

I. Outline of the Project

1. Background – The need for institutionally organized internationalization in universities –

The changing conception of “internationalization”

The need for the internationalization of universities is long-standing issue: one that was discussed even back at a time when venturing abroad was not a common endeavor for most people in Japan. In this age of intensive competition for knowledge, however, global conditions are changing constantly, and it seems that “internationalization” is now assuming a meaning distinct from its traditional roots. This is particularly evident when examining how to enhance universities’ appeal as a core contributor to the generation of knowledge for the global community.

Yamamoto (2006) describes the historical change in the meaning of university internationalization as follows:

It seems to me that universities and internationalization have been closely intertwined ever since the Meiji Era. The internationalization of universities was virtually a national strategy for Japan, a less developed country in the area of higher education at that time, and, in that sense, internationalization was a considerably organized endeavor. Foreign teachers in the government services and students sent abroad by the government played a major role in the early Meiji Era even if they were typical of a passive approach to internationalization. With the subsequent stabilization of the country, however, it seems that internationalization in universities ended up becoming dependant upon personal networks. For instance, individual researchers remained in contact with researchers abroad through participation in international conferences and so on; they introduced advanced studies in foreign countries to the academic circles in our country; or they taught foreign studies courses. Individual-level activities such as these seem to have come to play a major part in the international activities of universities. It is likely that this happened as a result of each faculty or department, or each class or professor, having a high degree of autonomy. This autonomy meant that activities of the university as an organization were relatively weak, and there was little room for exploring strategies for the whole university. Under the current changing circumstances, however, this approach is no longer viable.¹⁾

Background to the internationalization of universities

Presented below are four points salient to the discussion of university internationalization in Japan.

(1) Global higher education trends, particularly in Europe

Under the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) and ERA (European Research Area) frameworks, universities in the EU are rapidly developing initiatives to facilitate the mobility of students and researchers and to optimize the attractiveness of their programs. Against this backdrop, it is becoming increasingly important for universities throughout the world to establish partnerships of genuine quality and to develop linkages internationally. Of particular importance is the developing EU tendency to place emphasis on linkages not only within the the EU area but with institutions in other parts of the world, including Japan.

(2) Internationalization within Japan’s S&T strategy

The Japanese government’s third Science and Technology Basic Plan calls for moves to

enhance both the diversity and the standard of research conducted in Japan, by fostering world-class personnel and hosting outstanding researchers from other nations. The Plan underlines the need to support the organizational restructuring of universities to better attune them to the agenda of strengthening Japan's capacity in the field of science and technology.

(3) Internationalization in response to global issues

Problems common to the entire global community, such as the environment and health care, are increasing in number and gravity. It is imperative that research addressing these problems is conducted in a framework of cross-border collaboration. Growing expectations are being placed on universities to use their knowledge assets in contexts of international cooperation.

(4) Internationalization as a key theme in Japanese university reform

Japanese universities are undergoing a process of reform to prepare them for increasingly intense inter-university competition generated by developments such as the incorporation of national universities and the onset of an era in which the number of undergraduate places will equal or fall below the number of would-be university students in Japan. The reform process calls for deployment of an organized approach to university internationalization that will play an instrumental role in both sustaining and bolstering the dynamism of universities and in revamping their management structures.

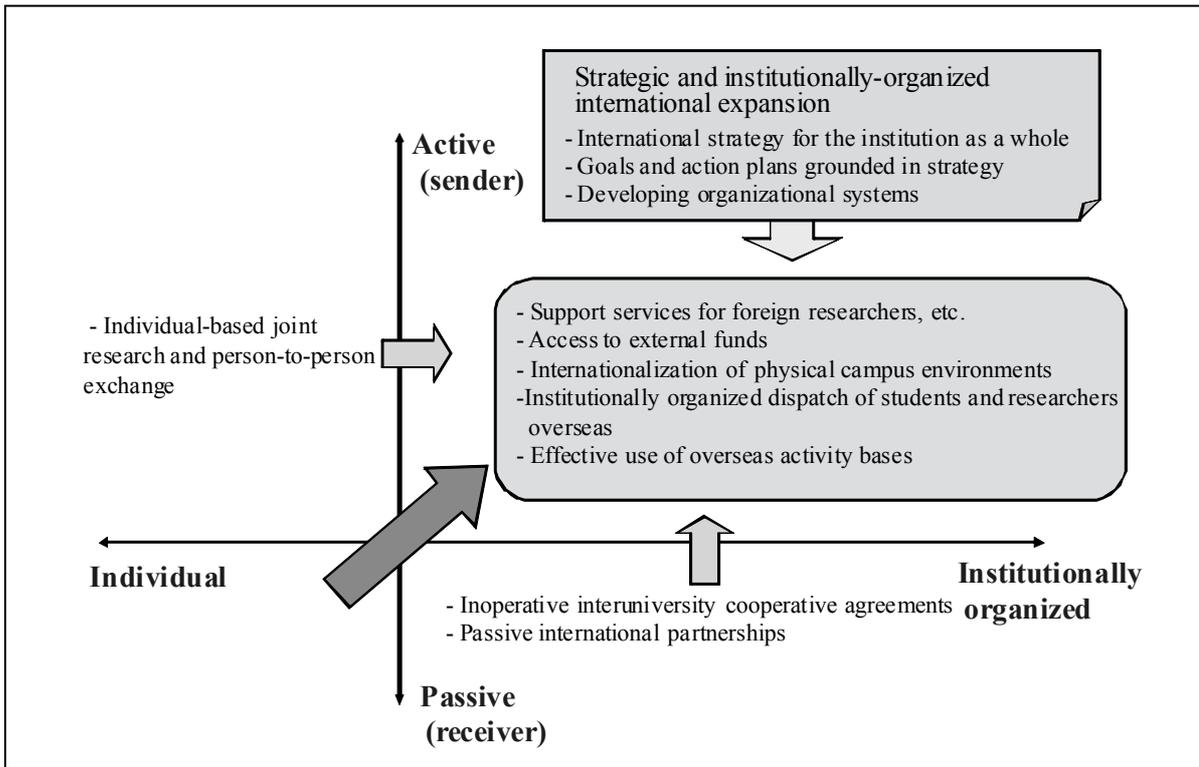
Toward an institutionally organized, pro-active strategy for internationalization

Against this background, what is expected of individual universities? Yamamoto (2006) stated that:

What is expected of an individual university is “an international strategy implemented in an institutionally organized and pro-active manner.”²⁾

Figure I-1-1 is a concept diagram of the international expansion of a university in an institutionally organized and pro-active manner.

Figure I-1-1: International expansion of a university (concept diagram)



There has been a tendency in the past for international activity to be dependent upon individual members of the university community. If activity is to become more efficient and effective, a strategic and institutionally organized approach must be taken to implementation of issues including the following:

- Provision of an improved environment for the acceptance of foreign researchers including one-stop service points and university-organized accommodation;
- Leverage of external resource funds;
- Structured training for university administrative personnel engaged in international operations.

For this purpose, therefore, it is important to formulate an institution-wide international strategy, establish goals and plans of action based on this strategy, and develop organizational systems to implement it.