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**International Students' Perceptions of their Academic and Non-Academic  
Experiences in Japan:  
The results of a 1999-2000 exploratory survey**

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**October 2004**

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Japan: The results of a 1999-2000 exploratory survey**

**by**

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the results of a small-scale study of international students' perceptions of their academic and non-academic experiences in Japan. It explores the general issues that face international students in Japan and considers several dimensions in relation to the initial stages of international student life in Japan, such as the students' reasons for studying in Japan, the admission process, financial issues, Japanese language ability, accommodation issues, culture shock, part-time employment, friendships and the students' perception of the Japanese reaction to their presence. The study concludes that the academic experiences of international students highlight particular deficiencies in the Japanese higher education system, such as poor teaching methods and inadequate graduate supervision; whereas the students' non-academic experiences raise the wider issues of the cost of living in Japan as well as prejudice and discrimination.

**Keywords and phrases:** Japan, higher education, university, international students, foreign students, student perceptions

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This paper is one of three working papers concerning international students in Japan. The second forthcoming paper will discuss the results of a similar study concerning international students conducted solely at the Faculty of Economics at Shiga University in November 2002 and the third will discuss the overall risks that face international students in Japan.

I would like to acknowledge Mr. Amar Wahab (University of Toronto) for his collaboration over the questionnaire for this study and thank him for his assistance in distributing the questionnaire at Osaka University for Foreign Studies. I would like to thank Dr. Ryuta Ray Kato at the Faculty of Economics, Shiga University for his invaluable comments and advice. Further, I acknowledge the support of both the Centre for Risk Research and the Faculty of Economics of Shiga University.

Studying in Japan is a most unique learning experience because we actually learn to live in a new culture and language. It's tough and challenging. It takes two times, three times the effort to learn here than if I were in the U.S. (FS39)

Thank you very much to the Japanese government for giving me a chance to continue my studies at X University. Domo arrigat gozaimasu. (FS13)

They are only interested in the blond people, you know, American students and people from Europe. They are not really interested in us or other Asian peoples. (FSIA)

### *Introduction*

Japanese universities have hosted international students for over a century. From the Meiji period, when the education system favoured the importing of knowledge and ideas, to more contemporary times, when the university system is engaged with the global exchange of information, international students have been central to these processes.

However, the relationship between Japanese universities and their international student communities has not been one of mutual satisfaction. Although Japanese universities have gained a variety of world perspectives from interactions with international students, there are recent concerns that the quality of these students has been compromised by the generous Japanese government scholarships, which were aimed at increasing the number of international students into universities. (Japan Times, 19/09/2003) There are also apprehensions that some international students show more interest in receiving the scholarship stipend rather than in advancing their education. Further, while international students have had the opportunity to study Japanese perspectives and contribute this knowledge to their home countries, they noted their frequent disappointment with the level of education that they received and commented that Japanese universities did not seem prepared to receive them. Moreover, they were often the victims of racial and ethnic discrimination and prejudice, which further marred their overall educational and social experience in Japan. (Otake, 2004)

This paper presents the results of a small-scale study of international students' perceptions of their academic and non-academic experiences in Japan in 1999-2000. It highlights the general issues that face international students in Japan and pays particular attention to their arrival process.

It is the first of three papers concerning international students in Japan and targets international students in receipt of Japanese government scholarships.

The paper will begin by a brief summary of the history of international students in Japan, followed by a discussion of some of the main government policies concerning international students over the last two decades. A brief statistical profile of international students is given for the years 1998-2000 and this includes some comparative figures with the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). The methodology and the results of the survey and interviews will then be presented. In particular, the research considers several dimensions in relation to the initial stages of international student life in Japan such as the students' reasons for studying in Japan, the admission process, financial issues, Japanese language ability, accommodation issues, culture shock, part-time employment, friendships and the students' perception of the Japanese reaction to their presence.

*a) Historical background of international students in Japan*

In the aftermath of the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895), Chinese students arrived in Japan to learn how the Japanese nation had so rapidly understood the 'secrets' of Western power and influence. (Crozier, 1988) In 1895, it was reported that there were 200 Chinese students in Japan, this number rose to 700 by 1890. After Japan's success in the Russo-Japan war (1904-1905), the number of Chinese students in Japan dramatically increased to 5000. By 1908, the figure peaked at 8,000 students. (Crozier, 1988)

In 1910, students also came from the then Japanese-colonised Korean peninsular while during the second Sino-Japanese conflict (1937-1945), more students from China attended Japanese educational institutes after the pro-Japanese government was established in Nanjing. Further, Asian students from the Japanese-occupied American and European colonies were also invited to study in Japan under the heading of "special southern foreign students." (Yamashiro, 1987:39) However at the end of the Second World War (1945), these particular students stopped coming to Japan.

Between 1945-1954, there were no international students in Japan. However, at the suggestion of UNESCO, Japan began to re-admit and invite international students in 1954. (Yamashiro, 1987:39) From that period onward, the numbers of international students has steadily increased because of specific government policy.

In the last two decades, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*Monbushô*<sup>1</sup>) has made continuous efforts to host large numbers of international students, as part of promoting exchanges for international understanding. This policy was also part of the overall reform of higher education aimed at transforming Japanese universities into competitive, international higher education institutions. In 1983, under the Nakasone administration, the *Monbushô* announced a target figure of hosting 100,000 international students by the year 2000. Although by 2000, there were 64,011 international students by 2003, the international student population stood at 109,508. (Japan Information Network, 2003)

*b) A summary of the main government policies and recommendations concerning international students 1980-200*

In general, government policies concerning international students were embedded within the policies of internationalisation and higher education. During the eighties, alongside Japan's economic achievements, there was also a general expectation for Japan to increase its interaction with, and contribution to, the international community. However, Umakoshi noted that Japan found itself lacking in such human resources largely because of inadequacies within the higher education system. Further, with respect to international students, he stated that Japanese universities were ill-prepared to accept them. (Umakoshi, 1997:259)

In 1983, under the Nakasone administration, the *Monbushô* announced a target figure of hosting 100,000 international students by the year 2000<sup>2</sup>. It also intended that 10,000 of these students would receive full scholarships from the Japanese government. The government plan aimed to expand the international student population in two phases. Phase 1 was from 1983-1992 and would target the rate of increase in international student numbers by 16.1 per cent. Phase 2, from 1992-2000, would target the increase at a lower rate of 12.1 per cent. (Umakoshi, 1997:260) Thus the recruitment of international students became one of the key features in the government drive to internationalise higher education.

Japanese language ability was one of the immediate issues that affected students wishing to study in Japan. In recognition of the need for comprehensive Japanese language programs, in 1982, the

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<sup>1</sup> As this study was conducted between 1999-2000; the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is referred to as its previous Japanese name, *Monbushô* rather than the present *Monbukagakusho*. It is only referred to as the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture when it has published in English.

<sup>2</sup> The *Monbushô* defined 'foreign student' as foreigners studying in universities, junior colleges, and technical or vocational schools.

government established a preparatory Japanese language course in China and Malaysia for students intending to study in Japan. By 1992, approximately 40,000 students had taken the test. (Umakoshi, 1997:262) In Japan itself, intensive Japanese language courses were given to all international students who had been offered a Japanese government scholarship and by 1990, 177 universities and colleges in Japan were also providing Japanese language courses for their international students. (Umakoshi, 1997:254)

In 1986, the Ad Hoc Committee on Education identified the achievement of internationalisation as a major challenge for higher education. It noted that there needed to be a) an 'internationalisation' of curriculum and teaching methods within Japanese universities; b) a development of, and improvement in, credit transfer agreements between domestic and foreign education establishments; c) an increase in Japanese students studying abroad; and d) a need in Japan to attract more international teachers and expand more opportunities for international students. These issues were further supported in 1991 in a report by the University Council of Japan. (Kawaguchi, Lander, 1997:103-104)

However in 1992, a report from a consultative committee to the Minister stated that future policy concerning international students should pay attention to the following, that: a) there should be a greater representation of students from all regions of the world as at that time, students from Asia represented 90 per cent of all international students; b) international students should be encouraged to enrol in institutions outside Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya where 60 per cent of all international students studied; and c) international students were too concentrated in particular educational fields, such as the Special Training school (*senmon gakko*) which at that time, enrolled 28 per cent of all international students. (Umakoshi, 1997:272)

In the same year, the government increased its expenditure to financially support more international students and tuition was reduced for those international students who were studying at national universities, but not receiving *Monbushô* scholarships. Approximately 7000 students benefited from that program and partial scholarships were also given to 6,300 privately supported international students. (Umakoshi, 1997:260) In addition, the government introduced a system of providing yen loans to developing countries to help offset the costs of sending their students to Japan. (Japan Times, 26/05/2000)

The mid-nineties saw a decrease in the numbers of international students. This was largely because of the economic downturn in the Asian region, as well as around the world. From the international student perspective, there were less part-time jobs available in Japan at that time, a part-time job was essential to cope with the high living costs in major Japanese cities. (Japan Times, 15/07/1999) The decrease of international student numbers was also explained by a

decrease in the number of self-financing international students who came to Japan to study Japanese in preparation for the university entrance exams. These students were the so-called reserve international students and when their numbers decreased, it had an effect on the total number of international students. (Ninomiya, 1997)

In 1997, more government-sponsored short-term programs were introduced, as it was argued that through flexible and short-term types of student exchange, the international student population would increase and internationalisation could be rapidly achieved. (Ninomiya, 1997) (Findlay-Kaneko, 1997) Initially, national universities did not develop as many short-term programmes as private universities because of the lack of funding from the *Monbushô*. (Umakoshi, 1997:272)

By the end of the nineties, the late Prime Minister Obuchi re-emphasised the importance of international students in Japan and of promoting exchanges for international understanding. He commented in the “Japan Times Foreign Students Special” (1999) that as a student he visited Asia and therefore, wanted to extend the same hospitality shown to him to international students in Japan, and in particular, to those students from Asia. This was an interesting comment given that the *Monbushô* had always seemed concerned with the high percentage of Asian students in Japan.

In 1998, the overall number of international students significantly increased. The student numbers from Africa and Europe also improved, and for the first time, short-term international students from the USA surpassed the number of students from China. (Japan Times, 15/07/1999) Stronger educational exchanges with Asian countries were promoted when Japan and South Korea agreed to launch a joint educational program beginning April 2000. Under this program up to 1,000 South Korean students would study at Japanese state-run universities every year up to the year 2010. The program also offered annual training and class observations in Japan to 50 South Korean teachers. (Japan Times, 20/03/2000)

There were also government policy changes in the funding of international students. In May 2000, the government announced that it was considering creating a multibillion yen fund using low-interest yen loans to provide financial aid to international students in Japan. It was hoped that the fund would benefit self-financing students coming to Japan, especially those from Asian developing countries, as there had been a low take-up of government-to-government yen loans for education from these countries. Under this new loan scheme, students would be eligible to receive yen loans on favourable terms to finance their travel, living costs, and tuition. The loans would be repayable for up to 40 years, which included a 10-year grace period. This provision of low interest loans to potential students followed in the footsteps of established student loan programmes in other industrialised countries, such as the USA. The significant difference in this

case, was that these loans were being considered specifically for international students. However, in a guarantor society like Japan, the main fear expressed by the Finance Ministry was that the loans might not be repaid unless an established repayment-guarantee system was first established. (Japan Times, 26/05/2000)

Overall, it would appear that much has been done to welcome international students to Japan. The government has funded language courses both within Japan and outside of it to assist international students with their initial language difficulties. It has supported international exchange programmes and mediated between foreign government programmes and Japanese universities. Moreover, individual international students had direct financial assistance in the form of *Monbushô* scholarships. In the academic year 1999-2000, an undergraduate student in receipt of a *Monbushô* scholarship received 142,500 yen per month and a graduate student received 185,500 yen per month. In addition, all students received a round trip ticket to their home country, paid no tuition or examination fees, received an additional 25,000 yen upon arrival in Japan and were reimbursed for 80 per cent of any medical costs incurred. Graduate students could also receive varied research allowances from their individual universities. (Association of International Education Japan (AIEJ), 2000)

However, there were still strong criticisms of the government's efforts regarding international students from agencies and individuals within Japan as well as from international students themselves. This was because in reality many of these policies and programmes 'fell flat' as they lacked in substance. The hosting of 100,000 international students by the year 2000 was said to be an important policy in the drive for the internalisation of the higher education system. However, it was suggested that the basis for the number 100,000 was the result of a simple comparison with France's international student population as opposed to a figure being constructed within a concrete proposal designed specifically for international students in Japan. (Asahi Shimbun Earth Project 21, 1998) Interestingly, it was subsequently reported that having been alarmed by the failure of the *Monbushô* to achieve its goal of hosting 100,000 international students in 2000, Education Minister Nakasone set a new target and declared that Japan would try to double the number of international students as soon as possible within the next decade. (Japan Times, 26/05/2000)

Comprehensive language programmes were, and still are currently under-represented in many universities, especially national ones. Despite setting up language programmes in the early eighties, by 1997, the *Monbushô* was still asking national universities to offer intensive Japanese language courses or to increase the current number of language courses and to develop courses and programs where classes were taught in English, especially for short-term programmes. One



of the reasons that many national universities hadn't implemented such courses was that it marked a serious challenge to Japanese professors, not only to teach in English, but also to take on a heavier course load in order to participate in such programs. (Findlay-Kaneko, 1997) As one professor explained in the course of the research,

Why are we going to do these things? There is no one forcing anyone to do these things. Many older colleagues don't want to do any more work. They want to do as little work as possible, going to conferences and on trips. They do not see foreign students and exchange programmes with foreign universities as important. Only if they get to go on a conference there, then maybe they will consider doing something.

(Professor A)

With respect to the 1990's policy of establishing government-to-government yen loans for the purpose of sending students to Japan, this was also problematic because developing countries could not utilise the system unless they shouldered the greater cost of sending their students to Japan, which they could not. In fact, only Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia received yen loans under that system. (Japan Times, 26/05/2000)

Similarly, although the budget for international student policy and scholarships had increased annually, there had also been concern raised over the concept of some international student policies being regarded as part and parcel of Japanese aid for developing countries. This was because international student policy came under the budget of Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 1997, the ODA's budget was cut by 10 per cent which raised fears of future reductions in international student funding. Ninomiya stated that Japanese higher education institutions had traditionally hosted students from developing countries as a kind of overseas assistance program, but he argued that the focus needed to be changed to a more separate promotion of student exchange programmes in the light of internationalising the education system. (Ninomiya, 1997) It was further reiterated by one NGO that a budget for international student policies should be backed by the principle that in providing training and education to international students, they will "become part of a human bridge for mutual understanding", which was quite different from "giving assistance for building roads and dams". (Asahi Shimbun Earth Project 21: 1998)

Even the concept of internationalisation has changed over the last two decades. In the eighties, it was argued that internationalisation was merely a process to attain and assimilate international standards into the higher education system. (Umakoshi, 1997:259) By the nineties, the idea had changed to that of Japan becoming a full partner in all of the activities of the global arena. The

impact of this was to shift from language competence to a wide recognition of the benefits of cross-cultural experience and understanding. (Kawaguchi, Lander, 1997:110) However, the *Monbushô* who initiated the move towards internationalisation in Japanese higher education was noted as being not very forthcoming in helping educational institutions outside of its domain become international. For example, rather than being an active partner in promoting and supporting foreign university branch campuses and international schools in Japan, it frequently ignored such requests and adopted a ‘wait and see’ attitude in such ventures. (Umakoshi, 1997:273)

### c) *Methodology*

The aim of this study was to provide a basic profile of international students’ general university experiences. It specifically targeted those students who were in receipt of a *Monbushô* scholarship or other Japanese scholarships. Although the majority of international students were studying in Japan via private means, there was a specific research interest in how students perceived their academic and non-academic experiences under the conditions of government scholarships and in the light of government policies concerning international students.

A questionnaire was given to 200 students in December 1999 and by February 2000, 46 questionnaires had been returned. Further, 15 students had been individually interviewed and approximately 10 others gave verbal comments in informal discussion settings, which they gave permission to be used in the research. The student-participants were from Shiga University’s Faculty of Economics and Osaka University of Foreign Studies (*Osaka Gaidai*). In the academic year 1999-2000, there were 63 international students at the Shiga University’s Faculty of Economics; questionnaires were distributed to all of these students. A further 137 questionnaires were given to international students at *Osaka Gaidai*; a majority of whom were graduate students and new arrivals to Japan. At the time of the research, these students were also attending the six-month mandatory Japanese language course given to every international student receiving a *Monbushô* scholarship.

### d) *Brief Profile of International Students in Japan 1998-2000*

	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>Total</b>	51,298	55,755	64,011
China	22,810	25,907	32,297

Taiwan	4,033	4,085	4,189
Korea	11,467	11,897	12,851
Malaysia	2,040	2,005	1,856
U.S.A.	949	1,073	1,044
Thailand	1,059	1,107	1,245
Indonesia	1,140	1,220	1,348
Philippines	434	497	477
Bangladesh	750	806	800
Others	6,616	7,158	7,904

From 1998 to 2000, the figures showed (see above table) that there was a steady increase in the numbers of international students. In 1999, there were 55,755 international students in Japan and this had increased to 64,011 in 2000, although this figure fell far short of the target 100,000 international students that the *Monbushô* had hoped would be attending Japanese universities in the year 2000. The figures also showed that the three top contributing nations of international students to Japan were China, Korea, and Taiwan respectively. (Kawaguchi, Lander, 1997:105)

In the academic year of 1998-1999, the total number of international students in the USA was 490,933 and this increased to 514,723 international students in 1999-2000. The largest group of international students were from the Asian region. (IIE, 2000) While in 1998-1999, the UK had a total of 233,203 international students (including European Union students) attending its higher education institutions, and by 1999-2000, this had increased to 241,746. The largest group of international students were from China, India and Malaysia. (HESA, 2001)

#### *e) Results of the survey*

##### *The international students' response to the research*

It should be noted that overall the students' comments on the questionnaires were fairly concise and largely favourable to the experience of being an international student in Japan. However, in the informal discussion sessions and the interviews, a large number of students expressed negative attitudes about their experiences in Japan. Further, a significant number of students stated that they had not written anything negative on the questionnaire for fear of being 'discovered'. They felt that a) there might be potential negative repercussions from Japanese faculty members or their supervisor who might 'discover' that they had participated in the research; b) they might be ostracised as trouble makers if a Japanese professor found out that they had commented unfavourably on their experience in Japan; or c) their criticisms of Japan and its education system could potentially lead to the loss of their *Monbushô* scholarship. This last point

was significant. In almost all of the interviews when *Monbushô* scholarship students spoke about their negative experiences as international students, they would then counterbalance this with a reference to the fact that they felt the scholarship was extremely generous. Students who spoke of positive student experiences also included the receipt of the scholarship as being one of those positive experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to consider this point as an underlying factor to international student experiences in view of the survey results and the comments from the interviews.

I don't want my supervisor to find out that I wrote something bad about Japan because he might think I'm making trouble. My friend said to her supervisor that she didn't understand the education system here, it was a kind of critical thing, and he stopped helping her, he said 'you are in Japan. You must understand how Japan is before you come to study here'. Now my supervisor is very kind and she helps me a lot, so I don't want anyone to think I am not grateful to get the scholarship and to study in Japan. (FSID)

I will talk to you about these things but I prefer not to write them down, you understand because in Japan, everybody is the same, they don't like trouble, even if there are problems, no one talks about them. If I say, this is bad or that is bad, then they will see me as a person who doesn't understand how to live in Japan. (FS1G)

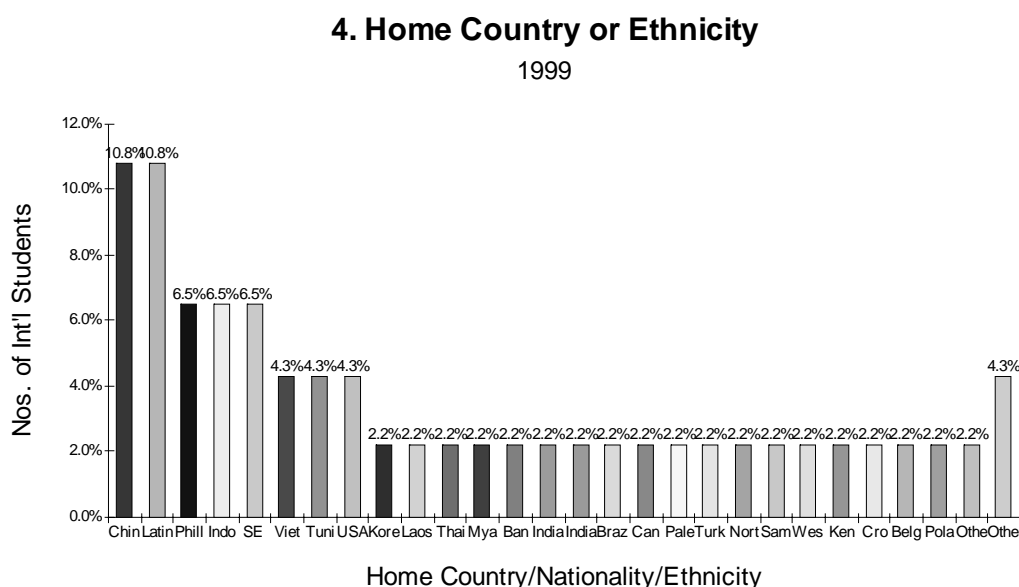
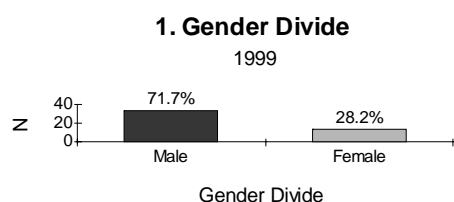
I think that there are some very stupid things about studying in Japan but I can't change the system. They gave us a very nice scholarship because they want to say that Japan is good to *gai-jin*. It's a lie. They are not good to us. But if I say anything to the other students or professors like 'why don't you like to have discussion in classes?' they will say 'this is Japanese way of studying', so I have to accept this. If we make a lot of trouble, maybe they will take away our *Monbushô* big money. I cannot study without this money and I will have to go back to my country and give up my studies. (FSIA)

I don't agree with many things in Japan, but then I came here to experience another culture. I can tell you at home, there's no way that you can get scholarships like this, so am I going to start to complain about another

person’s way of educating people, I don’t think so! I chose to study here, no one forced me too, and the Japanese were good enough to give scholarships to enable people like me to live and study in their country. (FSII)

*Academic issues*

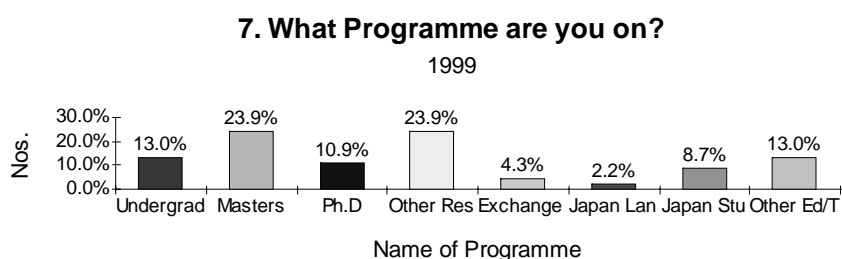
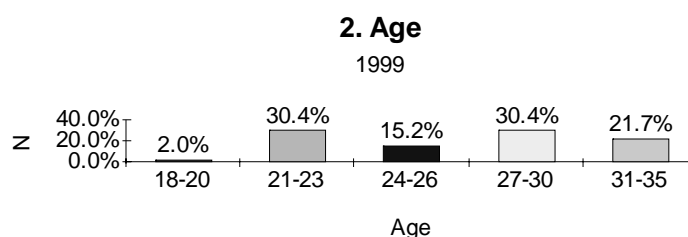
*i) Students’ background information*



(China, Latin America and the Caribbean, Philippines, Indonesia, South East Asia, Vietnam, Tunisia, USA, Korea, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indian, Indian Sub-Continent, Brazil, Canada, Palestine, Turkey, North Africa, Samoa, West Africa, Kenya, Croatia, Belgium, Poland, Other European, Other)

Overall, the majority of students who returned the questionnaire were male (71.7 per cent), while the majority of students who volunteered to be interviewed were female (with the exception of 2 male students). This was not reflective of the national gender divide of international students, which showed that in 1998, 56.2 per cent of students were male and 43.8 per cent were female. (National Science Foundation, 1999) Further, while the national statistics showed China, Taiwan and Korea as the main countries from which international students originated, the survey results

showed that a wide range of countries were represented by the international students who participated in the research. Students from China shared first position with students from the Latin American countries, the majority of whom named the region rather than specific countries in Latin America. Students in second position originated from the Philippines, Indonesia and the South East Asian region.

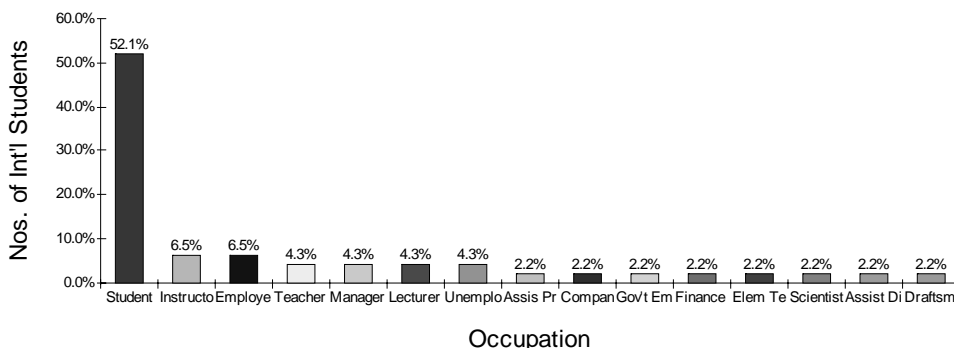


Undergraduate, Masters, PhD, Other Research, Exchange Student, Japanese Language Programme, Japanese Studies Programme, Other Educational/Training Programme

Students were also asked about their age, current academic programme and occupation prior to coming to Japan. The two main groups that emerged were a) undergraduate and graduate students who were in their early twenties; and b) graduate students who had work experience in their home country and then decided to return to study. The majority (71.7 per cent) of students were either on undergraduate, graduate or research programmes. Exchange students, Japanese language students, and Japanese studies students (15.2 per cent) were all on one-year, short-term study programmes. These programmes were based on existing agreements between Japanese universities and foreign universities. The students who stated that they were on other educational training programmes (13.0 per cent) included students who eventually wished to study at Special Training Schools (*senmon gakko*). The results showed the two largest age groups were 21-23 years old students (30.4 per cent) and 27-30 years old students (30.4 per cent). These results were consistent with the results for the academic programmes on which the students had entered.

### 3. Occupation

1999

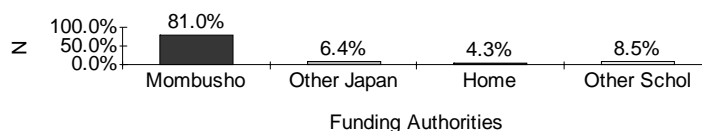


Student, Instructor, Employee, Teacher, Manager, Lecturer, Unemployed, Assistant Project worker, Private Company, Government employee, Finance worker, Elementary Teacher, Scientist, Assistant Director, Draftsman

Regarding their occupational status prior to studying in Japan, approximately half of the students had been students in their home countries (52.1 per cent). Many of them stated that they had either just completed their undergraduate degrees or were in fact in the middle of a graduate programme when they gained the opportunity to come to Japan. Apart from 4.3 per cent of students who stated that they were unemployed, the remainder of the students were previously engaged in white collar and professional occupations. For example, 19.5 per cent stated they were teachers, instructors or lecturers and 19.6 per cent were employed in companies or in government. Therefore, there was a significant group of international students that possessed a range of working experiences which would subsequently inform their experiences of being students in Japan.

### 6. Funding while in Japan

1999

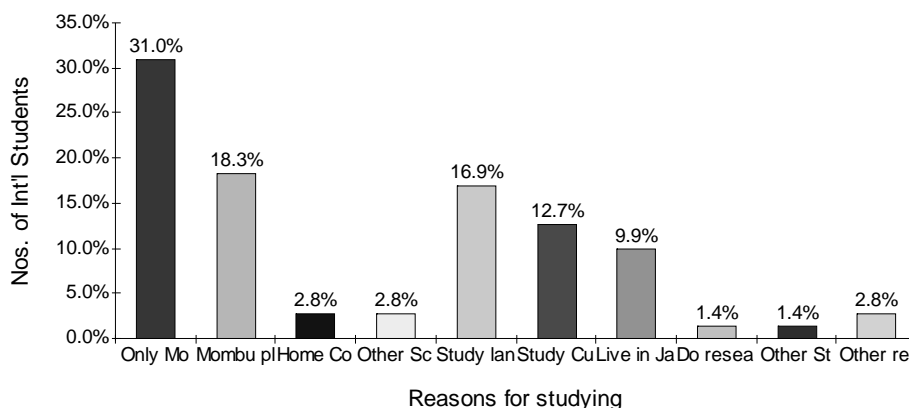


In 1997, statistics showed that 8,323 international students received scholarships from the *Monbushô*, 1,585 students were funded by foreign governments while an overwhelming 41,390 international students were privately-funded. (Yamashiro, 1987:41) This research targeted *Monbushô* scholarship students and therefore, the results showed that 81.0 per cent of the students researched received *Monbushô* scholarships, 6.4 per cent received other scholarships from Japan and 12.6 per cent received either funding from their home countries or some other source.

ii) Why did you want to study in Japan?

### 16. Why did you study in Japan?

1999



Only because of the *Monbusho* scholarship, *Monbusho* scholarship plus other reasons, Home Country scholarship, Other Scholarship, Study Language, Study Culture, Live in Japan, Do research, Other studies, Other reasons

In this survey, students gave a number of individual or multiple reasons why they wanted to study in Japan. Normile (1993) stated that foreign students viewed study in Japan as a chance to learn from the best. However, Lewis (1997) argued that international students all over the world generally tended to move to a country that provided better educational opportunities than their own or a country where their research area was being conducted at a high and progressive level. In that sense, location might not always be a first priority. The students' comments below reflected these perspectives.

Japan is well-developed in my field of study. (FS7)

Because Japan is a very developed country and education will be this way as well. (FS15)

I didn't have enough money to continue my studies and I wanted to do my Masters, so I looked everywhere for a scholarship to study abroad. I didn't care... whatever country would help me. (FS11)



However, the majority of the students gave the following reasons for wanting to study in Japan: a) because they had received a *Monbushô* scholarship (31.0 per cent); b) because they had received a *Monbushô* scholarship and wanted to study Japanese, study Japanese culture and/or live in Japan (18.3 per cent); c) because they had gained a scholarship from their home country or another source (5.6 per cent); d) because they wanted to do some specific research or other study (2.8 per cent); e) because they wanted to specifically study Japanese language (16.9 per cent); f) because they wanted to specifically study Japanese culture (12.7 per cent); and g) because they wanted to specifically live in Japan (9.9 per cent). Therefore, receiving the *Monbushô* scholarship was significant to many students as they would not have considered studying Japan without it.

I get more money from the *Monbushô* than I get at home for being a teacher. At first I worried that when I returned, I wouldn't get my old job back, but now I am here I think this way, I can get my Masters and new experience of how their education is, and I can live here in Japan. Now maybe I can get a better job when I return because everyone will be impressed that I studied in Japan. (FS43)

Even though I left my job of teaching, I know that when I go back I will be in a good way because of coming to Japan. To be honest, the scholarship is the same as my salary for teaching. (FS32)

### *iii) The admission process to university in Japan*

In general, to study at a Japanese university, junior college or *senmon gakkô*, an international student must complete twelve years of school education in his home country. This is based on the fact that the Japanese school education system consists of six years of elementary, three years of lower secondary and three years of upper secondary education. Therefore, an international student must have a comparable educational background for an undergraduate degree. Graduate students must complete a total of sixteen years of education.

International students have several options regarding admissions procedures. They can a) apply directly to the Japanese university from their home country and follow the admission procedures for that particular university which usually include taking examinations; b) come to Japan, take university entrance examinations and receive permission to enter a university; or c) come to Japan

to study Japanese at a language institute (private or at a university/college), and then receive permission to enter a university from six months to two years later. (Suhara, Fukushima, Torano, 1999)

In general, international students opted for the third route of c). This is because in the case of routes a) and b), students must have studied Japanese prior to arriving in Japan, as well as gained a level of language proficiency recognised by the university/college they wished to enter. Moreover, if students wished to come to Japan solely to take the entrance examination, they would have to obtain a short-term visa and this has been reported as being difficult to acquire. (Suhara, Fukushima, Torano, 1999) The results of the survey showed that all of the students who did not receive a *Monbushô* scholarship took route c) that is, they came to Japan to study Japanese at a university prior to beginning their studies at their final university destinations and this included those students in receipt of Japanese government scholarships.

*Monbushô* students had a more specific admission procedure. Prospective candidates applied through the Japanese embassies in their home countries or recommendations were made from the students' universities or governments to the embassies. Applications were examined at the embassies in the students' home countries and a list of those student-candidates who passed the screening process was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan and to the *Monbushô*. The *Monbushô* then screened the students again and final decisions were made. The successful students then received notices of acceptances in the mail. All *Monbushô* scholarship students normally attended national universities, but there were exceptions where students attended private universities if their field of specialisation or a research expert was based in a particular private university. (Yamashiro, 1987:41)

During the application process at the embassies in their home countries, a few students expressed some confusion over taking a Japanese language test, even though they had confirmed that they had never studied Japanese before. There seemed to be a case of different application and admission procedures operating in different countries. The students themselves couldn't ascertain whether this language test was connected with the *Monbushô* procedures or not, as some of their student peers had not taken a language test prior to arriving in Japan.

I went in, looked at all of Japanese writing and guessed my way through it.

For number 1, I marked B, number 2, C, number 3, A, number 4, D, then I changed around the marking and put C, A, D, B for the next four answers. It took perhaps 30 minutes to do what I think was a three hour exam. (FS24)

Why did they make us take a test if they know that we can't speak Japanese? I told the Japanese Embassy that I didn't know any Japanese and they said I could still apply for the scholarship and that I would take Japanese when I got to Japan. I felt so sick when I was called to take a test. I guessed the answers. I worried all of the time after the test. Then I was told I got the scholarship. Everything was confusing. (FS44)

I didn't know any Japanese and they gave me this paper with Japanese on it, some kind of test, and I said 'I can't understand', and they said, 'just write your name on it at the top'. It was so stupid. What does it mean? I never heard anything about it after. (FS21)

I told the officials at the Embassy that I didn't know any Japanese and I never took a test of any kind. (FS37)

Once the students arrived in Japan, most universities required them to take the *Monbushô*-established Japanese Language Proficiency Test. These students spent from six months to a year studying Japanese and then took the test. It is interesting to note that in some instances, it appeared that the only requirement was to take the test, as opposed to a requirement for students to pass it.

He (my supervisor) told me to show up for the exam and it doesn't matter if I don't do well or even fail, but I must do the exam. (FS19)

In addition to this, it appeared that in practise, the rules for attending language classes in the first six months to a year were not as rigid for some graduate students. Some students at *Osaka Gaidai* stated that although they were enrolled in the six-month language programme, a few of their student peers had gained permission from the supervisors of their programmes to be exempted from attending these classes. This inconsistency raised some discontent among those students who were told that attendance to these classes was mandatory. It also underlined the power of particular supervisor-professors over language instructors.

She said that she told her professor that she did not have time to study Japanese and that she wanted to start her research as soon as possible, so her

professor gave some kind of permission for her so that she doesn't need to attend language classes. (FS18)

My colleague doesn't attend any language classes because his professor gave him permission to begin his research programme immediately. I asked the instructor if I could be exempt from some classes because they are not applicable to my research, but she said no. I can't ask my supervisor because he said I should meet with him after I have finished the language programme. (FS09)

I don't need Japanese for my research only for living. My supervisor spoke to my instructor and I don't need to attend all the classes. (FS48)

In the interviews and discussions, the majority of *Monbushô* graduate students stated they were aware of the name of the university that they were mostly likely to attend and the name of their supervisor before arriving in Japan. However, a few students stated that they had to fulfil the more formal requirements of writing an application for entrance to university, going through an interview process and/or sitting a special test for international students.

I don't understand why I have to take an entrance examination for my university and X doesn't have to take one. Everyone seems to have to follow different rules, and it makes me feel that we are not being treated equally. (FSA1)

Only upon speaking with my supervisor, I realized that I was not admitted to the university as a Ph.D. student but under "Special student" status and would have to sit an entrance examination for enrolment into the PhD program in September 2000. (FS32)

The 1999 foreign student guidebook stated "the system of Japanese Education is not set up completely yet for foreign students...The Ministry of Education is now trying to get schools to give permission for students to enter before they come, however not much progress has been made." (Suhara, Fukushima, Torano, 1999) It would appear from this statement that international students were being prepared in advance for the inconsistencies in the admission process.

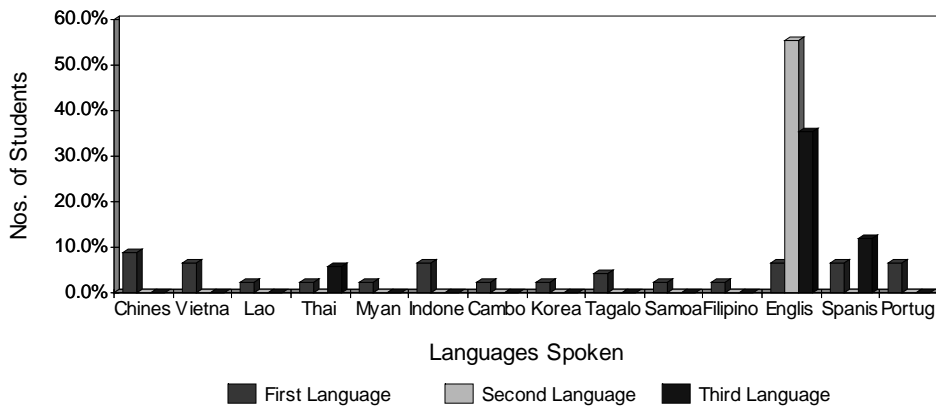
iv) Language issues

Even though I have studied Japanese, I can't understand what the teacher is teaching. (FS10)

Most international students were required to take the official Japanese language test and other Japanese language courses before entering university. However, as previously noted, some students were not required to pass the language tests, but rather simply take them. Normile stated that although students typically spent a year in language classes before beginning their academic work, they stated that it was still a struggle to keep up with native speakers. (Normile, 1993)

**10/11. First Language Second/Third**

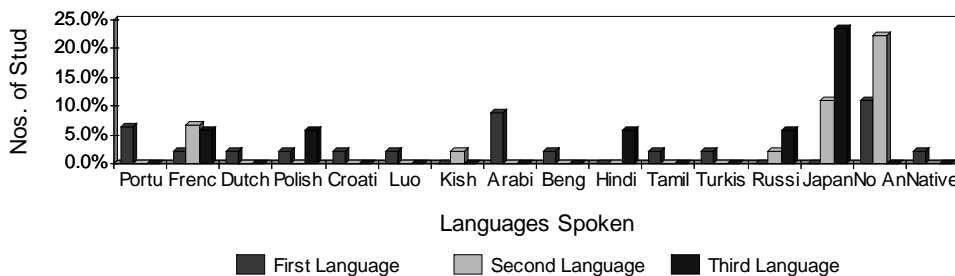
1999



Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, Thai, Myanmar, Indonesian, Cambodian, Korean, Tagalog, Samoan, Phillipino, English, Spanish, Portuguese

**10/11. First Language Second/Third**

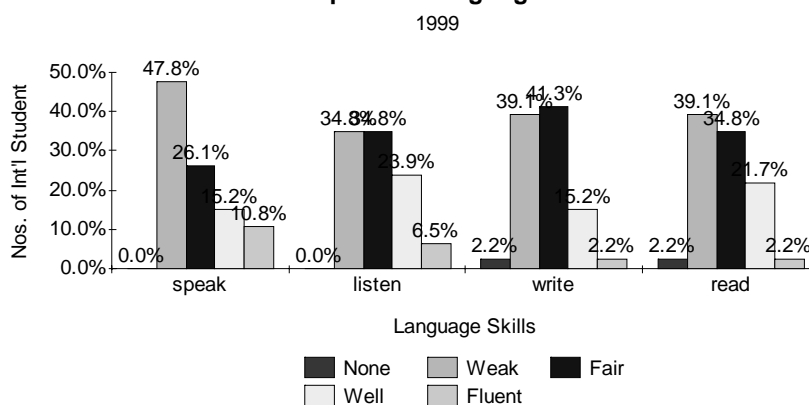
1999



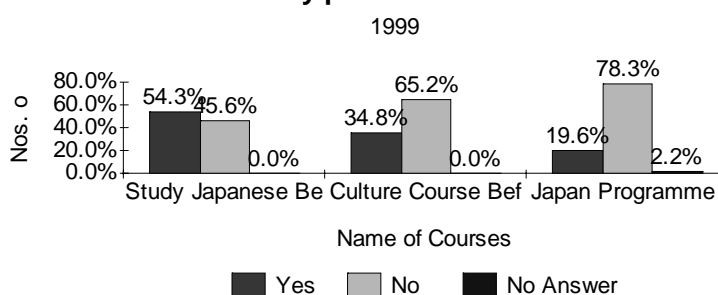
Portuguese, French, Dutch, Polish, Croatian, Luo, Kishwashi, Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Turkish, Russian, Japanese, No answer, Native language

The students were asked about their Japanese language ability and also about their own native language(s). The results showed that 8.7 per cent of students spoke Chinese, 8.7 per cent spoke Arabic and equal number of students spoke Vietnamese (6.5 per cent), Indonesian (6.5 per cent), English (6.5 per cent), Spanish (6.5 per cent) and Portuguese (6.5 per cent). More significant, was that 55.5 per cent of students declared English to be their second language, 11.1 per cent said Japanese and 6.6 per cent stated French. In terms of a third language, 35.3 per cent stated English, 23.5 per cent stated Japanese and 11.8 per cent said Spanish. Therefore, English and Japanese were the main languages that international students used to communicate with each other.

### 12. Japanese Language Skills



### 13/14/15. Any previous courses taken



In terms of the students' Japanese language ability, over a third of students declared that they were weak in the skills of listening (34.8 per cent), writing (39.1 per cent) and reading (39.1 per cent). Just under one half of students (47.8 per cent), stated they were weak in speaking skills. However, in line with the results of students who declared Japanese to be their second or third language, a greater proportion of 52.1 per cent stated they spoke 'fair to fluent' Japanese, 65.2 per cent rated their listening skills from being 'fair to fluent', and 58.7 per cent stated their writing

and reading was from 'fair to fluent'. These results were further confirmed by 54.3 per cent of students who declared that they had studied Japanese in their home country as opposed to 45.6 per cent who stated that they had not. From these results, it was expected that a large proportion of these students would have been able to manage in their daily life activities on immediate arrival in Japan. However, students who stated that they were 'weak to fair' in Japanese were likely to have experienced comprehension difficulties with respect to university lectures and seminars.

*v) Japanese Language classes*

Overall, the majority of students were more negative in their views towards their mandatory university language classes. This could be because some students were teachers in their home countries and therefore were more likely to take note of teaching methods. Moreover, as some students were older, they were perhaps more likely to demand more student-centred approaches to learning as opposed to the traditional Japanese method of rote learning, drills and memorisation. Students who were positive towards the language classes also pointed out the fast rate at which classes seemed to proceed. At *Osaka Gaidai*, students were also given the opportunity to take other courses, which were solely conducted in Japanese, and which were designed to make them accustomed to what they would experience in the average Japanese classroom.

A) teaching conditions and not good - crowded, noisy, on comfortable tables and chairs b) no communication between teachers and students c) teaching of Japanese and other languages are horrible d) too much theory and examination.  
(FS2)

Horrible and archaic grammar translation methodology and teaching is not conducive to language learning. (FS1)

Very unhappy with the mandatory and poor language training courses, very poor computer facilities which are vital for research and graduate students.  
(FS11)

*Gaidai* is the worst place to study Japanese. First they should complete the reform of the education system and then invite us to study Japanese. (FS31)

Classes are great but very fast. Also, having so many vacations doesn't help the learning process. My biggest complaint is that the computer lab is not open long enough and the computer lab in building x is useless. (FS5)

I was very surprised that they were so many subjects to choose from. I like most of the subjects that I have chosen though the levels of all the subjects should not be the same, some of them should be put in a different level. I also feel that according to the placement test they should have put us in different classes. Now there are people in the third level and they should be in the fourth level or even higher. (FS39)

It was scary because our teachers started to speak to us in Japanese. But I've been surprised by the very interesting and strange teaching methods. (FS22)

vi) *Quality of Japanese university education*

I was immediately impressed by the vast array of subjects offered to us and the amount of classes that we were able to take. I find all of the professors to be quite knowledgeable in their fields of speciality and most to be very skilled at explaining difficult terminology effectively to foreign learners. I was (still am) disgusted that many of the professors regularly cancel classes. To me, this is most unprofessional and leads me to feel that we, the students, are not being taken seriously and are not expected to try our very best. I find it insulting. (FS19)

The quality of Japanese university education has been reported as needing vast improvement to meet the demands of international students. Facilities were stated to be inadequate, such as library facilities, and class content was considered poor. (Murphy-Shigematsu, 1998) In 1982, Hiroshima University and Kyoto University conducted a survey of international students. Those students stated that they had a good opinion of Japanese universities but they found that Japanese university professors were totally absorbed in their own research and did not give sufficient



attention to educating their students. Furthermore, the theory-oriented educational methods of Japanese universities were thought by some students to be impractical. (Yamashiro, 1987:43) This situation seemed to mirror the comments that students made in this study less than two decades later. Undergraduate students noted that the teaching methods of some professors needed to be updated and that discipline in classes was lax.

All you learn it's by yourself because the teachers don't have pedagogy and worst of all, they can't impose discipline in class on students who are not really interested in what they're doing. (FS35)

I think that no reform would ever be really efficient as long as discipline, the mother of all knowledge, won't be required towards Japanese students. Universities shouldn't be considered as places to go in order to occupy one's free time, but as a sacred shelter of cultural interchange and spiritual/into actual improvement. (FS35)

Most of my friends came on the Japanese programme that we have in Malaysia. My senior came to Malaysia and said she had a good experience in Japan. She said the university was very easy, not like in Malaysia, I was happy to hear this. (FS12)

Murphy-Shigematsu (1998) noted that many graduate schools did not have structured programmes and although this favoured students who were highly self-motivated, it might also be a sign that universities were not particularly interested in graduate education. Fifty-eight point seven per cent of the students in this study were on graduate or graduate research programmes and their main point of discontent concerned supervision.

He (supervisor) actually asked me why I wanted to study so hard and why didn't I travel around Japan and do some sightseeing. (FSA1)

For research students, there's little time to discuss problems with the professor all among students. This limits the chance to develop the student's own ability and point of view. (FS9)

I came here to learn, to discuss and exchange my ideas with people in universities in Japan. I can't believe that this country is nearly a world power and the education system is this way. This is not graduate education. (FS22)

This is my second supervisor, although she is very nice, she is not in my field. My other professor just told me that he was a little busy so this other professor would help me but she is not a member of my field. (FS18)

My supervisor is very nice but he is never there. I see him once a semester. He gives me a lot of work to do and explains everything nicely for about one or two days and then he goes away to do his research and for conferences. I would prefer to see him more regularly. But if I ask to change supervisor, maybe I will get someone who is not a nice person. (FS28)

### *Non-Academic Issues*

#### *i) Accommodation issues*

The accommodation problem was a recognised major issue for international students in Japan. In 1999, it was reported that the percentage of students living in university dormitories and other facilities, not including private apartments, stood at 32.1 per cent. However, two out of three international students still had to find accommodation on their own. (Japan Times, 15/July/99) Batten (1995) also stated that there was a particular lack of suitable dormitory housing for male students, together with difficulties in arranging alternative housing. Home stays, for example, were hard to arrange because Japanese people were not used to opening up their homes to strangers, as well as the fact that most Japanese dwellings were too small to make such arrangements possible.

Mori (1997) suggested that overall, international students were most likely to study in large Japanese cities. They tended to settle in such urban areas where they could also work part-time to support themselves and avoid large travelling expenses. Although the cost of living was higher in larger cities, some international students found housing in inner-city areas which tended to have cheaper rents.

It's very difficult to find accommodation, it's very expensive and the key money is too high! (FS31)

Key money<sup>3</sup> and having a guarantor were the two immediate issues facing international students in relation to finding an apartment. Unlike in other countries, many landlords required key money and a deposit at the beginning of the renting period. In addition, most apartments were unfurnished so students had to buy the essentials themselves. Therefore, international students had to ensure that they had substantial extra funds prior to the beginning of their studies. Further, most students had not been in Japan long enough to establish close relationships with a Japanese person whom they could ask to act as a guarantor for them when renting an apartment. Therefore, it was common for students to ask their professors, supervisors, or university representatives in charge of international student affairs to act as their guarantors in such matters. This has raised problems as some faculty members were reluctant to be personally responsible for a student who has just arrived in Japan.

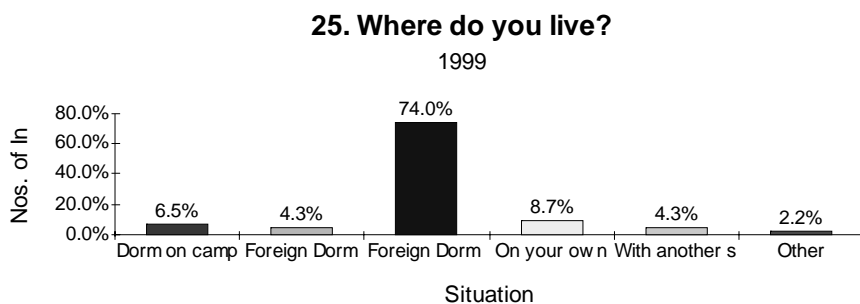
Most professors don't want to be responsible for a student that they don't know. It's a very difficult thing because I know what it's like to be a student in foreign country. The system is so stupid. The university should do this, not ask the professors to do it. I don't mind doing it for one of my students because I think I can trust him and I know him for one year already.  
(Professor B)

I was so shocked when I went to X student's home because it was so dirty and all the clothes were everywhere. The landlord was so angry and said he doesn't want to have students from X country because they make everywhere dirty. Now I have to talk to the student because I signed a type of guarantee for him. It is very difficult because we do not know what kind of students they are when they come to Japan, but they need to have a Japanese person to sign and give to the landlord. Some students are very worried and under much pressure because they need to live somewhere, so we have to sign to help them. But I think this system has to change for foreign students. The university must think more about this problem. (Professor C)

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<sup>3</sup> Key money is a kind of financial gift to the landlord in respect of him/her renting their property to you. It is non-refundable.

Reports also noted that seeking accommodation raised general issues of race/ethnic discrimination issues for international students as landlords did not particularly like to rent to them or to foreigners in general. Yamashiro (1987) suggested that language barriers, differences in daily customs and general uneasiness about foreigners were some reasons that landlords refused to rent. However, this discrimination often created a negative first impression of Japanese people and society in the minds of international students.

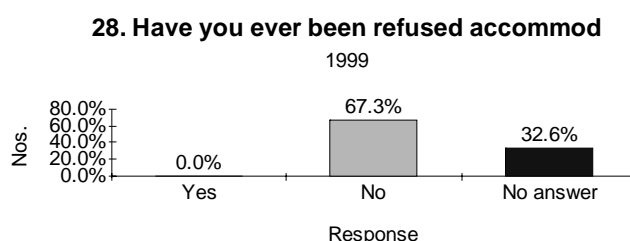


I think because I spoke to him in Japanese and was very polite that he liked me a lot. He said that women from Malaysia were very quiet and polite like Japanese women... The next year, I told him that my friend was looking for an apartment, and he said he would rent to her as well. My other friend is a boy, but he was very polite and his Japanese is very good, so the landlord let him rent the room. I think it's a good thing that he knows people from Malaysia will not damage his property. He will have a good impression of Malaysia and that's very important. (FS03)

I think that Japanese people think that Chinese people will make the kitchen dirty because of the cooking... we fry many things and the walls get dirty. But I am not like that, I clean the kitchen wall and put this thing to make it clean (aluminium foil small screen). My landlord always says to me, your room is very nice. I think he thinks it is not like typical Chinese person's house. (FS26)

The results showed that the majority of international students lived in dormitories (84.4 per cent), while the other 15.2 per cent lived either on their own, shared with another student or lived in a home stay setting. Many of the students at Shiga University had to find accommodation on their

own and lived in *manshions*<sup>4</sup> around Hikone. One apartment building of ten *manshions* housed five international students and five other students. In this case, the students were all from Malaysia and the landlord seemed quite happy to rent to them as long as a professor from Shiga University acted as a guarantor. Therefore, it seemed that the students' country of origin could also be an influential factor in the issue of accommodation, as in the example of the landlord who rented his apartments to the Malaysian students. In this way, students acted as unofficial guarantors for each other. Further, the above students' comments exemplified their perceptions of how they were being viewed by the Japanese, as well as their responses to those perceptions.



The students were asked if they had ever been refused accommodation but as the majority were living in dormitories specifically for international students, it was unlikely that they would have been in contact with Japanese landlords. However, two comments from the interviews implied that students were aware of such practises though.

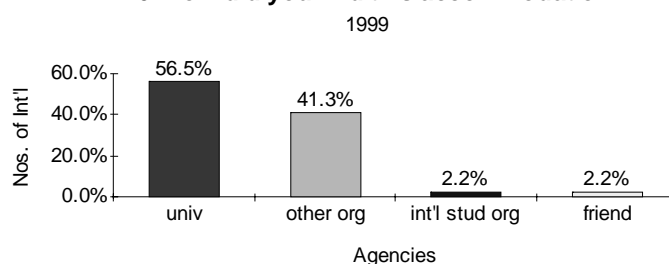
When I had to find a place to live, I only asked my friends because I thought that if a Japanese landlord rent to my friend, then they would be kind to foreign people. (FS33)

I went with my friend (Japanese) to look for *manshions* and there was a sign on one door. My friend said don't go there because he said it says that the agency does not rent to foreigner. I wanted him (estate agent representative) to tell me to my face that he wouldn't rent to me but he came outside and told us to come in and my friend said that he said that sign was only for Koreans. (FS43)

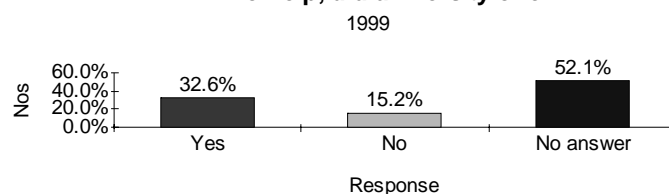
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<sup>4</sup> A *manshion* is a one-room apartment, similar to a studio apartment.

### 26. How did you find this accommodation



### 27. If no help, did university offer?

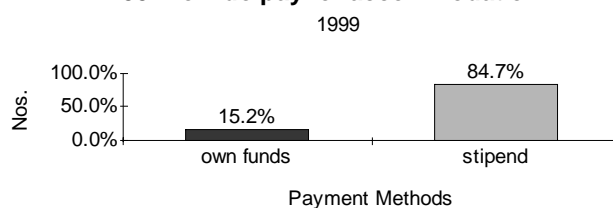


Over half of the students (56.5 per cent) stated that the university helped them find accommodation, while 41.3 per cent stated that another organisation helped them. A minority of 4.4 per cent of students stated that an international student organisation or a friend helped them to find accommodation. Further, 32.6 per cent stated that when they had to find accommodation themselves, the university offered to help them, although 15.2 per cent stated that they received no help at all.

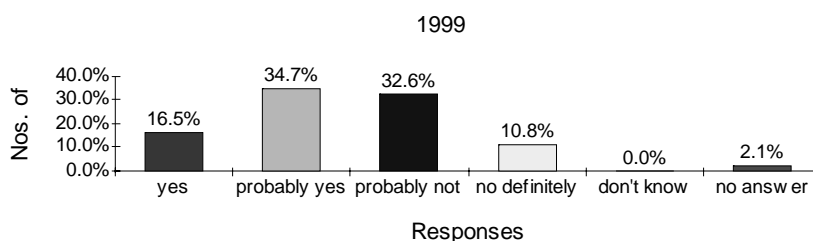
My professor told us about the international centre in Kyoto where we could find places to live there. (FS41)

From October to March, I lived in Kyoto, the university found no room for me. I had to find it myself and when I found it I didn't like it because it wasn't a clean room, the walls were not strong at all and dirty, it gives a bad image for a Japanese welcome. (FS11)

### 33. How do pay for accommodation?



### 34. Accommodation costs reasonable?

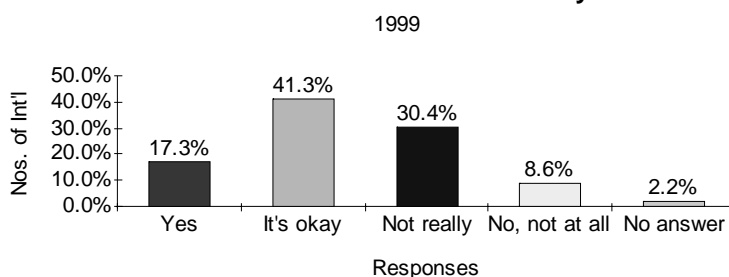


Bearing in mind the cost of independent living in Japan, the rent standard is okay for the price I pay. However a) electricity bills expensive b) baths - too many people for the facilities c) why do the Japanese like so much to create ghettos for the foreign students? (FS2)

In terms of how students paid for their accommodation, it should be noted that the majority (84.8 per cent) lived in a dormitory where rents were relatively low in comparison to renting a *manshion* for a single person. In the dormitory, students paid between 20,000 to 25,000 yen per month for their room and stated that they used their *Monbushô* or other scholarship money to pay for their accommodation. However, 15.3 per cent of students used their own money to pay for housing. These students would most likely have been those students who received scholarships from their home country or other sources. In Hikone, most international students stated that they paid between 35,000-45,000 yen per month for a *manshion* but in more urban areas, rents could be as much as 55,000 yen a month in addition to key money and a deposit.

Given that 84.4 per cent were living in dormitories, it was interesting to note that while 51.2 per cent thought the accommodation costs reasonable, 32.6 per cent thought they were probably not reasonable and 10.8 per cent stated that they definitely weren't reasonable. However, when some students explained their dissatisfaction with the dormitories, it was clear that they felt that what they were paying was not comparable to what they were receiving.

### 35. Accommodation satisfactory?



Further, 58.6 per cent of students stated that they were generally satisfied with their accommodation. However, 30.4 per cent stated that they were 'not really' satisfied and a further 8.6 per cent said they were definitely not satisfied. It was important to note that the majority of students living in the dormitories were graduate or research students, a significant number of whom were mature and/or who had worked in professional positions. Therefore, the negative responses to accommodation could be due in part to students being accustomed to a certain level of accommodation comfort in their home countries. Although some of the complaints also seemed to stem from the fact that students felt that the dormitory rules and regulations were more appropriate for younger people rather than for mature and/or graduate students.

Many students who live in the dorm don't have enough responsibility when using public facilities, for example, toilet, bathroom and kitchen. And there are some who tend to like to steal other people's private belongings. I don't understand why they don't keep the social regulation. (FS4)

It's too small room and basically the treatment by staff is not very nice. (FS37)

One is made to go out of your own room during the day, which is not really nice. (FS2)

We should be allowed to have guests in our rooms. After all, we are paying the rent are we not? (FS5)

For the price that we paid for our rooms, I think we should be allowed to let people stay over if we want. And if that is not possible, they should provide cheap rooms if we have family or friends from our country that come to visit us. (FS39)

The international students from *Osaka Gaidai* raised specific concerns about the dormitories run by the Association of International Education Japan (AIEJ). There were two dormitory buildings available for international students. The first one had been recently built with modern facilities such as an elevator and bathrooms on each floor. Students living in this dormitory made the following comments:



All I want and need is available and good atmosphere. I can say I like what I found. (FS15)

Accommodation satisfactory - complete facilities. Some groups are quite noisy though. (FS34)

I liked the fact that we have a refrigerator and air conditioner in our room. But what bothers me is the fact of sharing a bathroom. I would appreciate very much if we had a private bathroom or at least a sink in our room. (FS7)

Advantages: separate room, quite clean environment, friendly atmosphere

Disadvantages: far from the university, common use of facilities like toilet, bath, kitchen - narrow and not comfortable. (FS9)

Plus side – clean dorm. (FS)

The second dormitory was much older. The bathrooms and toilets were in the basement. Therefore, students residing on the top floors had to walk down five flights of stairs to reach these facilities as there was no elevator. Mould was abundant in the bathroom area because there was no ventilation. Students in both dormitories noted that the student residents of this older building seemed to be mainly from developing countries.

I must point out that I observed segregation based on ethnic orientation. Between the two dormitories, the new one, with well-equipped facilities etc. was given to persons of European descent, while the older one, with less liveable conditions, was given to people of colour. In fact, this seemed to be a major observation among the international students. Not only was it embarrassing, but it really made the conditions of life and study difficult. I do hope however, that the management of AIEJ would recognize this issue in the near future and address it more equitably. (FS1A)

Why are all people from Asian countries in this bad housing and American people and people from Europe in the new dorm? I think this is bad. For this situation, Japan does not give a good impression. (FS22)

At first I didn't realise how students were divided up but then after it was pretty obvious. All of the Asians and other people were in the old dorm with really bad conditions. After a while, a friend (from the older dorm) and I talked about it. I felt a bit bad because I was in the new one. (FS45)

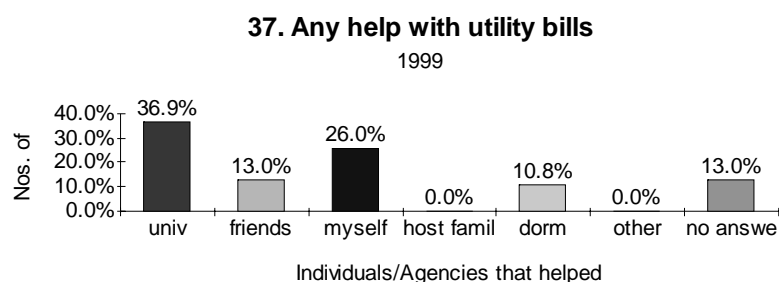
Dirty conditions and stupid rules. We had to sign our approval of the room without seeing it first. We did the orientation etc before we were able to rest so we were in no position to see what we getting into. I hate the living conditions, they're filthy, horrible living conditions (cockroaches!) and the rules of stupid, no 24-hour room or gathering place. (FS1)

Insufficient kitchen, nasty shower rooms, and it is a real pain in the – (expletive) to live on the fifth floor with no elevators. There needs to be shower rooms on each hall, not just on the female halls. (FS5)

Negative side - no elevator, the stairs will kill us by the end of this year, no shower room on each floor, small kitchen for too many people (FS25)

The shower doesn't work well. When somebody uses hot water from the tap while I'm in the shower, my water gets cold. (FS29)

## ii) Utility bills



Students were asked how they had initially organised their utility bills. At the dormitories, students paid their bills directly to the dormitory administrators and 47.7 per cent of students stated that the dormitory and university officials informed and helped them in those matters. A

further 39 per cent said they organised their utility payments by themselves or with the help of friends. Those students living on their own stated that their friends or professors helped them by telephoning the various electricity, gas and water offices. These students said that they had poor language skills and/or simply didn't know how to proceed.

My senior helped me when I moved to my home because there was no electric or gas and I didn't know who to ask to turn them on. (FS11)

He (person responsible for international students) phoned the electric and gas company so I could have it in my home. I did not speak Japanese and so I couldn't do these things. (FS22)

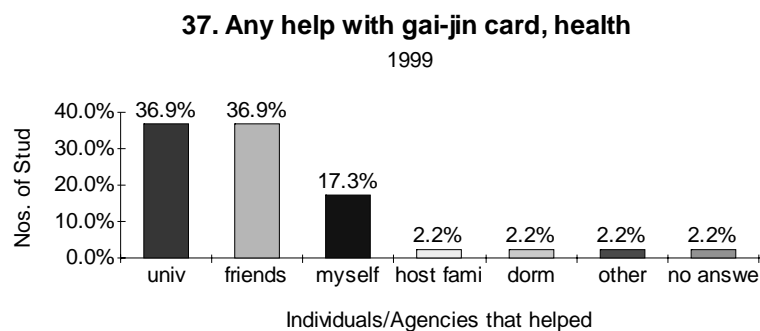
I asked my professor what I should do because I don't know how to do these things in Japan. He called the companies for me to get electricity and gas. I just arrived in Japan so I didn't know what to do. (FS39)

### *iii) Immigration rules and the gai-jin card*

Japan is one of the few countries which still maintains strict immigration controls, not only at the border where foreigners enter, but also throughout their stay. (Mori, 1997:1) Until April 2000, the immigration laws declared that any foreign national who stayed in Japan for more than 90 days had to register details such as their name, age, nationality, home address, and address in Japan, and occupation. Any changes to these details also had to be reported to the authorities. Therefore, when international students arrived in Japan, they were required to register themselves. This took place at the city hall where they resided. They would then receive a Certificate of Alien Registration, commonly known as a *gai-jin* card. This card had a current photo, important details such as passport number, current and home address, and a fingerprint. Under the immigration rules, foreigners were required to keep their *gai-jin* card upon their person at all times.

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000, a new registration law abolished the need for fingerprints on the *gai-jin* card and extended re-entry permits and the authorized period of stays for international students. (University of Tokyo International Centre, 2000) However, the requirement to carry the *gai-jin* card at all times was not revised. It should be noted that registration ended with the return of the

*gai-jin* card upon permanent departure from Japan, or through death or naturalisation. (Mori, 1997, p.3)



With the importance of the *gai-jin* card, it would be assumed that universities would ensure that international students obtained their identification cards as soon as possible. This process can be quite daunting for new arrivals. Officials at the city hall usually speak no other languages apart from Japanese and the building itself is usually large with many booths and desks assigned for various issues with all the signs and directions written in Japanese.

The results of the survey showed that 39.1 per cent of students were given help in obtaining their *gai-jin* cards by the university and/or the dormitory. However, 39.1 per cent had to rely upon help from friends or their host families while 17.3 per cent had to obtain the card themselves. Those students who had sufficient Japanese language skills (52.1 per cent stated their Japanese was ‘fair to fluent’) would have perhaps managed on their own to obtain the card. However, students in the interviews expressed their concern that this was something in which universities could have offered more assistance.

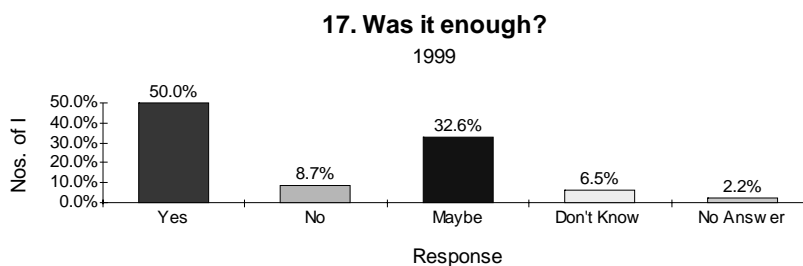
I didn’t know what they were talking about and they said we must go to the main office in the city and get our identification cards. I was nervous to do this by myself, but another student came with me. (FS23)

I couldn’t believe they told students to this without any help. I went with some new students to the city hall because they also had no idea what to do. (FS17)

No one at that place spoke English, although when they saw all of us, they probably knew what we were there for. I don’t understand why they (university) just didn’t organise for people who just arrived here to go together

with someone from the university and they could do everything in one day.  
(FS7)

*The high cost of living*



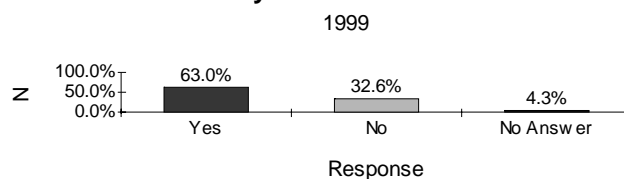
Japan has a notably higher cost of living in comparison to some other industrialised countries so although *Monbushô* scholarships were fairly reasonable, living costs were still dependent upon where students were located, as well as students came as individuals or with families to Japan. For the year 1999-2000, undergraduate students received 142,500 yen per month and a graduate student received 185,500 yen per month. Half of the students responded that the scholarship was sufficient to cover their living costs while only a minority of 8.7 per cent stated that it wasn't. The remaining 32.6 per cent and 6.5 per cent of students who stated 'maybe' or 'didn't know' seemed to come from newly-arrived students who were living in the international student dormitory and paying a low rent of 22,000 yen per room. The utility bills for their rooms consisted of electricity and telephone charges. Meanwhile the rest of their scholarship would most likely have been spent upon travel to and from the university, daily food, books, leisure activities, and other personal expenses.

I think the scholarship is good. I can save enough to go on vacation and see some of Asia while I'm here. (FS29)

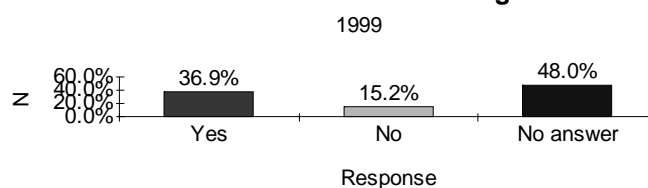
I think the money is great. At least I can get to some of Japan while I'm here and I don't have to keep thinking about money all of the time. (FS45)

Not enough for average living costs. (FS20)

### 18. Did you come with funds?



### 18a. Were the funds enough?



It should be noted that when international students on *Monbushô* scholarships arrived in Japan, they received 25,000 yen on arrival to cover their initial expenses. The actual scholarship payment was usually paid two thirds into each month. Sixty-three per cent of students stated that they received funds on arrival in Japan, whereas 32.6 per cent stated that they did not receive anything; this figure would have included students on other types of scholarships. However, as 81 per cent of students were in receipt of *Monbushô* scholarships, it implied that a small number of students did not receive their entitled arrival payment.

I received 20,000 yen, according to the standard of living; it is not enough for starting. (FS11)

We received 20,000 yen with which we had to survive for a month before receiving the scholarship. (FS35)

I received 25,000 yen and had to wait almost one month for the first scholarship. But they noticed me and brought me money for this month, so it was okay. (FS29)

The first scholarship came very late and I only had 25,000 yen for the first month. (FS37)

Because the first scholarship money came after two months. (FS28)

I had to supplement with the money I came with from my country. Transportation and food were particularly expensive. (FS38)

I took my own money for initial expenses as well as for unforeseen expenses.

(FS9)

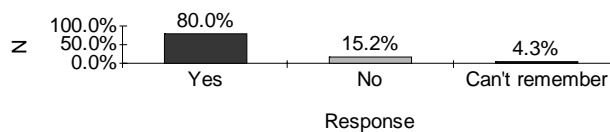
I still needed \$1,000.00 of my own money. (FS1)

There seemed to be a discrepancy in the amount of the arrival payment as some students talked about receiving 20,000 yen and not the official 25,000 yen. Further, in some cases, students noted that the monthly scholarship payment also arrived late which caused them additional financial problems. Although the *Monbushô* advised international students to bring approximately one thousand US dollars with them to Japan to assist them with initial costs, some students seemed to come from financial circumstances where they simply could not afford to bring one thousand dollars with them.

Although I had been advised to bring \$1,000.00 in cash to cover expenses during the first month before receiving the scholarship, I did not have that amount of money to bring and arrived instead with a credit card thinking I could use it like cash. I was alarmed at how few places accept credit cards, and the first month was tough. I would have appreciated being informed about the importance of the \$1,000.00 in cash earlier. I received this notice with my plane ticket, three days before my departure, too late to either borrow or save that amount of money. (FS19)

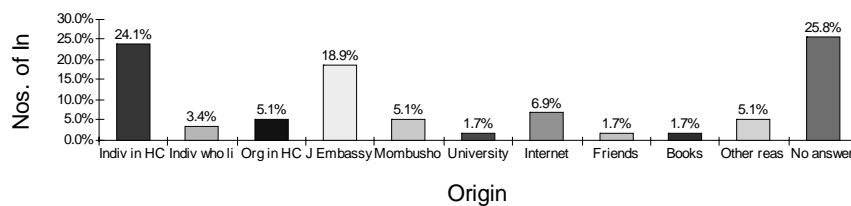
### 19. Information on cost before?

1999



### 19a. Where did the info come from

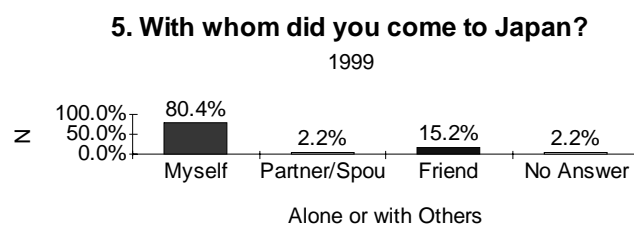
1999



Individuals in home country, individuals who have lived in Japan, organisation in home country, Japan embassy, *Monbushô*, university, internet, friends, books, other sources, no answer

Overall, the initial month of arrival was problematic in terms of finances for scholarship students. The arrival payment didn't seem to be enough and this was compounded by late payments of the scholarship – a situation for which the students were quite unprepared. The results of the survey showed that 80 per cent of students received information about the cost of living prior to arrival in Japan, but 42.9 per cent of those students stated that most of their information came from a) individuals in their home country; b) individuals who have lived in Japan; c) organisations in their home country; d) the internet, friends and books; rather than the more official agencies such as the Japanese Embassy, the *Monbushô* or the university they hoped to attend (25.7 per cent).

#### *Monbushô students with families*



I would have liked to bring my wife and child with me but I couldn't because we couldn't live on the scholarship alone. I don't like being away for so long periods so I have to travel back to X often but then I use the money (scholarship) in this way and so I have to live cheaply in Japan. (FS22)

My wife and daughter are here with me in Japan. It is very very hard but we have to manage. I could not leave them alone home and we can have a different experience living in Japan, but we have to be careful with what we spend. (FS36)

To support the family, two or three people, it is insufficient. The cost of living in Japan is very expensive. (FS18)

One criticism of the *Monbushô* scholarship is that it appeared to target single people. There were no allowances for spouses or children; therefore study in Japan was particularly difficult for



students with families. Some married students were forced to separate from their families and there was little or no social support for students living in Japan under that particular situation. (Murphy-Shigematsu, 1998) The results of the survey showed that 80.4 per cent of students came alone while a minority of 2.2 per cent came with a partner/spouse/family. The 15.2 per cent of students who stated that they came with a friend came as two individual students not financially dependent on each other.

*Food as an additional cost*

I can't get used to having Japanese food all of the time, it doesn't fill me up. I've never eaten so much fast food until I came here. At least you know how it's going to taste. I eat out all of the time because you can't really cook at the dorm. It's real dirty looking and other students are always in there. My money is going all on food. (FS10)

I think the scholarship is okay but sometimes I have little money because the rent is high and the food is expensive. The three of us cook and eat together because we can save more money. It is expensive for us to eat because we have to order *halal*<sup>5</sup> meat from Nagoya. (FS5)

Food was one specific issue that came up in the interviews and discussions in relation to costs. Some students stated that they couldn't get accustomed to eating Japanese food and/or didn't have facilities to cook where they lived in the dormitory. Muslim students had to buy special *halal* meat from stores that also delivered the meat to their homes. This meant that their food costs would be higher than average. Further, *halal* meat was not usually available in restaurants so Muslim students were generally limited in what they could eat outside of their homes. In general, international foods in restaurants tended to be more expensive than Japanese food (excluding fast food restaurants) but nevertheless, students would still spend extra money for a 'taste of home'.

Western food is expensive to buy, like at the foreign food shops, but sometimes you just want to eat something from home. It's like comfort food!

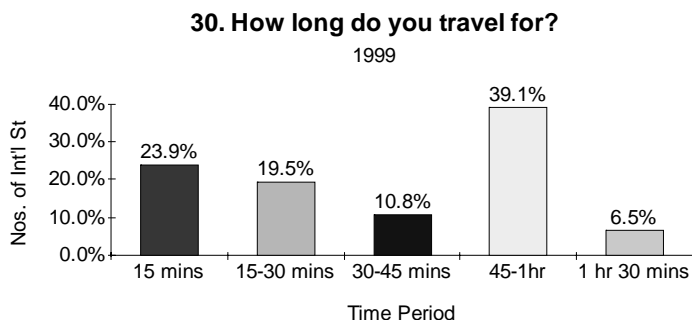
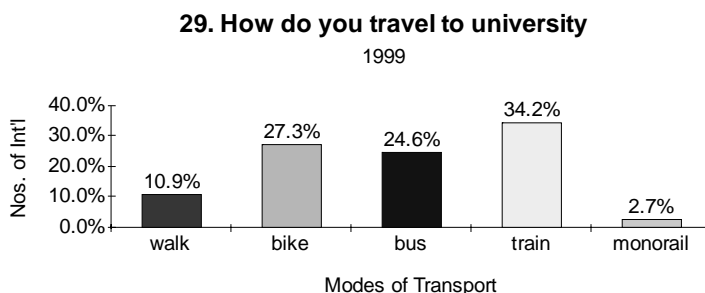
There are a few American chain restaurants that serve food that I crave and

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<sup>5</sup> *Halal* meat is meat that is prepared in a specific way according to Islamic custom.

serve American size portions. They're expensive but what are you going to do? You're in Japan away from friends and family and you want to eat food that you are used to, so you just say to hell with it and spend the money. (FS41)

*Transportation and costs from home to the university*

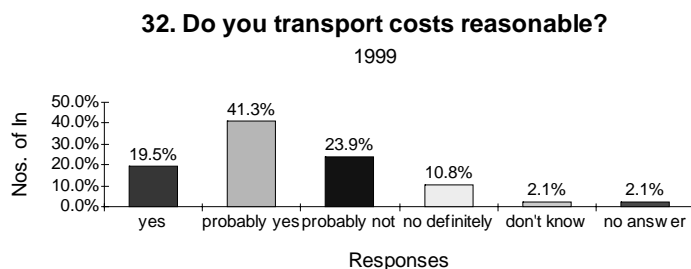
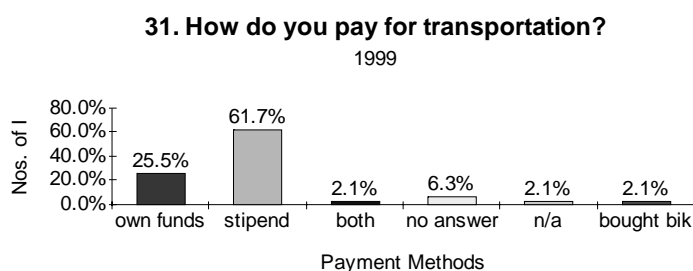


The majority of students did not live on campus accommodation; therefore the survey asked questions concerning transportation and its costs. Apart from the 10.9 per cent of students who stated that they were able to walk to their university, the remainder rode bikes or took public transportation. Twenty-seven point three per cent of students stated that they rode bikes to the university. However, 58.8 per cent of students took a train, bus or monorail to get to university which meant incurring daily financial costs. Several students who lived on their own mentioned in their interviews that when they looked for a place to live, their priorities had been to find cheap accommodation and a place which was near to the university so they could either walk or ride their bike and lessen their financial burden.

Even though I pay 40,000 yen a month for my rent, I can walk to the university, it is only five minutes walk, so I can even come home to eat my lunch and if I need anything, I can come home. It is very convenient. I don't

have to pay for a train or bus and I don't have to spend much time travelling.  
(FS17)

Students seemed to divide into two groups according to the length of time that they spent travelling. Forty-three point four per cent spent up to thirty minutes travelling from their residence to the university and 49.9 per cent spent from 30 minutes to an hour; only 6.5 per cent spent an hour and a half travelling time.



Of the students who used public transportation, 61.7 per cent stated that they used their scholarship money for transportation and 25.5 per cent stated that they used their own funds. Further, 60.8 per cent stated that they thought that transportation costs were reasonable or probably were reasonable while 34.7 per cent stated that they were probably or definitely not reasonable. Some students from *Osaka Gaidai* living in the AIEJ dormitory compared their monthly rent of 22,000 yen for rent per month to the monthly 20,000 yen they paid for travel expenses and expressed that commuting expenses were costly.

#### *Part-time employment*

Part-time employment or *arubeito*<sup>6</sup> is part of student life in Japan. However, with the high cost of living in Japan, a number of international students reported that they needed to work, especially because the majority of them were self-financing. Immigration regulations stated that students could work up to 28 hours a week and 8 hours a day during university spring, summer, and winter vacations but required specific permission from the immigration office. (University of Tokyo International Centre, 2000) The reality was that many students did not seek permission and worked for much longer hours, especially if their employers were not government agencies or closely regulated businesses, such as the post office or the city's international visitor's centre. (Yamashiro, 1987:43)

It was hard to assess the actual economic participation of international students, as many have not gained permission to work or worked privately as language tutors in a home setting. (Mori, 1997:18) The fact that student employment in general was hardly covered by any official data in Japan also suggested that there was under-representation in the official data both in the size of service sector employees as well as in the immigrant labour force. International students often worked in restaurants as servers or dishwashers, service clerks in other small service sector businesses or taught English/other language on a private basis. (Mori, 1997:111) It should be noted that with part-time jobs, there was also an element of racial/ethnic segregation. Students from countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, generally found jobs teaching English where pay levels were higher, whereas students of colour from these same countries expressed difficulties in gaining teaching positions.

I got jobs as soon as I got here. I thought either I'm lucky or there aren't enough teachers to go around. I hear of other people who have difficulties finding jobs but I actually had to turn some down because I had to attend my classes. (FS26)

The woman was really friendly on the telephone when I spoke to her, but when I went down, I knew she wasn't expecting a black British person. She was surprised, I could tell. She said she would call me back, but she never did. I was warned that was going to happen a lot in Japan. (FS17)

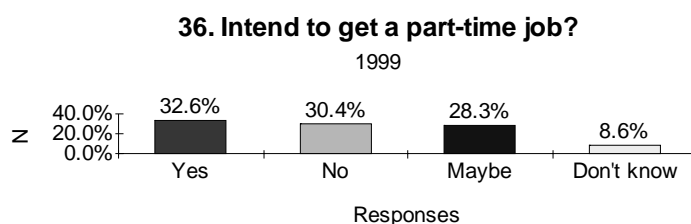
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<sup>6</sup> *Arubeito* originated from the German word *arbeit* meaning work. In Japan, it refers to part-time or temporary employment.

International students at Shiga University seemed to express a more positive experience in their part-time work environments. The university is situated in the small city of Hikone and most employers knew that the small number of young foreigners in the area tended to be international students.

Where I work, they are very kind to me. If I say I have to study, they say I don't need to come to work that afternoon or evening. I like where I work, sometimes the restaurant gets very busy and I'm tired, but we can eat anything we want there so I'm lucky. (FS14)

I went to the dentist and after he fixed my teeth, he told he was looking for someone to help him and asked if I knew someone that could speak Japanese. I said I would like to work there and he gave me the job. I never thought to work in that kind of place and especially in Japan. Everyone is so surprised, but I like it there. He shows me all kinds of things to do, so I am actually learning to be an assistant to the dentist. The other staff are very kind and helpful. I tell many foreigners now to come to this dentist because I can translate for them from English or Malaysian to Japanese. My family is so surprised that I work at a dentist's office in Japan. (FS30)



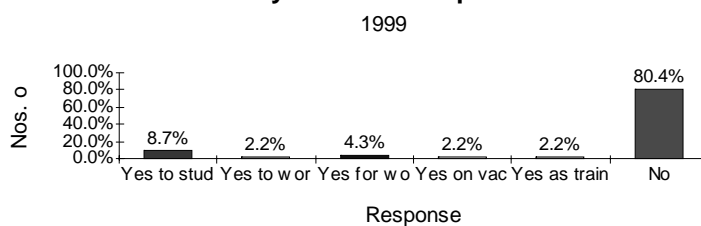
The results showed that 30.4 per cent of students stated that they did not intend to get a part-time job, while 32.6 per cent stated that they did; 28.3 per cent of students were undecided. Graduate students came to study and do research and therefore, seeking part-time work did not seem to be a priority for them. The students gave a number of reasons for wanting a part-time job. One incentive was to improve their Japanese language skills or to experience Japan in a work environment with an aim to understanding Japanese culture, although their main reasons were financial. A few graduate students from the USA spoke of their need to pay off their student loans with money from their part-time jobs as well as savings from their *Monbushô* scholarships. Two

other graduate students wanted part-time jobs so that they could either pay for air tickets to Japan for their family members or so that they could go home on a regular basis to see their families.

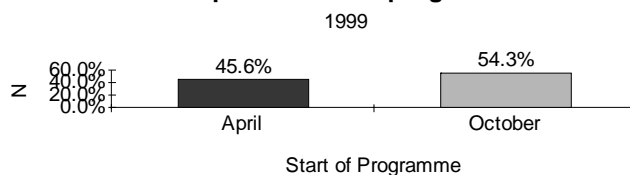
Three of us went to take the test to see whether we could work in the post office in the summer. All of the people were smiling at us. Now we will work there and we can improve our Japanese much more. (FS31)

### *Initial Culture shock*

#### 20. Have you been to Japan before?



#### 9. April or October programme



It has been largely accepted that when individuals move to another country to live, they may be susceptible to what is known as culture shock. (Hsiao-Ying, 1995:524) This has been viewed as a normal process of adaptation to a new cultural environment, where newcomers may experience symptoms which could include feelings of anxiety, helplessness, irritability, and a longing for a more predictable and gratifying environment.

Research carried out in Japan by Hsiao-Ying (1995) on newly-arrived foreigners concluded that international students in particular, rated Japan more favourably in the early part of their stay, but afterwards their positive attitudes deteriorated. Overall, attitudes worsened after the first year and there was no evidence to show that language familiarity led to improved attitudes. The students were asked if they had ever been to Japan before and the results showed that 8.7 per cent had previously been students here, 10.9 per cent had been to Japan for work-related matters or on vacation, but the vast majority (80.4 per cent) had never been to Japan before. Specifically, 54.3 per cent of students had just arrived in Japan two months prior to receiving this questionnaire.

The other 45.6 per cent of students had arrived either the previous April or within the last four years, so they had a little more time to experience life in Japan.

Students who had just arrived expressed overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards Japan. Apart from a few comments about the expense of living in Japan and the accommodation problems, the overwhelmingly majority of students initially found life to be comfortable and convenient. Further, most students were excited about their new surroundings making references to the fairly safe and organised environment, the friendliness of the people, and the scenery being aesthetically pleasing.

Everything is expensive. (FS10)

Before I thought that being in Japan would be more comfortable, but actually I realize that it's not - dorm, transportation, and very expensive. (FS25)

It's very nice and comfortable for me. (FS8)

People are nice, clean cities (FS38)

It's a great country. (FS36)

Very beautiful nature. (FS12)

High tech, high standard, expenses, safe, clean, convenient. (FS39)

Things are systematic and people are kind and helpful. (FS30)

You can have a convenient life in Japan. (FS4)

Nature is beautiful throughout the year. (FS27)

Nice, clean, people are helpful. (FS24)

Now I like Japan as much as my country. (FS20)

It's beautiful, very busy country. People are friendly, helpful and kind, not all but most of them. (FS17)

Japan is a very nice country. (FS14)

The Japanese are kind and hospitality is warm hearted. (FS18)

It's much better than I thought. I've been having many good experiences here. I met lots of very interesting people from various parts of the world. Japan also impressed me because people are friendly and talkative. I like the gardens and parks too. (FS7)

I have been studying about Japan for four years in my country already, so there wasn't really anything that surprised me. Maybe the only thing that I

wasn't prepared for was all the formalities that had to be taken care of. I think that have signed for more than 20 different things during the first two weeks. (FS39)

Hsiao-Ying also reported that there were differences of feelings between students from Asia and students from the non-Asian group. (Hsiao-Ying, 1995:528-531) For example, students from Asia were more positive in stating that Japan was a good role model as a country in comparison to their own home country. This was perhaps attributed to the attraction that Japan's economic and political situation had for its neighbours. However, Asian students also reported feelings of alienation and people from other developing countries suffered most from alienation and their attitudes towards Japan deteriorated significantly throughout their whole stay. (Hsiao-Ying, 1995:528-531)

Japan is a developed country with a strong economic base and at the same time Japan has a rich culture. The environment is quite well protected. The Japanese people work very hard and sometimes overload. Living expenses in Japan are high. (FS9)

I am used to the Japanese looking at me in not friendly way, because they don't like Asian peoples too much. Maybe they think we are poor and come to Japan for *Monbushô* money. They are always smiling and talking to the Americans. But I have some Japanese friends who are very nice and we talk about these things. (FS25)

Boring and lonely life for me. (FS20)

In contrast, the European and American group's attitude were significant in that they were more positive towards Japan when arriving in Japan and did not show as many symptoms of alienation. (Hsiao-Ying, 1995, p.530) The American group had the most positive attitudes of all groups toward Japan, showing the least symptoms of alienation throughout their stay. However, the European group showed more alienation after three years and were also less likely to accept Japan as a role model for their own countries. (1995, p.530)

Wow! (FS37)



Intimidating, it is hard to be in a country and go to the supermarket and not be able to read what you are buying. However, I was very excited about being in Japan. (FS5)

Although I had been to Japan twice before, my first impressions this time around included alarm at how much has changed. There are so many fellow *gai-jin*, at least in this area, that most residents don't seem to pay them any mind. (FS19)

Japan is so americanised. (FS42)

Some newly arrived students also noted the following issues pertaining to behaviour towards foreigners.

Compared to people in my country, Japan is a very cold country. People look at you but if you look, they look away. They don't smile at foreign people. (FS13)

There is some hypocrisy in their interpersonal relationships/attitude towards the foreigners. (FS2)

Japanese people seem to look at me with curiosity and a bit of fear. Sometimes nobody sits at my side on the bus... but it's OK, where we start to talk we become friends rapidly. (FS36)

### *Discrimination*

I knew Japan was a racist country before I got here. Even when they are friendly, they want to know if I like rap music or play sports or something stupid like that. That's all they think black men do. (FS43)

One professor said to me that 'we Japanese do not consider you black ones, *gai-jins*, only those from America and Europe', we don't consider you

anything. I think he was drunk but I was still shocked that he would say that.  
(FS1A)

In terms of specific discrimination on the grounds of 'race' and ethnicity, international students had an unfortunate variety of experiences. In particular, students from Asia, Africa and Latin America who had lived in Japan for some time felt they were being treated differently and more negatively by the Japanese in comparison to the treatment that they perceived that European or American students experienced. They spoke of having to endure the many references made to their home countries or regions as being in need of development, poor, or in war-torn situations. More significant, were the numbers of students who simply resigned themselves to accepting these comments while living and studying in Japan.

Some Japanese are truly interested in Africa and African nations, but one professor asked me 'why is Africa so backward?' It was very hard for me to explain without feeling very angry, although I am used to it. (FS14)

At first, I was so angry at some Japanese people and other foreigners for thinking that my country is poor and the people are always fighting. That is all the news shows of us, not only in Japan but America and other places too. Every time I said I am from X, they said 'oh you have many problems in your country'. Even if I try to tell them good things, I know that they are not really interested. It makes me so angry. Only my friends from Brazil and other countries like that understand how I feel, because they have the same problems when people talk about their country. (FS48)

Students of European descent also experienced discrimination and feelings of alienation. In fact, all of the white students in the discussions and interviews expressed some kind of anxiety when first arriving in Japan because they were aware that they were an ethnic minority. For some of these students, these feelings were mixed with their awareness of racial and ethnic discrimination in their home countries. Furthermore, most of these students also stated that they were very aware of the difference in treatment between themselves and students of colour or students from developing countries.

However, the first time I surfaced from the subway station into the crowds at *Umeda*<sup>7</sup>, I felt like I did upon arriving for the first time, into a faceless sea of black hair - lost, overwhelmed and very obviously a minority. (FS19)

I felt really strange because I was the only blond person there and I couldn't speak Japanese, and for a minute I wanted to go back to the States because I felt so lost. (FS41)

Until I came to Japan, I didn't really realise how minorities felt at home. But when I realised that people wouldn't sit next to me on the train or just avoided me, I kind of understood how a black person might feel. (FS47)

I noticed how the Japanese simply ignore Asian students or black students. It's terrible, as if they don't exist. If I say something in class, the professor always pays attention or in general people try to help me with something, but I've seen the professor dismiss my friend from Thailand, and also when another friend from Ghana makes a statement in class, the professor begins to correct his Japanese and doesn't really answer the questions...I think the white people here are really privileged, even though I know that I experience discrimination from the Japanese, overall people really go out of their way to help me and I just don't see that happening with other students from developing countries. (FS6)

There were also some incidents among the international student community itself where students stated that they experienced racist or prejudiced remarks from other students. The following comments highlight some of the issues that arose when students from a variety of cultural backgrounds were placed together in one distinctive cultural environment. Therefore, it would seem that racist or discriminatory attitudes also came to Japan via some international students.

I have many problems with that student from X. He always looks at me strange and makes comments to me after class when I ask the professor something, like he is making fun of me. When we went to our first class, he was staring and staring at me. I don't care that I'm the only black girl in the

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<sup>7</sup> *Umeda* is the name of a main subway and train station in Osaka.

university, I am here to learn. When he introduced himself, I was surprised because he was from Africa but he had very white skin. He said 'I am more from Africa than you are', I said, 'yes, because I am from the Caribbean but I am also from Africa'. He was saying it like he wanted to argue with me. (FS19)

They (Latin American students) were talking about a new student and they started making jokes about how she would look – dark, fat. When Japanese people hear these kinds of things, it's just going to reinforce their ideas about skin colour.

Those girls from Malaysia, you know in those Muslim countries, the women have to keep quiet about everything. I don't really talk to them because they have a different culture. (FS35)

One student said to him, 'in my country, we call people like you ...' and she said a really racist word, and you could tell he (student from Africa) was embarrassed. He never said anything. I was so angry. (FS1A)

I don't trust the Chinese, they always tell lies. I don't trust them in my country and I don't trust them here. They eat anything. That tells you how they are. (FS34)

*International students comments on how they thought the Japanese viewed themselves*

I think the Japanese think they are white people. But they are not, they are Asian people. We are all Asian people. (FS33)

I don't know why they think they're white. I know they think they are. We don't think they are. I said to this one Japanese person when she started making racist remarks about Asian people, 'hey come to America, we don't think you're white there, you'll be Asian with the rest of them'. She was like 'oh really?' and I thought 'get real'. Japanese people have to be more honest with themselves about who they really are. (FS44)

People are nice and friendly, but they have a lack of self-esteem about themselves and that's the reason that they always refer to the western countries such as Europe and the U.S. (FS35)

I am happy to be Asian but the Japanese are not. They want to be American.  
(FS16)

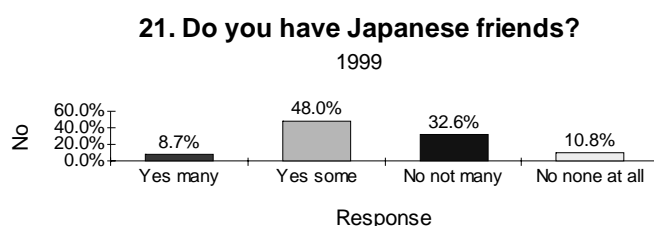
In the context of the discussions on race and ethnicity, a few students commented on how they felt the Japanese saw themselves. It has been suggested that for some time that the Japanese have seen themselves as part of the Western world in Western terms and not as Asian. (Weiner, 1997) Weiner argued that mainstream Japanese culture and people have entered the symbolic space of "white", in terms of economic and political privilege, and cultural dominance. Yet there still existed a gap between the white westerners and Japanese, which could be due to the original aspirations of Japan and its people to reach the state of progress symbolised by the white Western world. (Weiner, 1997:227) A 1999 survey found that the majority of Japanese people had more positive feelings towards the USA and European countries, than China and South-East Asian countries. They had the least positive feelings for South-East Asian countries. (Foreign Affairs Public Relations Office, 1999)

### *Friendships*

It takes a long time for Japanese people to make friends with foreigners. They are not very friendly and ignore. But if you make friends with some, they are very kind. (FS8)

Friendships are important in everybody's life but in the case of international students, friends can be a great strength of support when beginning life in a new environment. It is suggested that making friends a) with people from the students' home countries could be seen as important for their emotional well-being as well as helping to overcome issues of loneliness; b) with people from other countries can broaden a students' perspective on several issues and also allow students' to recognise that others are in similar new surroundings; c) with people from the host country can play an important role in acculturating and learning positively about the new environment in which the students are living.

Studies by Yuk Huey Jou and Fukada (1995) found that Chinese students reported that they needed the least support from Japanese friends off-campus and received the most support from other international friends. However, the greater their need for support from Japanese students and international friends, the poorer their adjustment to life in Japan. Moreover, it was also noted that the more support Chinese students received from Japanese professors, the better their adjustment became. These conclusions could perhaps be taken as somewhat representative of the experience of other international students in Japan.



The results of the survey showed that only 8.7 per cent of students stated that they had many Japanese friends; 48.0 per cent said they had some; 32.6 per cent said they didn't have many; and 10.8 per cent said they had no Japanese friends. The reasons given were language barriers, living in a foreign dormitory or studying Japanese with other international students and/or reasons pertaining to how the international students perceived Japanese people and how they felt they were perceived.

They don't speak their mind to us. I think they are afraid sometimes to communicate with foreigners. (FS48)

Language barrier: as Japanese is for foreigners as English is for Japanese. It seems that the Japanese are always busy and behave very formal. (FS9)

Some Japanese are too shy or not confident about the English ability or making overseas friends. (FS21)

I sometimes feel that Japanese students are shy to talk to foreigners. (FS27)

It is part Japanese culture because they don't like foreigners and part my weak Japanese ability. (FS2)

I can't communicate well with them. They are not so open and friendly. (FS7)

Now my schooling is still at a Japanese language school. All of my friends are usually foreigners. Perhaps after I enter vocational college, I'll have Japanese friends. (FS28)

Because I do not have any contact with Japanese students at all. I don't speak Japanese either. (FS6)

The Japanese are friendly but not friends. (FS14)

They are cold and not friendly to foreigners. (FS21)

The students who had some or many Japanese friends stated that this was because they a) lived here before; b) were able to communicate in Japanese; c) made a specific effort to make Japanese friends; d) showed an interest in Japanese culture; and/or e) were in an environment where there were many Japanese students.

Friends from before because I lived here in the Japanese community. (FS1)

I think it is easy to make friends when one person has a genuine interest in the other culture, language, way of doing things, etc... I think most people can petition themselves if they feel that someone will receive what they share willingly (and vice versa). (FS19)

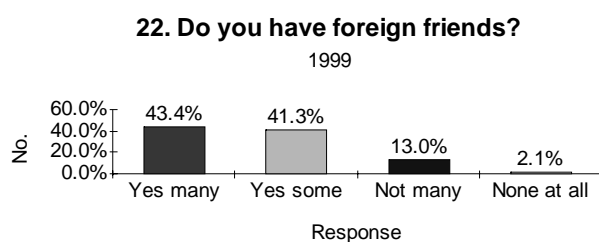
Because I wanted have only Japanese friends. (FS5)

Because I can speak Japanese and am interested in Japanese culture. (FS29)

My class is full of them. (FS37)

I have many Japanese friends because in my department because there are many Japanese there. (FS20)

Japanese friends are very warm and helpful. (FS13)



In contrast to the question on Japanese friends, the results to the question regarding having international friends showed 43.4 per cent of students had many international friends; 41.3 per cent had some; 13.0 per cent said they didn't have many international friends; and 2.1 per cent said they had none. The reasons given as to why they had many international friends were similar to their previous responses, such as living in a foreign dormitory and studying Japanese together.

However, many also cited the similarity of situation; the ability of other international students to be more supportive; and/or culture similarities.

Because they're studying at the same university or they're living in the same dorm for international students. (FS6)

The same place in life situation. Language barriers are not so big obstacle. Sometimes close cultural background (customs, a sense of humour, religion etc.) (FS2)

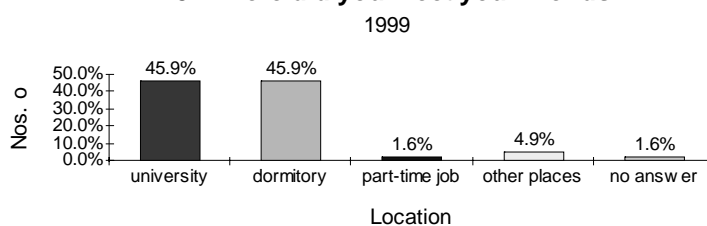
We always share our feelings (FS27)

Easier to communicate in English and there is less formal behaviour. (FS9)

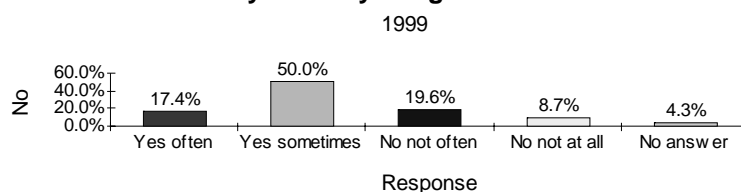
Because I can speak English and have the same aims and the same troubles that other foreigners have. (FS29)

I live in an international students house so all the residents are foreigners and I think it is good to know the culture of every country. (FS15)

### 23. Where did you meet your friends



### 24. Do you study/hang out with friends



Students were also asked where they met most of their friends. Ninety-one point eight per cent of students stated that they met their friends at university or in the dormitory, only 1.6 per cent said at their place of part-time employment and 4.9 per cent said 'other places' but did not state where. A further 67.4 per cent stated that they often or sometimes studied and spent their leisure time with their friends while 28.3 per cent stated that they didn't often or did not at all study with their friends or spend their leisure time with them. The explanation for this was that they didn't have time to spend with their friends at the time of completing the questionnaire because of their studies.

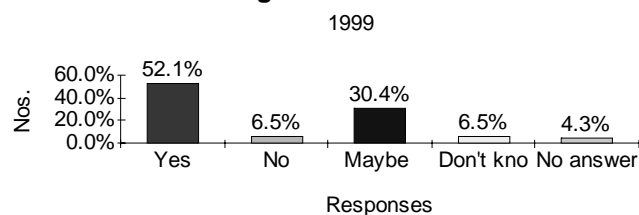


I would really like to spend more time with my friends but since we got here, they really started piling on the work. I just go to university and then get something to eat and then go back to the dorm to study. I really see the need for learning Japanese so I spend a lot of time trying to learn all the things they gave us to study. (FS15)

I find the school work very difficult and I don't understand too much in class. I spend many hours in the evening to go over what the teacher said but sometimes I still don't understand, but I have to pass the exam. Recently, I don't have much time to be with my friends. (FS39)

The final question on the survey asked the students whether they thought that having a meeting with former international students would have assisted the process of becoming an international student in Japan. Over 50 per cent of students in the survey stated that they felt that such a meeting with former students would help them better prepare for life and study in Japan.

#### 41. Meeting with former students..?



I had that meeting in my country and it was a very good idea. (FS8)

I think it is better to get some advice from the old students. They should be the most helpful to the new students. (FS17)

#### *Other comments*

The arrival service at the airport provided was outstanding, helpful, well organized and in general a smooth transition into life in Japan. It was above and beyond the call of duty to provide a free taxi service to the dorm and I am still grateful for this luxury and kindness. In contrast, the reception at the

accommodation building was curt and confusing. After 24 plus sleepless hours of travelling and adjusting to time zone differences, it was overwhelming to be bombarded with a two-hour orientation seminar including maps and whatnots, with orders to get up in the morning, figure out how to find some food, then how to ride the trains, buses and subway, get to the city office to register for alien registration and get to school in time! I almost cried when I got back to my room. It would have been so nice to be able to come one day earlier, get sufficient sleep and get oriented to gradually. (FS19)

Only one student made a specific comment on the overall arrival procedure. However, in discussions, the majority of students agreed with the above statement, noting that they felt they felt that they needed more time to ‘digest’ all the information that they were given as well as a day of rest after their journey to Japan.

#### *Concluding comments*

Each time, including the study I conducted last year, I find that international students develop a bad image of the Japanese people once they have learned how to speak the language...This suggests how closed our society is and how woefully inadequate our universities are in coping with the special needs of foreign students. Professor Sumiko Iwai (Iwai, 1999)

The results of the study showed that international students faced multifarious issues studying in Japan. The research targeted students in receipt of *Monbushô* scholarships and the majority stated that without such government funding they would not have considered studying in Japan. Other students stated that they came to Japan because they perceived that the Japanese higher education system would be conducted at a high level commensurate with their images of Japan as a whole. However, their comments suggested that their initial perceptions did not fit the reality of their classroom experience.

The first experience of Japanese education for the majority of international students came in the form of the *Monbushô* mandatory Japanese language classes. The majority of the students considered that the teaching methods of the tutors were not at all conducive to language learning, especially for a mature student group. Secondly, some students were able to gain permission from their supervisor to be exempt from some or all of these Japanese language classes, which caused

some discontent among the student body. For those international students who had already begun their university programmes, their comments were also unfavourable with respect to their classroom experience. Undergraduate students complained that there was a lack of discipline in the classroom which was disruptive to their studies, whereas graduate students commented on the poor quality of supervision they received. Students of both levels noted that some faculty members were in great need of updating their teaching methods.

International students also felt that their universities could have given them more assistance in their non-academic lives, as this would have further eased their transition into life in Japan. Instead students had to rely on professors to be guarantors for their accommodation, which created tension in the student-faculty relationship. Further they had to rely on newly-made friends and older students to assist them with important matters such as obtaining the *gai-jin* card and sorting out utility services and bills for their accommodation.

Other immediate concerns for international students were the high cost of living and other related financial matters. All international students felt unprepared for the initial costs that faced them. In particular, for those students who were in receipt of the fairly generous *Monbushô* scholarship, the delay of the initial monthly payment and the insufficient arrival payment created an additional stress for them. There were also financial difficulties in accommodation matters, as international students needed to provide a lump sum of key money and a deposit in order to rent. Those students who privately rented apartments specifically looked for accommodations near to the university in order to reduce their transportation costs. Although it should be noted that the majority of students in this study resided in dormitories with low rents.

Food was also raised as a financial issue. Some students did not have proper cooking facilities where they resided so had to buy their meals outside, some Muslim students had to purchase *halal* meat which was more expensive in Japan, while other students stated that they were not accustomed to eating Japanese food so they ate the more costly 'international' foods at restaurants or bought food from the foreign shops.

Finally, students with families had specific financial difficulties as they felt that the *Monbushô* scholarship was not adequate to support a family in Japan. Therefore, some students would frequently return to their home countries to visit their spouses and children, thereby incurring large travel costs.

The other non-academic issues concerned culture shock and the more negative issues of prejudice and discrimination. Overall, all students experienced some kind of culture shock, although newly-arrived students of all nationalities were generally positive about their new lives in Japan. They noted the helpfulness of Japanese people and the convenient services for daily living. However

over a period of time, international students began to have a range of experiences, which appeared to be affected by their nationality, ethnicity or race.

Examples of prejudice and discrimination were discussed by all students and there was a notable difference in the experiences of students from Western countries and those from Asian or other developing countries. The latter group felt that their presence was considered more negatively by the Japanese. For example, when seeking part-time employment, students noted that those from Western countries tended to gain higher paid work teaching English as opposed students from Asian or developing countries who tended to find work in service sector jobs. Moreover, many students were aware of the potential discriminatory practises of landlords regarding renting to foreigners; again, students from Asia and developing countries felt particularly susceptible in this regard.

Establishing friendships was also problematic for students. Despite half of the international students having some Japanese language skills before arriving in Japan, they still had difficulties in making friends with Japanese students and Japanese people in general. Some felt this was to do with Japanese perceptions of foreigners as outsiders and others blamed their own poor language skills. Instead international students often made friends with other international students and experienced the kind of global friendship and exchange of world information that ironically, Japanese universities were hoping to achieve on their campuses for all their students.

It remains to be seen what future policies and practises will be adopted to encourage and sustain international students in Japan. However, with the increasing decline in the population of 18-year-olds set to substantially alter the character of the Japanese higher education system, some universities will be turning to international students to fill the shortfall in student numbers. Therefore, from the perspective of international students, it would appear that Japanese universities need to consider two general issues a) the improvement in the quality of higher education to make it more attractive to international students and b) the academic and social responsibilities of accepting members of the international community into their campuses. While international students may achieve their academic goals in Japan each year, they appear to be disappointed in their social experience and although many of these issues are rooted within Japanese society itself, universities could still do much to ensure that a more positive environment is created for their international students in Japan.

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