tasks of university.

<sup>4</sup>In 1996 the percentage of employed men in Finland of the total of men aged 15-75 years was 68,7% and the figure for women was 61,4%. *Statistical Yearbook of Finland 1997*: 332.

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