

# **The Public Good and Accepting Inbound International Students in Japan**

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## **Introduction**

Although the internationalization of Japan's higher education has undergone several changes since the late 1970s, attracting inbound international students has always constituted its core and become one of its most striking characteristics (Horie, 2002; Huang 2007). Since the early 1990s, influenced by economic globalization and increased academic competition worldwide, while Japan has continued to make efforts to accept inbound international students, it has also launched several national-level strategies, such as expanding the number of English-taught degree programs and hiring talented international academics and researchers, which aimed to further internationalize their universities and enhance their international competitiveness. In recent years, as the negative impacts from the adoption of New Public Management and marketization on higher education worldwide appear to be increasingly evident and considerable, a renewed interest has emerged in relation to both the public goods of higher education, and its internationalization at the local, international or even global scale (Knight, 2002; Brown, 2010; Hazelkorn and Gibson, 2018). In Japan, the possibility of providing free higher education to certain groups was proposed at a government level in 2017, and media, industry and academics have since contributed to the ongoing discussion (Mainichi Shinbun, 2017). It is still unclear to what extent this discussion is linked with or framed in terms of the public goods or global public goods of higher education, but there is little doubt that these concepts and their interpretation are acutely relevant to Japanese higher education, including its policy of internationalization in relation to the acceptance of inbound international students, at both policy and institutional levels.

The purpose of this study is to depict how the public goods of internationalizing higher education in Japan, especially inbound international students, are viewed by various stakeholders based on the main findings from semi-structured interviews. The

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interviewees include key persons from different levels or fields in Japan: officials from MEXT (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), national agencies in relation to international students and international cooperation, a national-level professional association of higher education research, both top-level and middle-level leaders of one research-intensive national university, academics from Humanities, Engineering and Economics, administrators in charge of internationalization of their respective universities, and international students from diverse backgrounds. The study begins with a brief introduction to the research background, before presenting the analysis and main findings from the interviews. It concludes by arguing how the public good and its relationship to the internationalization of Japanese higher education are viewed and interpreted by different stakeholders, and offering brief implications for research and practice.

## **Research background**

### *Review of literature*

When considering broadly recognized definitions of the public good, it was Samuelson (1954) who laid the foundation from an economic perspective. He defined it as goods that have the attributes of bring both or either “non-rivalrous” and “non-excludable.” In other words, public goods are non-rivalrous when they can be consumed by any number of people without being depleted, and non-excludable when the benefits cannot be confined to individual buyers (Marginson, 2016, p.85). Bringing up national defense and lighthouses as its examples, Samuelson located the public good in the context of market failure and thus perceived public funding as inevitable and necessary for its provision. Global public goods were also defined by economists. Kaul, Grunberg and Stern (1999, p.2-3) insisted global public goods must meet with two criteria: first, their benefits must have strong qualities of publicness marked by non-rivalry in consumption and non-excludability; and second, their benefits must be quasi-universal in terms of accessibility to countries, people, and generations. In line with these economic definitions, several theorizations have been made regarding higher education as a public good. For example, Stiglitz (1999, p. 310-311) stated that producing new knowledge is seen both as a public good and global public good, since its benefits, such as a mathematical theorem, can be used by any people without being depleted. McMahon

(2009, pp. 55, 255) also asserted higher education is seen as serving the public good especially when funded directly by the state, based on his analysis of public contributions of universities. Externalities, or spill-over effects, are another example derived from economic terminology, which help to express public contributions generated by higher education. According to the Institute for Higher Education Policy in the USA, such benefits as reduced crime rates, increased quality of civic life, social cohesion, improved ability to adapt to and use technology etc., are categorized as public goods that spill-over from the private benefits of those directly receiving higher education (IHEP, 1998, p. 20).

Whereas the discussions above are based on an economic perspective and raised primarily by economists, sociological perspectives are also informative to researchers in the field of higher education when discussing the public good aspects of higher education. Not strictly bound by economists' definitions, many scholars try to perceive the public good as a certain function or social contribution of higher education with an emphasis on its public nature. They are roughly classified into three. First is the creation and the dissemination of knowledge produced by research and education, through which scientific and economic development, or industrial innovation will be supplied (Gumport, 2002; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Second is the cultivation of human resources; receiving higher education will nurture those who appropriately lead and maintain the democratic society (Giroux, 2003). And third is the function of social contribution such as providing community services through educational practices like service learning (Schneider, 2005).

The "public sphere" is another sociological approach to understanding higher education as a public good. The public sphere is the notion raised by Habermas (1989) and defined as a communicative sphere for molding public opinion where everyone can participate in constructive discussion without the intervention of political and economic influences. Based on this notion, several scholars insist that the university is the typical form of public sphere in the sense that free speech is protected, and democratic movements have been born there (Calhoun, 2006; Budd, 2015; Pusser, 2006).

Evidently, despite being originally defined as an economic term, broader perspectives have been developed in the discussion of higher education and public good. Indeed, Chambers and Gopaul (2008) insist that the way people link higher

education with the public good is varied and thus it is inappropriate to narrow down it to one particular definition.

Compared to Western countries, very little research or discussion has considered the public good aspects of higher education, let alone the relationship between the public good and the internationalization of higher education in Japan, including inbound international students. As mentioned in the previous section, several contextual factors particular to Japanese higher education, such as the strong influence of economic policy and the dual structure of both public and private institutions etc., seem to have prevented the expansion of discussion regarding the public nature of higher education. In addition, “public good” is generally translated as “kōkyōzai” in Japanese, but this lexicon only conveys the economic nuance, abandoning broader perspectives seen in Western literature. In consequence, much of the limited earlier research deals with the public goods of higher education from the perspectives of higher education economics and financing. Two previous studies seem to discuss the relationship between public goods and higher education in Japan. For example, as noted by Ichikawa (2000), on one hand, although higher education has the character of collective consumer goods, it cannot accommodate those who do not pay for tuition and fees, and it sets limitations on those who want to receive higher education through sorting mechanisms such as entrance examinations and other restrictions. In this sense, higher education is not completely provided on the basis of the idea of public goods. On the other hand, not only university students can benefit from their higher education in the future, but also higher education can have external positive effects on other stakeholders and society at large. Therefore, it is not appropriate for students and their parents to cover all the expenses for higher education and the government should also contribute. Yano (1996) also raises the external effects to society as one of the grounds upon which public funding should be injected into higher education, and accordingly places higher education in Japan as a quasi-public good. However, he also emphasizes that because it is extremely difficult to measure the educational benefits of education, it is almost impossible to identify the real outcomes or social benefits of higher education.

In contrast to the few comprehensive research studies into public good of higher education, there has been criticism about the understandings of the public good of higher education in Japan. For example, as early as the late 1980s, Horio (1988) pointed out that if there is an increasing commodification of scholarship and education, there

will be surely a commodification of knowledge and the universalism, communitarianism or universality of scholarship or knowledge will be lost. Shigemoto (2009) also suggests that university management in Japan is too devoted to economic efficiency or performance, and does not take into consideration any public issues or issues in relation to general citizenship.

Hamanaka and Yano (2016) conducted a public opinion survey on public funding towards higher education and revealed that the majority think public funding should be directed to other social security systems like medical care, rather than to higher education. They concluded that strong sensitivity to “equity” among Japanese people deterred the public from regarding higher education as public good. That is, higher education still has a conceptual distance from the image of equity, and therefore, it is imperative to further activate the discussion on public good of higher education to increase the public awareness to this issue.

Compared to many Western countries, apparently, no comprehensive or in-depth discussions or arguments about global or public goods of higher education has been made at national or institutional levels, despite the fact that some reforms, such as the provision of public funding for private universities and colleges and private students, and increasing the amount of scholarships for inbound international students, were launched based on the idea of public goods of higher education. All these conflicts and apparent contradictions between national policies and the realities of higher education are also partly reflected in previous research into this theme in Japan.

### *Japanese context*

Although the formation of the modern higher education system in Japan is modelled on Western ideas and models from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the characteristics of Japanese higher education essentially differ from both most European continental countries and North America. As a well-known example, the first Japanese modern university, the University of Tokyo, was directly established by the Meiji government in 1877, and alongside six other universities founded by the government by the start of WWII, represents an “Imperial University.” From the very start, the mission of these universities was to contribute to the modernization of Japanese society by producing government officials and professionals, as well as social elites. According to the University Ordinance in 1918, other local public and some private institutions were

conferred the status of a university, but the Ordinance explicitly states that the purpose of universities was to pursue academic studies “only necessary to the nation” (Tsuchimochi, 1996). There is little doubt that other sectors or types of higher education institutions also fostered numerous graduates in a wide range of fields, but the development of the modern Japanese higher education system was rigidly regulated and controlled by the central government to meet the needs of the government rather than to pursue scholarship or undertake pure research.

During the US-led Allied Forces’ Occupation period of 1945-1951, the pre-war higher education system with complicated levels and types of various institutions was transformed into the single four-year university system, strongly influenced by the US model. During the process, driven by policies of both democratization and massification of higher education<sup>3</sup>, the missions and functions of Japanese higher education also changed from merely serving social elites and fostering government officials, to be open to all people. However, the US idea of emphasizing general education did not synergize with the demands of restructuring Japan after WWII. Especially after the 1960s when the “Plan to Double the National Income in Ten Years” was implemented by the Ikeda Cabinet, the top priority was placed on economic recovery and growth through the expansion of higher education enrolment in faculties of Science and Engineering, centered in the national universities. The key character of higher education in this period is described as “a conjugation of economic policy and education” (Hata, 1999).

Since the 1960s, a rapid increase in the number of private higher education institutions played a central role in accepting new entries and meeting with growing demand for higher education from students, and female students in particular. If South Korea or Taiwan were not considered as advanced societies by the early 1980s, as Geiger (1986) pointed out, Japan is the only industrial society in which private higher education institutions clearly outnumber the public institutions.<sup>4</sup> Despite the

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<sup>3</sup> Influenced by the US model, the Japanese government implemented a series of policies for building a democratic society after WWII. The main points of these policies include the establishment of national and local public universities in each prefecture and the expansion of higher education with a purpose of accepting more students from a wide range of backgrounds and social classes.

<sup>4</sup> According to MEXT’s annual Basic School Survey in 2018, among the total number of 782 universities in Japan, 603 are private, 86 are national and 93 are local public. As for the student enrolment ratio, 73.7% are enrolled at private institutions.

contribution made by national universities to remarkable economic growth in Japan, since the 1960s the government limited the number of newly founded national universities due to the level of public resources needed to finance them. Instead, the introduction of a laissez-faire stance on private higher education institutions led to a constant and quick rise of both private institutions and privately enrolled students. Both the massification of Japanese higher education and near universal access to higher education in the 1990s were realized through the rapid expansion of private higher education institutions and private students studying at their own expense (Pempel, 1973; Tsuchimochi, 1996; Huang, 2012). Interestingly, on one hand, the government implemented national policies of democratization and massification of higher education to provide an equal opportunity for everyone to receive higher education. On the other hand, the government did not provide financial support for expanding national universities and subsidize the expansion of private institutions while they increased in a rapid way. Contradictorily, the government seemed to accept the concept of the public goods of higher education and the decisive role higher education played in facilitating the recovery and development of Japanese economy, but it did not carry out corresponding financial policies which supported the expansion of higher education with public funding until the early 1970s.

Similar to other contexts such as the UK and Australia, since the 1990s the approach of New Public Management has also substantially influenced Japanese higher education. One of the most important outcomes of the increasing influence of this approach is corporatization of both national and most local public universities. Compared to previous periods, more emphasis has been placed on the private goods of higher education and individuals' benefits from receiving higher education. Even in Japan, changes in higher education have been more driven by educational or private corporations. In recent years, whether reforms on higher education are successful or not has been increasingly measured based on whether higher education could satisfy demands from private corporations and its relevance to corporate interests, rather than on its ability to educate the individual for civic life, or to distribute expertise throughout society for the public good (Hawkins, 2006).

As discussed above, differing from European continental countries, Japanese higher education has never been free of charge since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and expanded

based on the “benefit principle.” It is taken for granted that those who receive higher education should be charged tuition, as payment for their future benefit. Instead of fully supporting the higher education system by public expenses, the central government has intensively funded national universities, which consist of less than 20% of total student numbers, to set its tuition quite lower than private ones so that students with high academic performance can afford to receive higher education. According to Kaneko (1987), while this form of merit-based public funding system has become one of the characteristics in Japanese higher education, the massification of higher education in Japan has exposed the deep-seated contradiction that only a limited number of students could benefit from public funding.

The importance of implementing the Act on Subsidies for Private Schools in 1976 for understanding and interpreting the public goods of higher education in Japan cannot be overestimated<sup>5</sup>. As a result of a laissez-faire attitude towards private institutions without allocating any public funding for them, private institutions had to generate revenue by heavily relying on charging tuition fees and accepting as many students as possible. Some private institutions even recruited far more new entrants than were designated in the student quotas which had been previously approved by government. It inevitably brought about the deterioration of educational conditions. Due to radical students’ protests and increasing criticism from the public, the government began to take the public goods of private higher education into consideration and promulgated the Act on Subsidies for Private Schools for the purpose of improving educational and research conditions of private universities, maintaining healthy management of these universities, as well as reducing financial burdens of private students.<sup>6</sup> In exchange for this partial public funding to the operating expenditure, more strict regulations and control have also been imposed on private higher education institutions in order to maintain the quality of educational conditions and alleviate the economic burden on students. However, since the amount of public funding allocated to each private institution is fundamentally based on the number of students and faculty, rather than educational quality, some scholars still doubted the public goods of private higher

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<sup>5</sup> Since the implementation of the Act, the government has provided financial support to private institutions constantly.

<sup>6</sup> At its peak in 1980, government funding covered nearly 30% of operating expenditure of individual private higher education institutions, it shrank to approximately 10% since 1990s.



education institutions and objected to the provision of financial support for them (Ogata, 1977).

With respect to internationalization of higher education in Japan, accepting international students into Japanese universities has been one of the core policy issues since 1980s. To illustrate, the government launched the Acceptance of 100,000 International Students Plan in 1983. The most important rationale for this is to promote international cooperation and friendship with Asian countries and to contribute to the development of economic growth and capacity building of undeveloped and emerging countries in the region as the most rapidly advanced economic power in the region (Ebuchi, 1997). Therefore, substantial efforts were made to accept students from less developed East or South East Asian countries. After achieving the numerical target of 100,000 inbound international students in 2003, the government implemented the plan of accepting 300,000 international students in 2008, aiming at increasing the number of inbound international students in Japan nearly three-fold by 2020. Behind this initiative was the growing influence of globalization. Responses to worldwide competition for attracting outstanding international students were stressed, as well as the expectation to nurturing the highly skilled foreign workforce in Japan, to compensate for the shrinking domestic population. Since Japan is an insular country, a majority of people are educated by domestic peers within a single value system. Having more international students at higher education institutions provides domestic students with exposure to different culture and values, so it considered an effective measure to achieve internationalization at home. Recent internationalization policy has been driven by competitive funding projects by the government for which individual universities are asked to achieve a pre-set numerical target (e.g. the number of international students or faculty) since the government believes such goal setting will increase the transparency of public funding. However, it is criticized that achieving numerical targets becomes the first priority and universities are just competing in “numbers game,” leaving the rationale and vision behind (Ota, 2018).

In summary, this brief introduction to the changing context in Japan suggests that: first, seemingly, no consistent and clear national policies in relation to global or public goods of higher education, including attracting inbound international students, were

developed in Japan; second, a wide gap between policies and reality in terms of global or public goods of higher education exists.

#### *Conceptual framework and methods of research*

Based on earlier research and the analysis of the Japanese context, the study presents the following conceptual framework of analyzing public goods of internationalization of higher education focused on inbound international students (Figure 1). To illustrate, first, the prior research indicates that the phrase of public goods is an all-encompassing concept and its interpretation is highly relative to the different contexts. At least, it should be discussed at different levels, from different perspectives and approaches, and distinguish between the many activities of internationalization of higher education. Among which, despite debates over various activities of internationalization of higher education, it is primarily concerned with international mobility of students in the Japanese context since the 1980s. In terms of levels, public goods may operate at the level of the global, regional, society, country, or community. The meaning of the term can be approached at least from academic, cultural, sociological, political and economic angles. This study mainly discusses participants' interpretations of the phrase based on interviews. They include national government, professional association, individual universities, and inbound international students, etc.

Figure 1 here

In relation to the research methods, by using common interview questions the study analyzes main findings from interviews with relevant persons focusing on the following questions: “What are the main global public goods, benefits flowing not just to your country but to other countries, including the countries of student origin, that are created or augmented by inbound student mobility in your nation?”; “In your opinion, what are the effects of inbound cross-border student mobility in your country—positive and negative—in the countries from which the students have come?”; “In your opinion, what are the implications of inbound student flows into the nation, and their national regulation, for (1) social equity in other countries, (2) global equity?”

Following ethics approval and guidelines of research project, we contacted potential key persons and asked them to accept our interviews through emails. As mentioned earlier, a wide range of key persons from different government agencies, national professional and international associations, and two national universities were interviewed based on the same questions, the study only uses data from interviews with key persons shown in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3. The case university named as Star University for the purposes of this research is one of the former “Imperial Universities” which was established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As in most cases, only professors at Japanese national universities can recruit and supervise doctoral students and play a central role in formulating strategy of attracting inbound international students and other strategies of internationalization of their belonging institutions. We interviewed involved five professors from this university representing different educational fields: ‘Anthropology’ (n=1), ‘Economics’ (n=1), ‘Physics’ (n=1), ‘Engineering’ (n=2). Currently, it is a research-intensive university which accommodated nearly 2,300 international students from different parts of the world as of May 2017. Except for a few international students who only speak English and take English programs, Japanese was used to interview with these key persons. Important reasons why inbound international students were interviewed include: they could tell us their reflections of the public goods of inbound international mobility in their host university in light of their experiences and their opinions of effects of coming to study in Japan—positive and negative—in the countries from which they have come. For example, in the interviews with international students, we asked them the following questions: “Summing up, how does study abroad impact the home communities and country (student country of origin) of international students? What are the benefits? Downsides?”; “How does study abroad impact the host (education) communities, institution and country? What are the benefits? Downsides?”; and “Would there be benefit for local students from the country of education, in studying in the countries of student origin?”

All the interviews listed in the three tables were undertaken from early August 2017 to late February 2018. We conducted face to face semi-structured qualitative interviews with these participants at their work places or meeting rooms in their affiliated institution. Before organizing interviews, we explained the project to participants with an information sheet before they agreed to take part. Participants were

given a copy of a consent form to keep and refer to at any time. If they were happy to participate, they were asked to complete all sections and sign the consent form. Normally, we began with briefly explaining the key term of the public goods of internationalization of higher education focused on inbound international students based on our review of literature. For example, how it is interpreted in some Western countries and how is used by some Japanese scholars or in government documents, etc. Except for one interview, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Some participants reviewed and approved their transcript of interview as a precondition of participation. The duration of interviews varied depending on individual interviews and topics, but most interviews lasted between one and two hours.

Table 1 here

Table 2 here

Table 3 here

In terms of the analytical process, to gain full details and understanding of participants' interpretations of the public goods of internationalization in Japan's higher education sector, particularly focused on accepting inbound international students which would be provided by participants and identify potential lines of inquiry, we undertook a preliminary thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), firstly, we read all relevant transcripts of interviews and tried to be familiar with their main ideas and key points. Secondly, we searched for their key words and phrase in relation to the conceptual framework. Thirdly, we reviewed and defined major themes. Fourthly, we named and conceptualized key themes, but also created new perspectives, approaches, and levels, etc. based on interviews. Finally, we organized all main findings and produced a research report based on the conceptual framework.

## **Main findings**

As discussed below, except for one international student, almost all interviewees believe that public goods of internationalization of higher education focused on inbound

international mobility are obvious and substantial. No interviewees deny the existence of global public goods of internationalization of higher education, especially the acceptance of inbound international students to Japanese campuses. One of the interviewees clearly asserts that

My understanding is that public good is different from materials being dealt in the market, and regard higher education as something providing public benefit (F).

Because of non-profit research and provision of quality talent for society, the public goods of higher education are numerous, I think. Further, in terms of global public goods, more and more research papers have been written and published in English recently. From the perspective of sharing knowledge, there has been increased internationalization of research activities being undertaken in higher education institutions. Also, compared to the past period when university graduates used to work in their own countries, currently, with a growth in numbers of foreign-ventured or global corporations in Japan, international students could also be hired in these places after graduation (L).

In contrast, one international student does not think Japanese national universities yield any *global* public goods.

... When you look at some places like Japan, you can see this national university is NOT primarily for the students coming here. This university plays a strong role in nation-building, and research study does preparing workforce. You see, it's not a student-focus here, it's part of a sort of national bureaucratic machine that serves a number of different national functions. And in that sense, I see more blatant public good mentality (N).

However, it appears that no generally accepted definition could be identified from main findings of the following interviews. Some interviewees even claim that the phrase is not employed widely in the field of higher education and almost no one knows what it implies in relation to internationalization of higher education.

...As the traditional consciousness still prevails among many faculties such as, "national universities were built for fostering future leaders in Japan, so its educational resources should be dominantly allocated to Japanese citizens." In this sense, majority of Japanese faculties and stakeholders lacks the viewpoint of global public good (C).

But in general, Japanese people are not aware of such public good concept. Rather, the idea of Neo-liberalism has prevailed, and therefore, the discourse that university should be regarded as public good has regressed...As the country of homogenous society with almost single race and language, there is a limitation to discuss the issue of international students from global perspective. If we mention the term “global public good,” Japanese people would imagine something like idealistic but unclear concept floating in the air. Japanese cannot think it with reality since our daily life is far away from the diversity (F).

It is an extremely difficult question. I am afraid that I cannot give you a clear answer because I cannot fully understand what it means (H).

In short, the meaning of global public goods seems to be interpreted from three dimensions as follows. The first dimension is about what global public goods inbound international students themselves could obtain.

Experiences in studying abroad will be of help to fostering the youngsters who could think and behave with the global perspectives. The current borderless world needs more human resources who could solve the global issues. Unless they experience and absorb other culture and value outside their home countries, it is difficult to gain this kind of attitude and way of thinking. Broadening perspectives and nurturing global citizenship will be the main global public goods (E).

I think my decision to studying abroad is a good thing for the wider world. (In Engineering department) there are a lot of collaborative research projects, so I am not communicating only with Japanese. This makes many impacts on other countries as well (O).

A second dimension denotes what global public goods Japanese universities and Japanese society could derive by accepting inbound international students. It appears that more interviewees emphasize that attracting inbound international students could produce more benefits for Japanese society at large, especially for Japanese companies to strengthen their position abroad.

Accepting international students confer long-term benefits to the host country, I think....Due to the shrinking domestic market and globalization of the economy, Japanese industries keep

enlarging their factories and branch offices outside Japan. Those places are in need of recruiting more and more domestic employees. Ideal figures for them are those who understand Japanese culture with Japanese language proficiency, so that they could manage in bridging linkages between Japanese business with local business (B).

Even several international students mentioned this point. Some of them assert that, as Japan is a country with an extremely high homogeneity or ethnic purity, there are not so many opportunities for ordinary Japanese people to get in touch with foreigners. It is thought that the daily communication between international students and local people could provide more opportunities for local people to be aware of a variety of values and cultures, and also exert a form on internationalization of local community.

Perhaps there is no big contribution, but some of my Japanese friends seem to have changed their impressions on Chinese students around me (J).

There's certainly quite a lot of people ... who have not had any substantial interaction with foreigners before. So, because I've at least to certain extent been able to be a bridge to language divide. ... I would hope it has some kind of positive impact on those communities (N).

The globalization is the major impact Japanese society will have. I think Japan just started to be open to other countries...International students have a different point of view, so that makes Japan more open (O).

The third dimension is concerned with both inbound students and Japanese universities and society at large. This is not only mentioned by academics but also stressed by inbound international students as follows:

Having "supporters" outside Japan will be the public goods for both Japan and the countries of student origin. "Supporters" are fostered by studying and experiencing real life in Japan. The global public goods might not be achieved in a short period, but with a longer perspective, it will be gradually transformed as a basic foundation. In the time of tensions between two nations, if there are several figures who truly understand both countries, conflicts could be avoidable, or even such tensions would not occur. Accepting international students is consequently leading to bring up those "supporters" and yield long-term benefits (B).

There is an alumni association consisting of graduate students and researchers who came to learn or do research in Japanese universities. It is supported by the Iranian government. It

provides a platform on which both Japan and Iran can explore the possibility of helping each other and contribute to each side. Also it contributes to the partnership and collaboration of universities and industry between Iran and Japan. ... Through these conferences, usually people come and share the knowledge about Iranians in Japan, and how we can better contribute to Japan's society and to our own society (M).

In terms of approaches to understanding the term, several interviewees stress that the meaning of public goods of internationalization of higher education could be defined from a wide range of approaches. F points out that more emphasis should be placed on its economic value as follows:

When considering in accepting international students as educational diplomacy, we should first calculate how much cost is necessary to fulfil its implementation and gain the future benefit. By investing on public good, public benefit will be returned. Japanese educational policies claim the numerical target with vague purposes, but seem to ignore planning the actual roadmap to fulfil its aims (F).

Relatedly, several interviewees state that one of the largest global public goods of accepting inbound international students to Japanese universities is that it is of relevance and significance to the economic development of countries from which inbound international students come.

Those international students who obtained their degrees from Japanese universities return and could help their countries become more economically prosperous and further development of their countries with their learnt knowledge and competencies (I).

From the academic perspective, one of the interviewees emphasizes the benefits that accepting inbound international students could bring to Japan.

As a research intensive university, collaborative work at international settings is definitely important. Sciences cannot develop without such international cooperation...For social contribution, especially at Japanese society, it is beneficial for domestic youngsters to know and learn through experiences that there are different kind of people and values around the world. Such experiences will be eye-opening to them as well as to international students. So, it is meaningful for university to provide an international learning environment (B).

It is also considered that accepting inbound international students to Japanese universities is of importance to developing good relationships between Japan and



countries from which inbound international students are coming. It is especially true in the case of East Asian countries.

Sometimes political relationship among East Asian countries is extremely unstable. Even if there are political conflicts, international students in Japan can build human-to-human bond with Japanese students and faculty. Such grass-roots interaction of young people must be contributing to the global public goods (C).

The outcomes of accepting inbound international students are substantial and obvious for it could help build up regional community and help international students and local students to form such consciousness of regional community. More importantly, it could provide a basis of peace, I believe (H).

It is pointed out that returned international students could help improve the level of internationalization of their home countries.

For sending countries, those returned students from other countries can contribute to not only the enhancement of educational level of their home countries, but also development of science and technology. It is quite different in their perspectives and way of thinking between those who learnt in foreign countries and those who do not have any experiences of studying abroad. At least those returned students from other countries could help further internationalize their home countries (K).

One interviewee mentions that acceptance of inbound international students could help international students who come from different parts of the world to share common values of culture with Japanese people, and even share common values within inbound international students studying in Japanese universities.

The importance of creating and maintain basic human relationship between countries cannot be overestimated. And accepting inbound international students could contribute it, I suppose. Even if conflicts between countries take place, it makes huge differences if you have a close personal networking with the country (I).

Further, accepting inbound international students, especially providing financial support for those coming from developing and emerging countries could provide young people with quality higher education which they may not receive in their home countries. More importantly, it could also help build capacity of young generation from these countries (G).

### **Concluding remarks and discussion**

This study presented an overview of perceptions of global public goods of internationalization of higher education focused on the acceptance of inbound international students to Japanese campuses based on interviews with diverse persons from different backgrounds and affiliations. The main findings from both the literature review and interviews can be summarized as follows:

First, multiple perspectives, levels and approaches, as well as the diversity of stakeholders should be taken into consideration when the meaning and implications of the phrase “the public goods of inbound international mobility” is discussed, as the phrase covers various levels and could be approached from various standpoints and by diverse stakeholders. In a major sense, the conceptual framework (Figure 1) is reliable and makes sense.

Second, the brief instruction to the changing context of Japanese higher education reveals that despite the acceptance of the concept of public goods of higher education, in reality, changes in and reforms to Japanese higher education have been dominated by demands from business and industry. Sometimes the national policies seem to conflict with what happened in practice in terms of charging tuition and fees from students and their parents.

Third, although little is known about the real meaning of public goods of internationalization of higher education focused on inbound international students in Japan, diversity in interviewees’ perceptions of the public goods of internationalization of Japanese higher education could be identified. Some explained its meaning from different levels such as global, regional, national, community, and institutional while others interpreted it from different perspectives or in relation to different activities, etc. Interestingly, both officials from governmental agencies and institutional leaders seem to interpret the meaning of the term in a more positive way, and emphasize more the importance of accepting inbound international students than any other groups. In contrast, some academics express more their concerns and worries about the

government's initiatives which exclusively underscore an achievement of numerical targets of attracting inbound international students and especially a short-term vision of internationalization of higher education in Japan.

Fourth, it is apparent that some student interviewees understand the public goods of internationalization of higher education as something they acquire personally and that they embody and "channel" themselves as individuals, though differences also exist by different groups of them.

Finally, the existence of these different understandings of the term of public goods of internationalization of Japanese higher education focused on inbound international students seems to have affected and be likely to affect the development of national policies and practices of internationalization of Japanese higher education at the institutional level. While it would be extremely difficult for government officials, professionals, industry, institutional leaders, academics, international students and other stakeholders to acquire a mutual understanding regarding public goods of internationalization of Japanese higher education, but it would be of great help and relevance to a more healthy development and enhancement of internationalization of Japanese higher education if these stakeholders could share the core values of public goods based on the Japanese context.

## **Acknowledgement**

This study is part of international joint project on the Future of Higher Education which is led by Centre for Global Higher Education. The authors of this article want to express their thanks to the Economic and Social Research Council, the UK for allocating funding for support this research. Also we would like to express our sincere thanks to Thomas Brotherhood from the University of Oxford for proofreading this paper.

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