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The Hidden Narratives of International Doctoral Students in Japan: How are Japanese Government's Internationalisation Policy Initiatives being Experienced at the Micro Level? (0338)

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Since at least the turn of the century, policy makers began to frame the purpose of the doctorate as producing knowledge for the knowledge economy. In a drive to accumulate human capital over the last two decades the world has seen a large increase in the numbers of new doctorates (OECD, 2016). This global drive was recognised in Japan, with the country's 'Fourth Science and Technology Basic Plan, 2011-15' calling for a drastic enhancement of graduate education and a diversification of career paths, to be measured by the Japan Doctoral Human Resource Profiling (JD-Pro) survey. Yet, with an ageing population and a declining birth rate, the number of doctoral students in Japan has fallen from 18,232 in 2003 to 14,972 in 2016. One solution was for Japan to attract international doctoral researchers, through the provision of full or part scholarships to cover educational expenses with the aim of retaining them as *gurobaru jinzai* (the type of workers needed in order to bolster the Japanese economy). Certainly at a policy level, Japan appears to have embraced the knowledge economy. The outline of the 300,000 International Students Plan stated the aim to attract international students from abroad, allow them to secure employment post qualification in Japan and settle as highly skilled workers (MEXT, 2008). This macro-level drive was further augmented by the meso-level concerns of Japanese higher education institutions needing to fill spaces left by the dramatic decline in overall student numbers. For institutions, these additional overseas students could be seen as an existential issue, and a matter of fierce competition between institutions.

This paper aims to explore the lived experiences and hidden narratives of international doctoral students studying in Japan. How do their diverse experiences interact with policy intentions at institutional and national level to internationalise Japan's higher education system? We conducted 10 semi-structured interviews in English in 3 national universities and

3 private universities in Japan. We explored: Motivations; Positive and Negative experiences; Identity and Mobility; Support and Training, and thematically analysed the transcripts.

Motivation and the Knowledge Economy

The motivation for global mobility is often reduced to a narrative about competition, with governments and regional bodies around the world promoting mobility as crucial to enhancing the global economy (Robertson, 2010). Higher education is positioned as a service industry for the labour market (OECD, 2014), 'an important means of enhancing people's employability and adaptability' (Council of the European Union, 2009:3). In the context of a global skills race, international doctoral researchers are portrayed as contributors to the wider knowledge economy (Kitagawa et al, 2016) and a form of capital that governments and institutions wish to purchase. The sphere of the doctoral researcher is 'framed and measured by economic terms and metrics' (Brown, 2015:10) and market principles. Yet our study identified a complex coagulation of complicity and resistance to the discourse of the knowledge economy and that motivation could not be reduced to the strategic pursuit of labour market advantage through overseas education (Brooks et al, 2012). Furthermore, we will argue that the drivers for international doctoral mobility are diverse and, often in relation to gender, are not 'the romance of movement and mobility' (Robertson, 2010) that is often portrayed.

Language Requirement?

Many of the international doctoral researchers, particularly in the Sciences were given mixed messages about the importance of learning Japanese. There was evidence of 'English speaking' laboratories, reinforcing the linguistic and cultural imperialism of the language.

Yet, when asked the importance of language to engaging with Japanese culture and developing a sense of belonging was paramount. The lack of language skills called into question whether these international doctoral students were really the *gurobaru jinzai* (the type of workers needed in order to bolster the Japanese economy) Japan's policy makers were seeking. Leaving highly-skilled doctoral students often only able to gain employment in as unskilled workers (Osaki, 2017). In addition there was a significant social impacts with international doctoral students experience strong sensations of 'otherness' as they 'became strangers' (Ahmed, 2000). To a degree, Japanese Universities still appear to be protected from global competition by the language barrier (Kariya, 2014). The treatment of language learning for international doctoral students can be seen as an example of the superficiality of internationalisation as some institutions seek to meet targets (metrics) set out by policy makers.

Research Environment

The research environment and facilities of Japanese Universities were held in high regard by the participants of the study. International doctoral researchers spoke with strong affection about the importance of the research group or laboratory. Within these small groups strong bonds were formed, with social activities, mentoring and support. This contrasted with institutional level programmes to support international doctoral students to engage with their Japanese peers, which appeared to be underdeveloped in line with research by Otta (2016). Indeed, there appeared to be a tendency to fit in international doctoral students to Japanese Universities in an acceptable way and without the requirement for significant structural reform (Otta, 2018). There remained some distinct differences in the offer of Japanese doctoral education for example, there was little evidence of importance of

acquiring “generic skills” during the course of their doctoral education, something widely acknowledged as a global trend (Crossouard et al, 2015). In addition, the academic autonomy of the *sensei* within the Japanese system suggests that the ‘secret garden’ (Park, 2008) or the Humboldt model of the doctorate is still alive and well in Japan.

Summary

What emerged from our study is that there is a ‘disconnect’ between policy discourse, institutional implementation of policy and the experiences of international doctoral researchers. International doctoral mobility is complex and is performed, understood and experienced in multiple ways. These are often in tension with knowledge economy driven policy interventions.

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