

Title: Application of the Western-style Liberal Arts Education Model in a Non-Western Environment: The Case of Japan

The paper is based on two case studies of establishment of western-style liberal arts programs in Japan over the past 15 years. We first present the case of Akita International University (AIU), an all-English language public university established in 2004 in one of the most isolated, under-developed regions of Japan. AIU is 65-70% funded by the Akita prefectural government. Within five years of startup, it had achieved number one ranking in Japan in terms of job offers - 100% of its second graduating cohort received at least one job offer or acceptance to graduate school prior to graduation. Within eight years of startup, it ranked first among Japanese public universities in the humanities and social sciences in terms of selectivity (difficulty of entrance) - higher even than the venerable University of Tokyo.

The second case is that of the International College of Liberal Arts (iCLA), which draws upon the experience of AIU and other institutions in Japan and elsewhere in establishing a new western-style liberal arts college in Japan, including mechanisms to institutionalize interdisciplinarity in the curriculum, at a more rigorous, global standard. iCLA is a four-year college presently being established within Yamanashi Gakuin University, a private university located two hours west of Tokyo at the foot of Mt. Fuji. Pending Japanese Ministry of Education approval, iCLA will launch in April 2015, one month prior to the Harvard-AUC LAS symposium in Shanghai.

By the early 1990s, liberal arts education had virtually disappeared from the Japanese higher education landscape. In the last five years, it has experienced a widespread comeback - if only in name. These two case studies explore attempts to innovate in liberal arts curriculum design and internationalization in the context of Japanese culture and values, Japan's educational regulatory system, and other Japanese institutional forces, within the larger emerging global knowledge economy. We believe some of the lessons regarding the challenges of introducing a "whole person" western-style liberal arts education model in a non-western environment will be useful for universities in China.

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