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University Rankings, Global Models, and Emerging Hegemony: Critical Analysis from Japan

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Abstract:
The study analyzes how the emergence of dominant models in higher education and power they embody affect non-Western, non-English language universities such as those in Japan. Based on extended micro-level participant observation in a Japanese research university aspiring to become a 'world-class' institution, their struggles and the quest for new identities are examined. The prevalent and oft-referenced university rankings and league tables give rise to de-facto global standards and models, against which traditions of national language education and research as well as self-sustenance in human resources are challenged and tested. Such new modes of objectifying academic excellence alter domestic academic hierarchies and internal dynamics within universities. This study uses these insights to look critically at new dimensions of knowledge construction and an emerging hegemony in today's global higher education context.

Keywords: *university rankings, global models, elite education, hegemony, globalization*

The increasingly transnational character of higher education has brought tremendous dynamism for the advancement of science and technology. The trend also provides opportunities for the improvement of higher education through collaboration, competition, exchange of ideas, and increased exposure. Without trivializing these benefits, this study is concerned with another dimension of the globalization of higher education: the emergence of dominant models that embody a particular type of power that transforms identities and affects internal hierarchies both within individual institutions and across national system of higher education. Japanese universities are considered a strategic locale to critically observe the emergence of such models as well as the configurations of power that create and maintain the dominance. The analysis illustrates the challenges and dilemmas as experienced by non-Western, non-English language medium university. Their quest to stay competitive and relevant through proactive 'internationalization' can be best understood in the context of an emerging hegemony in the globalization process of higher education.

Throughout most of its modern history, Japan has maintained a rather self-sustained,

national language-based higher education model with a stratification mechanism to select and produce future leaders and professionals. It has existed outside the realm of Western higher education power domains, and Western university degrees have held little relevance for upward mobility in an existing national social ladder. Yet, over the past decade, such independence has slowly been altered due to a number of socio-political, demographic and economic factors, both domestic and global. The following study focuses on the crucial dimensions of prestige and status seeking in the global arena by outlining struggles and the search for identity among Japan's leading higher education institutions.

The findings herein are based on extended micro-level participant observation at a national university aspiring to be a 'world-class' institution. This study first presents an ethnography of a university being ranked. It is a story of contact with a ranking institution, one of the producers of the world university rankings and league tables. Unlike several recent studies that review the general trends and characteristics of the ranking exercises or critically analyze criteria and methodologies used (cf. Marginson 2006; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007; Sadlak & Liu, 2007), this ethnography plainly depicts what actors do and how they do it; how a non-English and non-Western university was approached by a ranking organization, what sorts of requests were made and how, what communications followed, and how a university and its people responded. By beginning with dynamics at the micro level, the nature of this particular ranking exercise becomes more apparent.

Consequently, the study analyses the creation of dominant 'world-class' university models and their impact on higher education in Japan. The results suggest that powerful global models appear to help cultivate a new quest for elite education overseas, create a new, internationalized national hierarchy, affect the balance of power between natural sciences/engineering and humanities/social sciences faculties within institutions, and even devalue research in the national language. Such challenges thus necessitate fundamental changes on the part of Japanese research universities. In the end, the findings address the issue of emerging hegemony in the world's higher education in the context of the globalization.

Ethnography of a University Being Ranked

First contact

In June 2006, Osaka University first received an e-mail message requesting data for the Times Higher Education Supplement [THES] University Rankings in its inbox for general inquiries posted on the main university website. It came from a researcher employed by a private company with 13 items on the list of questions including

inquiries such as: the numbers of faculty and international faculty, numbers of undergraduate and international undergraduate students, average course fees per year, and percentage of graduates employed 6 months post-graduation. There was no letter of endorsement from the THES editor. What made the message more dubious was the way the questions were posed; no definitions were given for any of the listed questions. In addition, there was no guarantee on the appropriate and limited use of the requested data. In short, the survey did not seem to respect basic research protocol, and the message appeared to be 'spam' to the administrative staff that first fielded the email.

THES and QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited [QS] started the world university rankings exercise in 2004. Until that year, however, there had been no record of contact between Japanese universities and the research company, QS, that was contracted by THES to undertake data collection. For this reason, the decision was made to verify the authenticity of the survey. Osaka University staff sent inquiries to other Japanese universities only to find that they were grateful to be notified of such a survey that failed to make it through their 'spam' filter. Concerned, the international office of Osaka University finally forwarded the message to the THES editor to check its authenticity. In his reply, the editor stated that "the rankings are emphatically a joint venture" between the THES and QS and confirmed the role of QS in gathering data. It was then that the offices and staff concerned first began to become aware of a gap between the celebrated image of the "world's best universities" and cursory process of creating it.

The results of the first two THES-QS rankings were noted with various degrees of pleasure and displeasure, but not taken seriously among faculty and staff at the university. In the second year of their ranking exercise released in the fall 2005, Osaka University slipped from the global top 100. Most insiders greeted the result with a shrug, noting that the ranking of almost all Japanese universities fell. The relative positioning among domestic universities was the primary concern at that time. However, after receiving the first survey in 2006, we as a university started paying more attention to the dynamics and details of how the whole ranking exercise was constructed.

Behind the scenes of data collection

Subsequent episodes showcase how this ranking exercise presents itself to the people in a particular university. By providing the requested data, our university became an active participant in the exercise. At the same time, we discovered irregularities and problems through communications with the company and by cross-examination of the data.

First came the questions surrounding definitions. A good example is the issue of the number of international students. In Japan, "international students" are defined by visa status in contrast to other countries that apply various other signifiers. Our university was instructed via email to "define all non-Japanese nationals as international students" by a QS researcher in charge, thus to include resident Korean and Chinese students. Yet, the university did not have such statistics. The second relates to the selection process of reviewers, and third to the related issue of "Peer Review" representation, especially concerning the national background of the reviewers. It is well known that THES university rankings rely heavily on reputation factors; 40% of the overall score is based on "Peer Review," and 10% on "Recruiters Review." Such weight attached to peer ratings has often been the subject of criticism as they favor well-known universities by the fact that "reputational rankings recycle reputation"(Marginson, 2006, p.9).

In spring 2007, our university was contacted for the second round of the survey exercise. There were some improvements on the overall methodology, including the clarification of several definitions. The ranking organization disclosed more information on how they collect and process the data gathered from universities and faculties. Despite this welcome move, the research company also introduced a new, problematic initiative. They "invite(d) universities themselves to supplement (their) databases" by supplying them with "lists of relevant employer contacts (company, individual contact name and position, email, telephone number) to whom (they) can send the survey." The university could not accommodate this request on two accounts. First, doing so would be in violation of confidentiality laws of Japan. Second, it would amount to "reviewees" nominating "reviewers." Our university protested in a letter attached to the survey response, which has not resulted in any substantive changes.

During this process, we also reviewed the website and checked the information disclosed on the composition of peer reviewers for the 2006 survey. The result was far from encouraging; the number of Japanese universities/academics involved in the exercise was fairly small in comparison with those of other countries, most notably English language countries. The Asia Pacific peer review votes, by the location of reviewers' affiliated institutions, were constituted as follows (Sowter, n.d.a):

India	256
Australia	191
Malaysia	112
Indonesia	93
Singapore	92
China	76
Japan	53

THES-QS claimed to have maintained a regional balance among the Americas, Europe/Middle East and Asia/Pacific. However, the data looked far from "geographically even in its breakdown[i]" and up to 2006 allowed peer reviewers to nominate their own institutions (Sawter, n.d.b). Japanese higher education currently hosts about 5% of the world's tertiary level mobile students, ranking only after the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Australia among all OECD countries (OECD, 2007, p. 304). In terms of the volume of scientific papers listed in the Thomson Scientific database, Japan occupies the second highest position only after the US (King, 2007). From its contribution to global higher education and research, one does not have to be a Japanese academic to find strong evidence that the country deserves better representation.

The above insights give a glimpse of what is occurring behind the scenes of the production of the world's "top universities" by established Western journalism. The problems associated with the rankings are not only on the criteria and methodologies used, but also the lack of mechanisms to ensure that surveys are carried out in a sound, scientific manner to minimize chances of manipulation. Yet, the university rankings thrive. Numerous international conferences and symposiums on well-known university rankings such as those by THES and Shanghai Jiao Tong University are organized throughout the world, with some producing suggested guidelines for proper rankings (eg. Berlin Declaration, 2006). Such commendable efforts have led to adjustments and improvements to the existing ranking systems. Facing the rampant university rankings of all sorts, however, one must acknowledge the reality that "there have been few concerted efforts to discredit the rankings process, which appears to have secured public credibility" (Marginson, 2007, p.309).

The ethnography of contact with a ranking agency also showcases how the creation of prestigious models manifests itself in the eyes of those at non-Western, non-English language universities. The following section will briefly examine the emergence of such models in the global context before moving on to a detailed study of their impact in a particular national context.

The Emergence of World-Class University Models

Philip Altbach (2007, p.7) grudgingly makes reference to a "mania" to identify "world-class" universities: universities at the top of a prestige and quality hierarchy. Such identification, Altbach argues, is closely related to the prevalence of university rankings. Most notable among the many are two new international rankings, one by THES and the other by Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Institute of Higher Education that started their league table in 2003. Both were introduced when increased student mobility, primarily triggered by the massive outward educational migration of Chinese

students after 2000 (Xiang, 2003, p.28) altered the mindset of university management. Indeed, the high mobility and transnational character of higher education has reached a new level since the beginning of this century. Earlier rankings such as *Asiaweek*'s that started in the late 1990s failed to survive, partly due to the fact many universities then had chosen to boycott them. Shanghai Jiao Tong's rankings juxtapose 'comparable' indicators on academic and research performances of universities rather than universities' overall performances. Such differences aside, the rankings have created an image of the world's best and strongest universities. The top-tiered universities on such lists are predominantly well-known names, comprehensive, research-oriented, and English-language medium. Out of the top 30 universities on the 2007 lists, the combined number of American and British universities amount to 22 and 26, for THES and Jiaotong rankings, respectively.

Universities that usually occupy the top 10 positions in the rankings easily fit the "world-class" category (cf. Altbach & Balán, 2007; Huisman, 2008) that include so-called "Big Three (Harvard, Yale and Princeton)" and "prestige" or "elite" colleges in the United States (Karabel, 2005; Soares, 2007) as well as Oxbridge in the United Kingdom. They present a powerful image of being on the top of the world and thus function as "global models" to emulate. They excel in most of the de-facto standards and categories used by ranking institutions such as "citations" and "awards and medals" received by either faculty or graduates. Most attract talents from overseas, and considerable proportions of students and scholars at these institutions are foreign-born. Many on the lists are the world's most generously financed universities and are proactive in their efforts in ensuring fiscal soundness. Furthermore, many have shown a commitment to be successful not only nationally but internationally, by making deliberate efforts to go global (eg. Karabel, 2005, pp. 518-521).

Alliance with such top-tiered universities is actively sought after by non-American, non-European universities aspiring to cultivate an image as being among this global elite. These top universities are often enticed with financial incentives to create transnational academic alliances and joint/double degree programs or to start off-shore operations. Examples abound: the MIT-National University of Singapore alliance (Sidhu, 2007), a recent high-profile deal between Stanford University and UC Berkeley with King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia to take effect in 2009 (Schevitz, 2008), are just a few of the recent partnership agreements that have made headlines. The brand image of the top of the league universities traverses national boundaries and often affects the existing regional or national academic hierarchy either directly or indirectly. Emerging local universities seek to form a new regional educational core by attracting home students and increasingly students from within the region. Curriculum development is based on the model of top universities with English as medium of instruction as a matter of course.

The university rankings helped create an image of global elite universities, but the manufacturing of prestige is in fact nothing new for higher education institutions. Take the example of the United States, where detailed studies by Karabel (2005) and Soares (2007) show the construction of prestige is never simply the assurance of academic merit. The creation of elite institutions and the maintenance of their image are the result of carefully orchestrated efforts that reflect each institution's history and political priorities as well as competition and rivalry, which cannot be summarized in simple charts and numbers. Similarly, universities in the world will not be affected the same way by the diffusion of the uniform world-class university models. They too operate in various socio-cultural settings and widely differ in size and orientations. The following section will take the case of Japanese research universities and analyze the impact of the new global models on Japan's higher education.

Impact on National Higher Education: The Case of Japan

Today, Japanese universities painfully face the reality of global higher education. Long-cherished academic traditions that enabled national independence and self-sustenance are no longer valued in the way they once were under the emergence of dominant global models. Since the late 19th century, Japan has imported western knowledge, translated it into the Japanese language, and thus never relied on a foreign language as a medium of instruction from primary to tertiary levels of education. Rather than being celebrated as proof of its independence and success in developing domestic human resources, the practice of not hunting for foreign experts to fill available faculty position is now interpreted as an inability to attract international talent, thus negatively evaluated by ranking exercises. The predominance of Japanese as the medium of instruction, a symbol of cultural and linguistic autonomy, proves unpopular among prospective students especially in natural science and engineering, who increasingly demand English-language courses and degree programs.

The outcome of the recently-launched "one to one" scholarship program by the Chinese government has in many ways substantiated worries among Japan's higher education administrators, the business community and national political leaders that the country is not the priority destination for Asia's best students. Each year, the Chinese program sponsors 5,000 prospective doctoral students from the country's top-ranked universities to study at the first-class institutions overseas. While there currently are more Chinese students studying in Japan than elsewhere in the world[ii], half of the approximately 4,000 applicants from China's leading universities in the first year chose to go to the US, followed by other English-language universities in Britain and Canada. According to information from the China Scholarship Council, only 181 students have chosen to continue their studies in Japan, far less than the initial projection of 10% by officials

concerned. If the trend continues in the coming years, it would makes current national discussions over "Japan passing" an immediate reality.[iii]

The following will explore the impact of the prevalence of university rankings and the diffusion of the global models on Japanese higher education by analyzing three salient issues. Rather than referring to the short-term responses by the academic community, it focuses on areas where long-term implications are most likely: 1) a new quest for global elite education among Japanese prospective students with particular attention to the country's history and class awareness; 2) the impact of global models on the existing national hierarchy; and 3) the shifting balance of power between the natural science and humanities faculties as a consequence of the wide usage of citation indices.

From egalitarianism to global elitism

The global rankings demonstrate the existing reality of a global hierarchy higher education in a plain, explicit and blatant manner. They portray the powerful image of the world's top-class universities in a way that overshadows the most competitive domestic counterparts. What the top-of-the-world image conveys is the future success in the global arena by superior academic training and cultivation of personal connections. Such notions may be especially appealing to prospective students who can qualify and afford the expensive 'overseas' options that are not available at the home society devoid of 'elite' higher education. More students who previously would have chosen the leading universities at home appear to now be going overseas. This phenomenon needs to be understood both socially and historically.

The notion of elite education is something that the Japanese education system cast off in the nation's post-WWII transition to democratic society. The older, stratified higher education system was abolished when former elite institutions such as imperial universities and the older higher schools were grouped together with 'lesser' institutions such as professional schools and teachers colleges, then reestablished as 'universities' under the new system (Kariya, 2001, p.128). By the late 1960s, the increased university enrollment rates, the percentage of white-collar salaried workers in the overall workforce, and high rates of urbanization among other factors led to the demise of the traditional Japanese academic elite and their predominantly class-based, high culture (Takeuchi, 1999, pp. 313-317). Since about the same time, university degrees have gradually ceased to ensure managerial jobs and high income. Now those without quality university diplomas may be disadvantaged in the future, but university diploma alone no longer assures future career success (Takeuchi, 1999). Yet, the hierarchy among higher education institutions remained, and competition for top universities was fierce.

Education in post-war Japan evolved along the lines of a rigid principle of egalitarianism. While the postwar educational reform contributed to making higher education universal and accessible, it also led to the general acceptance of uniformity as a signifier of equity (Kariya, 2001, chapter 3 & 4). Ability-based competitions and merit-based differentiation were kept minimum as they were considered "acknowledgement of differences," thereby avoided as "discrimination" (Kariya, 2001, pp.128-130). The demise of academic elitism went hand-in-had with the tolerance for mediocrity as recorded in Donald Roden's detailed historical studies of old higher schools (Roden, 1980). While Roden (1980, p.25) points out that the pre-war higher education system had shortfalls and was destined to be abolished, he deplores the fading of the old standards for cultural excellence, writing that back in the 1930s "when the intellectual curiosity of American university students rarely exceeded the *Saturday Evening Post*," a group of eighteen-and nineteen-year-old Japanese higher school students were given a list of 185 titles such as *Ethische Grundfragen* (Roden, 1980, p. 237). The lost academic elitism consequently witnessed an emerging "'repressive tolerance' for mediocrity and the neutralization of class consciousness in an industrial democracy" to the point that "mass higher education may have permanently consigned Japanese students to an undifferentiated culture of comic books, faded jeans, romance hotels, and Kentucky Fried Chicken" (Roden, 1980, p. 253).

The resulting vacuum of elite education, wariness over egalitarianism that tolerates mediocrity, and an unfulfilled sense of entitlement among winners (and prospective winners) of competitive university entrance exams, all constitute the background for the increasing popularity of the world-class institutions abroad by the next generation of Japanese. Unabashedly straightforward world university rankings are indeed timely. On one hand, globalization and increased transnational mobility of students facilitate access to overseas higher education. More importantly, neo-liberal discourses that encourage competitions and self-help are gradually being acquiesced to so that what happened in the United States is now happening in Japan. "As the gap between winners and losers in America grows ever wider - as it has since the early 1970s - the desire to gain every possible edge has only grown stronger," and the acquisition of education credentials is increasingly recognized as a major vehicle for the transmission of privilege from parents to child (Karabel, 2005, p.3).

Recent opening of new cram schools and preparatory schools in Japan for those who aspire to enter major American universities is therefore not coincidental. Some are operated by private businesses while others are linked to foreign institutions such as UCLA and Temple University, Japan (*Yomiuri online*, 2008, January 11). They offer preparatory English language courses; some also instruct students how to prepare application forms and how to do well in essay writing and interviews. One such institution opened in May 2008 by a major education corporation is called "Route H"

meaning the route to Harvard. The company was established in response to the increasing number of inquiries on the application process of overseas universities from "competitive" high schools all over Japan. Representatives of the company say about 6 % of the first year and 4 % of the second year high school students who sit for their national trial exams now cite the name of a leading overseas university as their first choice (*Yomiuri online*, 2008, May 30). The figures are not insignificant for a country with strong domestically-based higher education.[iv] More importantly, the general trend is that students from the nation's top high schools increasingly choose to study at American universities (*Yomiuri online*, 2008, January 11).

Internationalization of domestic hierarchies

The world university rankings confirm, fortify and sometimes distort the existing national hierarchy. They may also give rise to a new national hierarchy. Although there has always existed domestic hierarchies among universities in Japan, it has been hitherto rather nuanced and discipline specific. The level of each department/faculty of a university is measured predominantly by the standards set for its entrance examinations. Admission procedures are generally supervised by an individual school or faculty rather than university as a whole. This is particularly the case among conservative national universities. Reputations are built over time by a number of factors, such as the performance of graduates and their success in and contribution to the private sector and/or the society at large.

In Japan, the academic hierarchy is crowned by the University of Tokyo, the most prestigious institution in the country that receives the biggest share of state research funds and whose graduates predominate in the influential central government posts. Other universities are grouped together in progressive tiers of 'competitiveness'. Under these conditions, higher institutions with different orientations, more locally based, more focused on education and training in specific areas, for instance, have played no small roles in making Japan's higher education more accessible, affordable, and universal. There is no denying that a degree of hierarchy has existed, and Japan's higher education has a stratified system. In practice, however, explicit university to university comparison or overall institutional rankings hardly existed. Media reports and magazine articles that publish rankings usually do so in multitudes of categories such as fiscal soundness, employability, faculty pay scale, gender balance and others.

The world rankings have changed Japan's domestic picture of higher education. They can reinforce the old hierarchy while possibly creating new ones. The nation's leading universities, i.e. the seven former Imperial Universities (Universities of Hokkaido, Tohoku, Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka and Kyushu) as well as the handful of top private universities (Waseda and Keio Universities), are potential global players that

would most likely rank in the top 100 or 200 universities depending upon which standards a particular league table adopts. They are keenly aware of their relative positioning vis-à-vis their national competitors in the world rankings and of potential damages their poor performances may cause. There is growing fear that the failure to do well on global rankings may negatively affect their future in the face of growing competition among universities while the nation's population rapidly ages, and college age population continues to decline (Ishikawa, 2007).

As part of the "internationalization" drive, now highly prioritized on the nation's political agenda, many universities compete to recruit more international students and increase the number of international faculty. If successful, the increased presence of international students and faculty would make the universities look more international (and may improve their rankings). In January 2008, the national goal of hosting 300,000 international students was announced by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda. The government plans to select 30 priority universities that drastically increase the intake of international students to help achieve the goal - with expected preferential funding. It has become common in recent years that high-profile, government research grants and projects that involve substantial sums of research funds require a high percentage of foreign researchers to be included on project team as an indicator of 'internationalization' in evaluations. These projects are to affect the overall internationalization of universities. The top-tier schools are likely to be given a substantial share of the new research and education grants as the government hopes to make them competitive on the world stage. International denominators thus will become more closely linked to 'national hierarchy'.

Dominance of Natural Sciences and Engineering

There is a more subtle yet profound impact of the global rankings. Japanese universities that do make the top 100 on the international league tables are all comprehensive research universities with strong natural science and engineering faculties. Universities specializing in social sciences and humanities do not usually fare as well.

The citation index is the mostly frequently used denominator of university's research performance. It is based predominantly on publications in English language journals and rarely acknowledges vernacular language research results especially for papers in social sciences and humanities. While education and research in cultural and social studies remain solidly and decidedly Japanese-language medium, scholars in science and engineering fields have converted to the English language with relative ease, even if their medium of instruction remains mostly Japanese. The global university rankings that heavily rely on citation indices generally acknowledge natural science

performances by Japanese scholars but not those by their colleagues in arts, humanities and social sciences. As a result, science and engineering faculty of a university may start considering their '*bunkei*' (non-natural science disciplines such as humanities) colleagues as liabilities weighing down their international reputation.

This situation is perhaps better understood in the context of a single university. Take Osaka University as an example. Its overall score in THES rankings in 2007 is 46. The so-called "faculty level positions" are: 68 in Engineering and IT, 39 in Life Sciences and Biomedicine, 57 in Natural Sciences, 180 in Arts and Humanities, and 206 in Social Sciences. It is a comprehensive national research university with over 24,000 students and 2,800 faculty, 11 undergraduate and 15 graduate schools in a multitude of disciplines, as well as about 30 specialized research institutes and centers; it is fairly representative of Japan's former imperial universities that have served as the backbone for the nation's postwar economic success. Such imbalance in simple ranking quantifications indicates an inherent problem with an across-the-board comparison of universities worldwide that operate in different socio-cultural and linguistic settings. Yet, instead of seeing the problem with the rankings themselves, the average observer is more likely to look at these figures and conclude that the university is characterized by 'internationally competitive natural sciences' and 'parochial social sciences.' This combined disparity in both ranking and perspective can distort the existing order and recognition of individual departments. It is not hard to imagine how this is potentially disruptive to the internal dynamics of a university when prestige begins to flow toward those areas that will produce the greatest gains in international reputation.

Asian social science scholars are motivated to publish in English language, to communicate with wider audience and to build strong publication records for internal evaluation or to improve university standings in the rankings (Kratoska, 2007). Nevertheless, "even a greatly expanded program of English-language publication would only capture a small proportion of the academic research done in Asian languages" (Kratoska, 2007, p.6), as the rapid increase in the volume of social science research in Asia between 1950 and 2000 was achieved by the rise of research in national languages by Asian scholars. During the same period, social science research on Asia "shifted from the activities of the West in Asia to the activities of the people of Asia" (Kratoska, 2007, p.6). The situation will be affected by the move of some universities providing incentives to their faculty to publish more in English. The increased importance in English language publication, however, will likely smother the nascent scholarship at local, regional, and national levels. It is surely not a matter of language alone, but of representation and identity.

Conclusion

Global models as shown in the prevalence of world university rankings suggest the emerging hegemony in higher education of the world today. By the virtue of its achievement and "intellectual and moral supremacy," a dominant social group becomes a "model for others to emulate," who are drawn on to its path of development (Harvey, 2003). The concept of hegemony stipulated in Harvey (2003, pp. 26-86) is adopted here as it is particularly instructive in understanding the impact of globalization in the context of proliferating neo-liberal ideology and its policy adaptations. The case of Japan suggests that globalization affects higher education in a highly contextualized, nationally specific manner. More work is, however, still needed to understand the full presence and extent of power to create and maintain hegemony, especially its various manifestation at the national, regional and university levels.

Concerning the wide usage and acceptance of particular sets of indices to objectify academic excellence, we can refer to earlier studies for insights and analytical frameworks. Bernard S. Cohn, through his anthropological study of colonialism in India, showed how specific data could be employed as "investigative modalities," devices to collect and organize 'facts' that enabled the British to conquer the "epistemological space" (Cohen, 1996; Shamsul, 2001). While Cohn focused on incidents of state power, we shall now position and further analyze the modalities such as the world university rankings as incidents of transnational power and the new global construction of knowledge.

On the case of Japan, one must acknowledge the precarious position its research universities are now situated within. Even those in the top tier of the national league face enormous challenges ahead to stay competitive and relevant in the global context where English is the dominant language of education and research. Exposed to pressures from inside and outside to 'internationalize', universities transform themselves if not always willingly. In the process, the traditional value bestowed on domestic higher education, the preexisting national order, and power dynamics within universities begin to gradually be altered, which will have a lasting impact on national identity of Japanese universities.

The analysis of the impact of global models suggests that the internationalization efforts by Japanese research universities will have to be fundamental rather than focusing on short-term goals to improve quantifiable indicators 'recognized' by league tables. As noted earlier, increased global mobility, exchange and competition provide tremendous opportunities to higher education today. At the same time, we need to be aware of the presence and extent of power to standardize and homogenize - as academia will benefit more from diversity and multiple intellectual trajectories.

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Notes:

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[i] "QS topuniversities.com" web pages are not dated, nor do they record last updates. The quote here was retrieved from their website on July 13, 2007, explaining the peer review methodology employed for the 2006 survey. The line was subsequently revised and as of July 31, 2008, reads as "the response we have received to date is growing increasingly geographically even in its breakdown."

[ii] As of 2006, there were approximately 74,000 Chinese university students in Japan as compared with about 62,000 in the US, although the latter attracts more than a quarter of the world's foreign students. (JASSO, 2007; IIE, 2007)

[iii] The terms are a play on words reworked from "Japan bashing," an expression often used to counter American criticism over Japan's trade policies in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Now its new version, "Japan nothing," is often used in the media and popular discussions, meaning Japan's political and economic presence in East Asia is being replaced by China, an emerging key player.

[iv] Nearly half of the country's 18-year old cohort advances to 756 universities nationwide with a total student population exceeding 2.8 million (MEXT, 2007). Less than 35,000 or just over 1 % of the total figure went to the most popular destination, the United States, in 2006/07 (IIE, 2007).