

# Research in Internationalization of Higher Education : A Brief Overview

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高等教育の国際化における研究に関する考察

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## Abstract :

Internationalization in higher education is a diverse process that takes place at multiple levels. This article focuses on three : the global, national, and individual, with a special focus on the Japanese context. Because it is a complex process, research in internationalization addresses a wide range of topics including international programs, curriculum and teaching, and faculty and student mobility. Various methodological approaches to research are employed, including positivist, constructivist, and critical. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks are also prevalent. The findings address the way in which internationalization in Japanese HE resists Westernization, or neocolonialism, brought about by globalization. In concluding with a focus on the level of the individual in these processes, areas for further research are suggested.

**要旨**：高等教育での国際化には多数のレベルにおいて、多様なプロセスを必要とする。本論では、構成主義的、実証主義的、また批判主義的な手法を用いて考察した結果、日本の高等教育はグローバリゼーションによってもたらされる西洋化（Westernization）も新植民地主義（Neocolonialism）も受け入れ難い状況であると思われる。また、国際化における今後の研究課題にも言及する。

**Key words** : internationalization, globalization, neocolonialism, research methodology

## Introduction

Internationalization of higher education (HE) is a broad term, which refers to a diverse range of processes and outcomes at various levels. Ways in which scholars define and operationalize the term will be addressed throughout the paper. At the outset, it is important to note that universities have from the beginning been internationally oriented institutions (Altbach, 2007). With the increased pressures a globalized economy has put on universities, scholars have, in diverse ways, analyzed how to improve the international activities of higher education institutions (HEI). Similar to the breakdown of levels of analysis in HE literature provided by Tight (2003, p.10), Sanderson (2008, p.280, building on Knight 2004) lists the levels representing the “depth” of internationalization ; they are : global, regional, national, sector, institution, faculty/department, and individual.

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This literature review will adopt Sanderson's (2008) levels of analysis. In focusing mostly on the broad concept of internationalization and how it affects university operations in Japan, I will not address all the levels listed above, but will look specifically at research at the global level ; the national level, focusing on Japan ; and finally the individual level – namely, faculty and students. After a careful consideration of the topics and themes present in the academic literature, it is clear that research approaches adopted are diverse. Therefore, I will address major themes, but the paper will be organized using the primary level (global, national, and individual) of analysis. The discussion will focus on the impact a chosen research approach has on the article/book, and the area of internationalization in HE more generally. Scholars' approaches to research impact knowledge generation and practical decision-making. In researching this far-reaching topic of internationalization, I have attempted to both gain a broad range of insights from various countries, as well as focus more narrowly on the context here in Japan.

### **Internationalization of HE – Literature at the Global Level**

This section of the paper will look at literature applicable to many situations in various countries. By 'global' I mean that an article or book does not limit itself to one region or country, but addresses HEIs in a more general way that makes the research applicable to multiple sites worldwide. Literature discussed in this section tends to depict 'the university' as an ideal type that could be located in multiple, diverse countries. At the global level of analysis, the approaches to research in internationalization of HE are diverse. Practical as well as more conceptual or theoretical research approaches will be analyzed.

Some scholars address issues of practical importance, including international campuses, global (distance) programs, curriculum and teaching, or study abroad programs. Turner and Robson (2008) is a book-length treatment addressing all these aspects using a broad-brush approach. Their practical outlook concludes that in order for internationalization to be a reciprocal transformative process, training programs (in areas such as intercultural communication) for academic staff and faculty are necessary. Turner and Robson (2008) borrow from Bartell (2003) who strategically discusses two cases of universities internationalizing in a symbolic or transformative manner. Bartell (2003) does discuss two specific universities, but his overall approach is one that sets up a dichotomy between weak and strong university cultures with regards to internationalization. Robson (2011) later builds on this symbolic or transformative distinction in her conceptual article focusing on what it means to engage in transformative internationalization. She calls attention to another worry periodically addressed in the literature, that of global competition and other factors leading to neocolonialism, where Western (specifically North American and UK) HE influences cause a "convergence of style and approaches" (p.620), where non-Western international students, faculty, programs, and universities are being pushed to become more like the US or UK model (also, see Altbach, 2007 ; Mok, 2007 ; Turner & Robson, 2008, p.44).

In a landmark conceptual piece, Stier (2004) moves beyond any discussion of a specific case or university and develops a critical perspective of internationalization in general. His research agenda is to locate an ideology of internationalization in HE. His findings are that three approaches are typically found to drive this process: idealism, instrumentalism, and educationalism. Stier does mention the danger in pushing a universal ideal, or Western ideal, on universities, but includes the

brighter side of idealism, which is a hope for basic human rights for all world citizens. Instrumentalism represents the way that internationalization can bring revenue to universities, as well as brand graduates as having a world mindedness that can be an asset on the job market. Finally, the ideology of educationalism represents the aspect of internationalization that teachers are often interested in, that of learning about foreign languages or cultures so as to become a better, further developed, or more learned, person. In a similar look at ideology driving internationalization, Maringe and Woodfield (2013) identify three rationales : economic, cultural, and educational. Economic and educational are similar to Stier's (2004) instrumental and educational, whereas cultural refers to a focus on the way that a particular culture influences HE and learning processes in comparison to different cultural approaches.

It is important to reiterate that the literature at the global level represents a diverse range of methodological perspectives. Because the concept under investigation involves many practical processes, such as curriculum or international student support for example, many authors include a realist account. However, many researchers go beyond the practical and adopt an eclectic approach to internationalization research, discussing ideologies as well as practicalities. As mentioned above, perhaps the most pointed criticism of internationalization is its tendency to set Western HEIs or HE teaching and research agendas as the pinnacle of what an internationalizing university should look like. In the next section, I will discuss how this idea of 'internationalization' being nearly synonymous with 'Westernization' is a part of the discourse in the Japanese context.

### **Internationalization of HE – Literature at the National Level : Japan**

Before focusing on research that deals with the level of the individual (student or faculty) in internationalization literature in Japan, this section will look at themes in the literature that adopt a primary aim of researching internationalization at the national level. Literature at this level includes a diverse range of methodological approaches. A fascinating treatment of this diversity, what he terms "multivocality" of internationalization in Japan (*kokusaika*), can be found in Goodman (2007). Internationalization can mean different things depending on who is involved and what the context requires.

There are researchers who use a positivist approach, relying heavily on quantitative data. Futao Huang of Hiroshima University is a scholar who publishes reports based on descriptive quantitative data outlining, for example, the amount of joint degree programs Japanese universities have established abroad (Huang, 2006), the number of foreign faculty in Japan (Huang, 2009), and the difference in student profile between the US and Japan (Huang, 2012). Huang's research represents a prevalent theme in the literature at the national level, one that focuses on numbers, especially of international students, as a way to talk about internationalization. Qualitative literature looking at internationalization in Japanese HE ranges from more traditional constructivist approaches, to more full-blown critical challenges to power and predominant discourse.

In adopting a critical approach, several authors characterize internationalization in Japanese HE as manifesting a governmental policy tendency to place nationalist identity above all else. The argument is that the drive behind internationalization is to strengthen students' identities as Japanese, and to promote Japan and Japanese interests to the world (Rivers, 2010). Hashimoto (2000, 2007, 2009) consistently takes a critical stance stressing that even though policy at the government level encourages learning foreign languages (mostly English) and culture, ultimately internationalization

aims to promote Japan, especially economically, on the international stage. The title of Hashimoto's (2000) article captures this idea succinctly: "'Internationalization' is 'Japanization.'" Liddicoat (2007) sums up this theme in the academic literature thus: "Japanese interculturality focuses on the inculcation, maintenance and entrenchment of a particular conception of Japanese identity . . . and its communication to others" (p.41). When taking into account the above discussion of neocolonialism, or the process of internationalization equaling Westernization, it seems that certain pockets within the discourse in the Japan context exist which could represent an effort to resist Westernization, while still managing to incorporate internationalization. By this I mean that there seems to be a discourse of carefully regulating the less desirable effects of globalization, or a disappearing of borders, and an acceptance of internationalization, or a maintenance of national borders and differences (see Yang, 2002 for a discussion of the differences between globalization and internationalization). Of course the reality of the situation is complex, and ultimately the HE sector in Japan is often engaged to differing degrees in both an "opening up" to and a "closing in" against both globalization and internationalization processes (Burgess, Gibson, Klaphake, & Selzer, 2010).

The level of analysis in internationalization in HE research that interests me most is that of the individual. Above, I have discussed the broad framework within which more narrowly focused research is located. The remainder of the paper will address the issue of internationalization as experienced and articulated by students and faculty involved in the process.

### **Internationalization in HE – Literature at the Individual Level**

Because I am working and researching in Japan, it should be acknowledged that most sources in this literature review are works published in English. Although the above discussion of Westernization, or what Tsuneyoshi (2005) calls "Englishization," may shine an ironic light on my decision to mostly exclude articles written in Japanese, ultimately my decision is based on two things. First, in reading articles on internationalization by Japanese scholars working both abroad and in Japan, the literature that is cited with any consistency is either dated (e. g. Ebuchi, 1997), or gray (e. g. published proceedings of seminars at Hiroshima University's Research Institute of Higher education [RIHE, 2003] ; or policy documents which can often be found in English as well). Secondly, most researchers who write in Japanese also write in English, which I read much more efficiently (for an example of an author who cites literature in Japanese as well as English see Tsuruta, 2013). I will now turn to the focus of this section, the level of the individual, beginning with a look at research on faculty and concluding with literature focusing on students.

The most in-depth research on faculty involved in internationalization in Japanese HE is reported in Whitsed and Volet (2013), Whitsed and Wright (2013), Whitsed and Volet (2011), and Whitsed and Wright (2011). Craig Whitsed and his colleagues studied adjunct part-time English as a foreign language instructors working in the Kansai area of Japan. Overall, his research approach is constructivist, with critical tendencies. In other words, he acknowledges his participants' and his own role in the construction of the knowledge he is generating. To my mind, his work moves into critical methodology when he suggests that the HE system in Japan needs to do a better job incorporating English instructors into the internationalization process. In Whitsed's work, the effect of the researcher's approach is most visible. All of his participants were foreign (non-Japanese) part-time English instructors. By focusing on this level, his research excludes other perspectives, such as Japa-

nese English instructors, or full-time limited contract, or tenured English instructors. By choosing a specific group of participants, and being an insider – himself a former English instructor – Whitsed's approach frames his findings. Overall, one of his conclusions echoes the above discussion of resisting Westernization, and he asserts that foreigner English instructors at Japanese universities are mostly kept on the periphery. Internationalization in Japanese HE therefore tends to be symbolic, rather than transformative (Whitsed & Volet, 2011).

In an example of what I see as an unsuccessful conflation of quantitative and qualitative approaches, Asaoka and Yano (2009) present findings on questionnaire data. By presenting such complex concepts as “What do Japanese university students think about study abroad?” (p.182) in quantitative data only, the researchers' methodology restricts and masks the rich and interrelated factors involved in students' choice to study abroad. By not allowing students the opportunity to answer this type of inquiry in an open-ended format, researchers can risk merely finding what they were looking for.

Research approaches looking at the level of the individual in internationalization processes are diverse. Although Asaoka and Yano (2009) is not necessarily an exception, and more positivist accounts exist, most researchers combine approaches and make their methodology difficult to categorize. An example is Burgess et al. (2010), which focuses on the plans introduced in Japan to increase the number of international students in HE from 10, 428 in 1983 to 100,000 by 2003, and to 300,000 by 2020 (the current number is 137,756 or 3.8% of all students in HE ; JASSO, 2013). This theme of the number of international students in Japan dominates the literature on internationalization. Although there is a disproportionate fascination with this area of research, most scholars do mix their discussions of descriptive statistics with constructivist or critical analysis, thus aptly maintaining the complexity inherent in this area of research.

Studies focusing on the experiences of international students can also be found in the literature. Both Howe (2009) and Lassegard (2006, 2009) use qualitative action research, concluding that international students in Japan need more support, and their integration needs to be researched further. Another area that has yet to be researched in Japan in any depth is the home students' experiences of internationalization. It would be interesting to research perspectives, beliefs, expectations, and experiences of internationalization with Japanese university students.

## Conclusion

Published research in the area of internationalization in higher education represents a broad range of methodological approaches. Positivist-leaning research and constructivist-leaning research are well represented. This equates to a robust treatment at the global, national, and individual levels discussed herein. This paper has focused on these three levels of analysis in internationalization research and is therefore a restricted picture of our knowledge of the subject. One theme that does resonate throughout each level addressed in this paper is what I see as the tension in balancing negatively perceived effects of globalization with positively perceived effects of internationalization. Globalization, out of necessity, leads to convergence ; internationalization does not have to. The goal in Japan seems to be to find a way to restrict *and* adopt these two processes in strategic ways.

A resistance to Westernization is discussed in the literature in Japan. Various areas of internationalization are researched, including global processes, national policy, institutional programs, and

student mobility. For reasons that are not usually explicit, authors employ certain methodologies for certain purposes. Being aware and critical of approaches to knowledge production allows us to construct a fuller understanding of research and epistemological approaches.

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