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Exporting American Higher Education To Japan

—Yusuke Kataoka

WITH U.S. fast-food chains and beverage companies thriving in Japan, the next American export is a natural: U.S. college branch campuses. Japanese Youth who already share food, film and music tastes with U.S. undergraduates, may soon be attending lectures by American professors and writing term papers on Hemingway and Faulkner.

A Japanese proposal that American colleges and universities set up branch campuses in Japan is attracting interest on both sides of the Pacific. The novel idea was inspired by the realization that haggling over beef and semiconductors isn't the answer to U.S.-Japan trade problems.

Cultural differences are a key factor in bilateral friction. Japan has to shed its insularity and learn to see the world including economic ties, from different perspectives.

What better way to close the perception gap than for Japanese and Americans to study together? Academic exchanges would help groom a new generation of cosmopolitan men and women sensitive to how Americans live and think. And the visitors will see what makes this society tick.

The notion of inviting American colleges and universities to set up branch campuses was broached by Susumu Nikaido, then vice president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, when he visited the United States in October 1985 to explore ways of reducing Japan's trade surplus.

Nikaido also heads the U.S.A.-Japan Committee for Promoting Trade Expansion, a nonpartisan group of Diet (Parliament) members concerned with improving economic relations. The committee's secretariat, which I head, coordinates contacts between U.S. academic institutions and local governments in Japan.

Our plan calls for municipal and prefectural governments here to provide land, buildings and laboratory equipment for the American campuses. The local business community would help defray operating expenses by endowing chairs.

Yokohama and Nagasaki are among the 26 local authorities that have expressed strong interest and proved they can meet all the conditions. Twenty more, including several prefectures, are studying the proposal. More than 100 American institutions, including Boston Uni-

versity and the University of Hawaii, are considering participation.

Both countries stand to benefit from this cooperative venture. Americans will gain closer links with Japanese industrial and academic circles, and Japan can be a stepping stone to similar arrangements elsewhere in Asia. Japanese supporters hope to stimulate the local economy and enhance the area's prestige.

A branch campus will have from 200 to 1,200 students and 10 to 30 faculty members. We envisage an international student body, with about 50 per cent of the enrollment Japanese, 30 per cent from other Asian countries and 20 per cent from the West.

Language

Entrance examinations and instruction will be in English. The Japanese school year ends in March, so high-school graduates can spend five months in intensive English courses at one of the branches before starting classes in September. After two years of study here, students will complete their course work in the United States.

Attracting enough students to make the campuses a paying prop-

osition is an important consideration, especially at the start. The host governments will recruit students, and local businesses are expected to encourage their employees to attend. American colleges will publicize the project in order to attract foreign student enrollment.

The Ministry of Education won't accredit these schools, because they aren't likely to meet the rigid requirements for university accreditation in Japan. But we don't want to set up carbon copies of Japanese institutions. The whole point of having U.S. colleges here is to give young Japanese a chance to get an American education.

Even though graduates will not have a Japanese university diploma, I don't think employers will balk at a bachelor's degree from Columbia College or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A Japanese degree shouldn't be a prerequisite for working in a Japanese company.

If the U.S. branch institutions offer quality training, they will turn out graduates with a broad outlook who will be an asset to any company—and certainly to their country. (From Japan's Nihon Keizai Shimbun)