Foreigners Reluctant to Come, Japanese Reluctant to Leave: The *Uchimuki* Discourse as a Cover for Japan’s Failure to Secure and Cultivate “Global Human Resources”

Chris Burgess

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, Shimizu and Shimizu (2001) identified the term *tabunka kyōsei shakai* (multicultural coexistence society) as a central keyword for conceptualising Japanese society in the new millennium. Certainly, in the ensuing years the term has featured prominently, not only in academic writing on Japan (Burgess 2007; 2010) but also in government reports on the promotion of ‘multicultural coexistence’ within local communities (Cabinet Office 2009; Cabinet Secretariat 2012; MIC 2006; 2007). These reports have appeared alongside, and further triggered, a spate of local government ‘multicultural coexistence plans’ (Aiden 2011).

Although, often viewed as simply a description of demographic change in a rapidly globalising Japan, multiculturalism is perhaps better viewed discursively, as a way of conceiving, acting on, and ultimately managing difference (Burgess 2004), “a metric by which inclusion and exclusion are decided” (Hankins 2012: 1). Thus, while ostensibly promoting an “opening up” of Japan in the face of globalisation, this discourse also represents a way of dealing with and ultimately defending Japan from global processes — the imposition of global standards — that are perceived to pose a threat to a “homogeneous” national identity (Burgess et al. 2010).

While much has been written about Japanese style multiculturalism and its role in managing internal difference and containing globalisation, a new discourse has recently emerged that has received rather less academic attention: *gurōbaru jinzai* (global human resources). For example, in the space of only two days, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* carried articles detailing an agreement between three major Japanese banks to cooperate in fostering *gurōbaru jinzai* (2012c) and an accord between five leading Japanese universities to foster *kokusaijin* (international people) (2012b). At the same time, the press has spent much time bemoaning the emergence of inward-looking (*uchimuki*) youngsters who are not interested in studying, working, or volunteer work abroad. This paper aims to analyse these two new discourses, dis-
courses which shed much light on Japan’s complex relationship with globalisation. A key goal of this paper is to draw out the contradictions apparent in a youth apparently reluctant to leave Japan (uchimuki wakamono) and companies, universities, and government seemingly desperate to nurture and attract global human resources (gurōbaru jinzai).

1. Foreigners Reluctant to Come

Japan is one of the few industrialised countries not to have experienced the tremendous inflow of international migrants characteristic of other developed countries. Although the foreign population in Japan has doubled since 1990, it is important to note that this is starting from a very low base. In 2010, the foreign population stood at only 1.7% of the total population, the third lowest of the thirty-four OECD countries (Mexico was the lowest at 0.7%, followed by Korea at 1.1%, neither of which can match Japan’s economy in terms of size) (United Nations 2009). Even more worryingly, in 2009 the foreign population fell for the first time since 1961 (Daily Yomiuri 2012a); the decline in the number of foreign workers in particular was dramatic, decreasing 15% from the previous year, the fifth consecutive year of decline in the entry of foreign workers (OECD 2011: 294). The OECD (2011: 294) notes that the most important category of entry for employment in Japan is “entertainers”, with skilled labour and intra-company transferees showing a “significant decline.” The decline has continued: at the end of 2011, the number of registered foreigners was 2,078,508, shrinking to 1.63% of the total population (Ministry of Justice 2012a).

One reason for the decline in foreign migrants in general and foreign workers in particular is a toughening of immigration controls. Tougher penalties against undocumented foreigners began with the immigration law revisions of 1990 which saw harsher penalties for those who employed “illegals”; ten years later, a further set of revisions saw the creation of “unlawful stay” as a new criminal offence (fuhōshūrōjochōzai) (APFS 1999).1 In 2003, the Ministry of Justice and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government joined forces to “crack down” on illegal foreigners, with a five-year plan to cut the number of illegals (Daily Yomiuri 2003). Other measures have included compulsory fingerprinting and photography for all foreigners entering Japan since November 2007 (Japan Times 2007). The measures were spectacularly successful, with overstayers hitting an all-time low of 67,065 as of January 1st 2012, compared to some 300,000 in 1990 (Daily Yomiuri 2012g). However, a by-product of tougher border controls seems to have been a decline in legal foreign residents. At the same time, the government has made significant efforts to attract more foreign tourists (Japan Times 2012d)2, suggesting it is more interested in temporary short-term stay than long-term permanent settlement (Burgess 2012: 53). This is personified

1 Making overstay a criminal rather than a civil offence puts Japan in stark contrast with the US which has a far greater overstayer population; in the US, being illegally present “has always been a civil, not criminal, violation of the INA [Immigration and Nationality Act], and subsequent deportation and associated administrative processes are civil proceedings” (Procon.org 2012). As Nancy Pelosi has noted, making overstay a federal instead of a civil offense (as Japan has done) “would turn millions of immigrants currently here into criminals, hindering their ability to acquire any legal status – and would effectively frustrate the proposals that would provide real immigration reform” (Procon.org 2012).

2 A new plan aims (rather optimistically) to increase the annual number of foreign visitors to 18 million by 2016 (up from 8.6 million in 2010), turning Japan into a “tourism nation” (Japan Times 2012d). Interestingly, the earlier “Visit Japan” campaign which aimed to double the number of tourists to 10 million by 2010 was opposed by one in three Japanese citing fears of a rise in “foreign crime” (Japan Times 2003). The new plan also aims to encourage Japanese to venture out of Japan, setting a goal in the annual number of people travelling abroad from Japan to 20 million, compared to 17 million in 2011 (Japan Times 2012d).
by the reluctance to accept refugees: the number of refugees accepted in 2011 was only 21, down from 39 in 2010, despite the number of applications being the highest since 1982 (Daily Yomiuri 2012d).

1.1 International Students

One of the few migrant groups to have increased in recent years are international students, although 2011 saw the sharpest drop in decades following 3.11. Moves to bring in more foreign students have been a key engine driving education reform since the 1980s. Nakasone’s ambitious 1983 target of bringing 100,000 foreign students to Japan was the first step in his plan to ‘internationalise’ Japanese education (Ishikawa 2006: 8-9). The 100,000 goal was eventually realised in 2003, some twenty years later (Figure 1). More recently, then Prime Minister Fukuda, in his opening address to the Diet in January 2008, announced a plan to increase the number of foreign students studying in Japan to 300,000 by 2020. The plan, presented under the heading ‘an open country Japan’ (hirakareta nihon), aimed to bring in ‘top-class talent’ (yūshū na jinzai) and high quality international students (shitsu ga takai gaikokujin gakusei) from overseas to Japan’s graduate schools and industries (Fukuda 2008).

As Figure 1 shows, spurred by the Ministry of Justice deregulatory drive of the late 1990s, the goal of 100,000 foreign students was eventually reached in 2003. Post 2003, growth stagnated, the result of a stricter admission policy triggered by fears of dropping academic standards and (illegal) foreigners as a threat to Japanese public security (Ishikawa 2006: 16). The 2008 300,000 plan represented yet another policy U-turn, a reversion to the pre-2004 ‘positive acceptance’ mantra, although recession and 3.11 have meant growth has been slow.

In 2011, over 90% of ryūgakusei (foreign students) were from Asia, the majority of these from China. Because many foreign students do not have the Japanese ability required to take regular classes, plans to attract more international students, such as the Global 30 initiative, have often been accompanied by moves to introduce more classes in English. As I discuss in detail elsewhere (Burgess et al. 2010), this “opening up” of Japanese higher education — the creation of globally competitive ‘international centers of learning’ built around the ‘global standard’ that is English — has gone hand in hand with a “closing in” that seeks to maintain Japan’s cultural independence. The policy flip-flops of the past few years concerning acceptance of foreign students reflect this ambivalent attitude towards migrants and migration in general in Japanese society.

A lack of policy consistency towards foreign students may partly explain the slow growth of foreign students in Japan, in relation to its economic size, although language is certainly another key factor. Japan actually boasts one of
the highest ratios of government sponsored foreign students to privately funded foreign students in the world (Ishikawa 2006: 16), though some have framed this as a form of “bribery” to compensate for the low quality of the education offered (Askew 2011: footnote 16). Table 1 shows that Japan remains a popular destination for international students even if growth has slowed in recent years.

The events of March 11 2011 caused some 40% of foreign university students in Japan to leave the country in the following month (Japan Times 2011). And although, the vast majority of these eventually returned, numbers of short-term international students have dropped, with a number of summer programmes cancelled and a “dramatic decline” in foreign students applying to study at Japanese language schools (Japan Times 2011). This latter trend is causing a great deal of concern in educational circles since some 70% of language school students continue on to Japanese universities and colleges (Japan Times 2011).

2. Japanese Reluctant to Leave: The Uchimuki Phenomenon

Although the notion of Japan as a “closed” island nation (shimaguni) has long featured in Nihonjinron writings on Japan and foreign criticism of Japanese market and other barriers has not been uncommon, specific criticism of Japanese youth as having an “inward-looking orientation” (uchimuki shikō) is relatively new. Wikipedia (2012) defines the term as follows:

海外就職・赴任や留学を望まない日本人の若者が増えるなど、国際的な人材の減少・若者の挑戦する欲が薄れることで、日本の将来に悪影響を及ぼすのではないかという説を指す言葉

Central to this definition is the suggestion that Japanese young people no longer wish to work or study abroad. The sections below examine this premise by looking at data and attitudes on study abroad (2.1), work abroad (2.2), and overseas volunteer activities (2.3) by Japanese youth.

2.1 The Fall in Japanese Students Studying Abroad

The key driver of the uchimuki panic in the media is the recent drop in Japanese students studying abroad (Figure 2). As Figure 2 shows, since a peak of 82,945 Japanese studying abroad...
abroad in 2004, numbers have fallen significantly, roughly returning to the level they were in 1995. Since the most popular destination for Japanese students has always been (and remains) America, the rapid fall in Japanese students attending American universities has been the focus of attention: Japan students studying at US universities ranked 7th in 2010 at 21,290, a drop of 14.3% on the previous year and down from a peak of around 47,000 in 1997-98 when Japan was America’s largest source of students (IIE 2012; Yomiuri Shimbun 2012h). Media reports have also tended to focus on the rapid rise of Chinese and Korean students studying in America, the implication being that Japan is being left behind by its closest neighbours in the race to train global human resources (Yomiuri Shimbun 2012g). “In a Japan which is showing signs of being pushed aside by China and Korea’s focus on the economic sphere,” writes the Yomiuri Shimbun (2012h), “it is said that the youngsters who have to shoulder the burden of the next generation are uchimuki.”

Not all analysts agree that uchimuki is a negative phenomenon or even that it is the main reason behind the fall in Japanese studying abroad. Many commentators point out that given the highly developed and peaceful nature of Japanese society it is entirely natural that many young people see less need to travel outside a technologically advanced, comfortable, and secure Japan, a trend made to appear more dramatic by a shrinking youth population (shōshika). For example, Shiina (2010: 51) notes that the increasingly ‘sotomuki shiko’ (outward looking orientation) of countries like China and India is hardly surprising given the large populations and nature of society and government in these countries; in the case of South Korea, Shiina points to the North Korean situation as a key factor in young people leaving. Certainly, this may partly explain the sharp rise in international students from China, India, and Korea, particularly against the background of a growing middle class more able to fund their children’s study abroad. Nevertheless, it avoids the question of whether Japanese youth are really becoming more ‘inward-looking’. A survey by the British Council (2010: 1) found that the majority of Japanese high school and university students are actually interested in studying abroad and if anything have become more interested over the past five years. The British Council survey highlighted worries over safety, expenses, and negative influence over school/
work as reasons why youngsters ultimately didn’t go abroad; another survey found these plus ‘lack of language ability’ as the most cited impediments to study abroad (8 Daigaku Kōgaku Kyōiku Puroguramu/Gurōbaruka Suishin Iinkai 2009: 14).

2.2 The Drop in Japanese Employees Wanting to Work Abroad

While the drop in Japanese studying abroad has tended to drive the talk of uchimuki youth, some commentators have also noted that workers too are losing their enthusiasm to be posted abroad. A series of surveys taken by the Sanno Institute of Management on the “global consciousness” of new employees shows a polarisation of attitudes towards working overseas (Figure 3).

Whereas in 2001, the majority of respondents’ desire to work abroad (or not) was based on where they would be working and was thus rather flexible, in 2010 attitudes had hardened: 49% replied they didn’t want to work overseas period (up from 29.2% in 2001) whereas 27% replied that they did want to work abroad (up from 17.3% in 2001). The most common reason given for not wanting to work overseas was the “risk” involved, followed by a lack of confidence in their own abilities and not feeling any attraction towards the foreign (Sanno Institute of Management 2010: 2). Although, “risk” was not specified, the deterioration of the economic situation from 2008 — a period which saw the number adverse to going abroad jump from a third to almost a half of respondents — suggests financial risk, echoing the study abroad surveys above. The same survey also found that over 50% of new employees felt some kind of resistance to having a foreign boss or CEO (Sanno Institute of Management 2010: 3).

2.3 The Decline in Interest in Overseas Volunteer Work

One of the most well known programs dispatching young volunteers (20-39) is the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (seinenshigai kyoryukutai) scheme operated by JICA. However, since the peak of 1994 when over 11,800 applicants were received, applicants fell below 6,000 for the first time in 2006, dropping to under 4,000 in fiscal 2007 and 2008 (Asahi Shimbun 2008). The Asahi Shimbun (2008) notes that the finger is being pointed at young people’s “inward-looking orientation”, and goes on to note a tendency for student travel abroad to be shorter against a background of fear of terrorism (held by youngsters and parents).

Although showing a slight upturn in 2009, summer applicants for 2011 were the lowest since 1989. JICA put this down to the need for domestic volunteers post 3.11, young people’s “inward-looking orientation”, and the poor economy making people worry if they can find employment after coming back (Kobe Shimbun 2011).
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To sum up this section on uchimuki youth, the data clearly shows a decline in Japanese young people studying (2.1) and volunteering (2.3) abroad, plus a sharp polarisation among new employees wanting or not wanting to work abroad (2.2). These trends have frequently been explained by an increasing uchimuki shikō or inward-looking orientation among young people, particularly in contrast to Japan’s sotomuki neighbours. Certainly, as a highly developed, stable, and peaceful country, the necessity of venturing abroad to acquire skills and experience is undoubtedly less than in the past. As Furuichi (2011) argues, the youth of Japan are happier and more content than they have ever been, and are perhaps comfortable to stay in a Japan which no longer needs to “catch up.” However, surveys show that many young people are still interested in study abroad but are being discouraged by social and economic barriers. Indeed, Nikkei Business (2011: 36) argues that the problem is less about young people⁴ and more about society and the companies which hire youngsters. In particular the rigid Japanese job-hunting system — currently in the middle of a “super ice-age” (New Straits Times 2012) — has been picked out as particularly problematic (Asahi Shimbun 2010; Nikkei Business 2011: 36). As the following section discusses, the uchimuki discourse may be less a reflection on changing youth values and more a cover for Japan’s failure to attract and foster “global human resources” which have suddenly come to be perceived as absolutely crucial for Japan’s future in the face of its global competitive decline⁵.

3. “Global Human Resources”

In a 2009 survey by the Japan Association of Corporate Executives asking what concrete measures can be taken to develop globally, by far the largest response was “to secure and cultivate human resources to promote globalisation” (Japan Association of Corporate Executives 2012: 4). Keidanren defines Global

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⁴ Much has been written about how young people are frequently blamed for various social ills. See for example Imoto and Toivonen (2012).

⁵ For example, in the Global 500 ranking of the world’s largest companies, Japanese companies occupied the top six places in Asia in 2005; in 2012 they had fallen to positions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 (CNN Money 2012b; 2012a). And in 2012, Japan slipped one place to 10th in the WEF global competitiveness rankings (Tokyo Times 2012).
Human Resources (hereafter GHR) as “Japanese or foreign talent who are able to take on the burden of globalising Japanese companies’ business activities and take an active part in global business.” This stress on securing GHR — dubbed the “war for talent” in the survey above — is a rather recent phenomenon. As Figure 5 below shows, the term *gurobaru jinzai* itself only emerged in Japan in 2007, the year when the housing bubble burst in the US, signalling the start of global recession.

As discussed at the end of section (2), *uchimuki* and GHR are closely connected terms. Indeed, Figure 5 shows how the terms *uchimuki* and *gurobaru jinzai* emerged at the same time and then mirrored each other’s growth. This section explores what exactly is meant by the term GHR and looks at what steps have been taken by government, business, and universities since 2007 to secure or attract external resources (3.1) and cultivate or foster internal resources (3.2).

### 3.1 Securing External “Global Human Resources”

#### 3.1.1 Government Policies to Attract “Global Human Resources”

One of the first government initiatives in the push to attract GHR was the establishment of the Industry-Academia Partnership Human Resource Development by METI in October 2007 (METI 2012). The goal was to increase collaboration and communication between industry and universities with an eye to better developing and utilising talent (*jinzai*). One offshoot of this body was the Global Human Resource Development Committee (*Gurobaru Jinzai Ikusei Iinkai*), set up in 2009 to directly address the need for Japanese industry to globalise against the background of a declining population and falling domestic demand (METI 2010: 3).

Aside from METI, other initiatives have taken place within the framework of the government’s 2010 ‘New Growth Strategy’ (*Shin Seichō Šenryaku*). One pillar of this strategy is acceptance of “highly skilled foreign professionals” (*kōdo jinzai*) to boost Japanese technological innovation and economic growth and ultimately revitalise Japan (*Daily Yomiuri* 2011; Kantei 2010). *Kōdo jinzai* are defined as “quality, unsubstitutable human resources who have a complementary relationship with domestic
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capital and labor...the human resources who are expected to bring innovation to the Japanese industries, to promote development of specialized/technical labor markets through friendly competition with Japanese people and to increase efficiency of the Japanese labor markets” (Immigration Bureau of Japan 2012b). As part of government efforts to realise the New Growth Policy, the Council on Promotion of Human Resources for Globalization Development (Gurōbaru Jinzai Ikusei Suishin Kaigi) was established in May 2011 with the goal of “cultivating ‘global human resources’ who will drive Japan towards future advancement” (Kantei 2011; 2012). A June 2011 interim report frames this as an “urgent issue” that is of “great necessity” (Kantei 2011: 3).

One concrete outcome of the moves to attract foreign talent is a “point system” introduced in May 2012 with the aim of promoting “more acceptances of highly skilled foreign nationals who have advanced abilities since those foreign professionals are expected to contribute to economic growth and creation of new demand and employment in Japan” (Immigration Bureau of Japan 2012c). Under the system, which resembles those in Canada and Australia, anyone earning more than 70 points based on academic, technical, and business activities, will be recognised as a “highly skilled foreign professional” and will be given preferential immigration treatment. The government is expecting around 2,000 entrants each year, with a review planned after the first year (Daily Yomiuri 2011).

A closer look at the calculation tables reveals that the target of the new point system is not international students currently studying in Japan. For example, although points are given for graduate degrees (wherever they are earned) and Japanese language ability, only 5 points is given for completion of a Japanese university or graduate school; the majority of points are given for length of professional career (the longer the better), annual income (the more the better), and research, technical, or business achievements (Immigration Bureau of Japan 2012d). Indeed, in a FAQ section, it is made clear that the system is not aimed at international students who would like to work in Japan after graduating: applicants would have to leave Japan temporarily and are advised that the “burden of paperwork will be heavy” (Immigration Bureau of Japan 2012a). As the JASSO Job Hunting Guide for International Students notes, “[i]t is difficult for international students to find employment in Japan” (JASSO 2012b: 4).

The failure of the new point system to target international students currently graduating from Japanese universities — individuals with Japanese language and cultural skills — is difficult to understand given that many of these students would like to remain in Japan after they graduate6. The Yomiuri Shimbun (2009) estimates although more than 60% of the 30,000 or so foreign students who graduate each year want to stay and work in Japan, only 6

It is also rather surprising since it goes against the international trend to encourage graduates to stay: “Most OECD countries...have introduced policies in recent years to encourage graduates to stay on, by granting a certain period of time in which to look for work following the completion of studies, often a year. Those who find work, which must generally be in their field of study, are then granted the right to stay and enter on a migration track that can lead to permanent residence” (OECD 2011: 65). In Japan, if an international student cannot find a job before they graduate, they must apply to change their visa status to “designated activities (to continue seeking employment)” if they want to continue job-hunting activities (the visa is valid for six months and can only be renewed once) (JASSO 2012b: 60). On finding a job, they must then apply for the appropriate visa (such as Specialist in Humanities/International Services). JASSO warns that because of the emphasis on new graduates and the rather inflexible job-hunting calendar in Japan, those international students looking for jobs after graduation will have “limited opportunities” (JASSO 2012b: 60). Government support (such as the 2007 established Career Development Program for Foreign Students in Japan with its focus on “exceptional” Asian talent) remains limited (METI/MEXT 2012).
half that number are able to do so. This corresponds roughly with Ministry of Justice figures: in 2011 only 9143 international students (up 8% from the previous year) applied for a change of visa status with the object of working at a Japanese company; interestingly, only 8,586 were accepted, despite all applicants presumably having secured a job offer. Over 40% of job offers are in translation and interpretation (JASSO 2012b:4). Ten years previously (2001), the figures were 4,132 and 3,581 respectively (Ministry of Justice 2002). The OECD (2011: 67) puts Japan in the bottom range of countries in terms of the percentage of international students changing status and staying on. In comparison, in 2011, 11,404 “skilled labour” (gijutsu) and specialist in humanities/international services (jinbun chishiki/kokusai jigyō) visas were issued to foreigners wanting to work in Japanese companies, a 25.4% rise from the previous year (Ministry of Justice 2012b).

3.1.2 Business Measures to Attract “Global Human Resources”

With more businesses aiming to expand their global market share, the number of companies positively recruiting non-Japanese is increasing. As Table 2 shows, Japanese companies are stepping up efforts to recruit non-Japanese. For example, a Tokyo career forum for foreign students which started in 2008 with only 12 companies participating recently attracted 47 firms, suggesting that companies interest in foreign students is rising (Japan Times 2012a). And polling by career consultancy DISCO Inc. found that 24.5 percent of firms said they planned to hire foreign students in the 2013 fiscal year, up from only 13.1% the previous year (Japan Times 2012a). Interestingly, among those companies hiring foreign recruits, although overseas expansion is a key factor in the hires, the most important reason given in the survey was revitalising the company and having a positive influence on their Japanese employees (Asahi Shimbun 2012).

3.1.3 Educational Moves to Attract “Global Human Resources”

Section 1.1 already touched on the 2008 300,000 foreign student plan and its enabler, the Global 30 Project, a government initiative that aims to upgrade a number of existing universities to form a select hub of elite universities for receiving and educating international students. This initiative has four main pillars.

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Table 2: Japanese Companies Foreign Hiring 2012/2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company Name</th>
<th>Total Recruits</th>
<th>...of which non-Japanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panasonic</td>
<td>1390*</td>
<td>1100*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Retailing (Uniqlo)</td>
<td>1200**</td>
<td>900-1000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1500***</td>
<td>1200***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakuten</td>
<td>410**</td>
<td>120**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitachi</td>
<td>750**</td>
<td>5-6**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawson</td>
<td>99**</td>
<td>23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Eleven</td>
<td>250**</td>
<td>20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sony</td>
<td>187***</td>
<td>56 (30%)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamato Transport</td>
<td>100***</td>
<td>20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toshiba</td>
<td>500**</td>
<td>50 (10%)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Yomiuri Shimbun (2011); Japan Times (2012a); Asahi Shimbun (2012); Nikkei Business (2010).

Notes: *2011 Figures **2012 Figures. ***2013 Figures

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7 Ironically, as foreign students become “rivals”, job-hunting for Japanese students becomes more competitive, exacerbating domestic students’ worries over jobs which are one reason for the reluctance to study abroad.
The first is the expansion of course programmes by which degrees can be earned through English-only classes. The second seeks to enhance facilities for receiving and hosting foreign students, such as specialist support staff, internship programmes, and flexible semester start dates. A third pillar aims to provide international students with opportunities to learn about Japanese language and culture. The fourth and final pillar concerns the setting up of overseas offices to provide a ‘one-stop service’ for local recruitment and examination as well as furthering cooperation with local universities (MEXT 2009). The project is described in more detail in Burgess et al. (2010).

Since 2009, when the first 13 universities were selected to receive Global 30 money, funding has been withdrawn and prospects for the project after its initial five-year span are unclear (Burgess et al. 2010: 471). A new MEXT project to fund 40 universities is aimed not at attracting foreign students but encouraging Japanese students to study overseas, although the criteria for selecting universities — adding foreign instructors, increasing the number of English language classes, and setting up transfer-credit systems — may also result in Japanese universities becoming more open to international students (Japan Times 2012c).

However, neither of these projects are likely to significantly affect the lowly position of Japanese universities in international world rankings, an important factor in attracting international students. For example, even though Japan’s top ranking university, Tokyo University, scored highly on most academic indicators in the THE 2012 ranking, it scored only 23 out of 100 on “international diversity” which measures the ratio of international to domestic staff and the ratio of international to domestic students (Yomiuri Shimbun 2012a). This weakness has been highlighted by METI’s Global Human Resource Development Committee as one of the key factors in the “delay” in the globalisation of

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8 In January 2012, Tokyo University announced plans to shift enrolment from spring to Autumn in five years time (Japan Times 2012b). By moving enrolment to September, which is more common internationally, the university hopes both to attract more foreign students and encourage more Japanese students to study abroad. President Hamada framed the plans in terms of “speeding up the internationalization of Japanese universities” and responding to the “urgent need to nurture tough-minded and globally-oriented people” (Japan Times 2012b). The biggest hurdle is said to be the job-hunting system, specifically the “deep-rooted practice” of all new employees starting in April (Daily Yomiuri 2012b)
Japan’s universities.

What stands out from this data in the low percentage of international staff at Japanese universities. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that although universities are extremely keen to attract (temporary) foreign students they are reluctant to employ (permanent) foreign faculty, reflecting the attitude towards migration in general as discussed in section (1). The irony is that without permanent foreign faculty creating an “international” learning environment, international students are much less likely to come. Faced with this bottleneck, efforts have increased to foster local “global human resources”, but, as we shall see below, this has resulted in a different set of problems.

3.2 Cultivating Internal “Global Human Resources”

On top of attracting talented non-Japanese from outside Japan, a second pillar of the GHR movement is to cultivate domestic human resources. As with section 3.1, this can be divided into three areas: government (3.2.1), business (3.2.2), and education (3.2.3).

3.2.1 Government Policies to Foster “Global Human Resources”

Against the background of a drastic fall in Japanese studying abroad, the government’s 2010 ‘New Growth Strategy’, mentioned in (3.1.1) during discussion of the new “point system” for foreign workers, also has the goal of dispatching 300,000 Japanese students overseas (kaigai haken 30 man nin) by 2020 (Daily Yomiuri 2012c). The interim report of The Council on Promotion of Human Resource Globalization Development phrases this objective in slightly different language, aiming to increase those with overseas study experience of a year or more to 10% of all 22-year-olds by an unspecified date (Asahi Shimbun 2011c).

In order to realise these goals, in the 2012 financial year, ¥3.1 billion (up from ¥1.9 million the previous year) was earmarked for scholarships to send some 9,000 Japanese overseas for study and short stays. However, the government has indicated that without support from private companies and individuals “it can do no more to foster global human resources” (Yomiuri Shimbun 2012d). A new scholarship fund — known as GiFT or Globalised Independent Future Talents — aims to provide ¥1 million to 1,000 Japanese students studying abroad (Daily Yomiuri 2012c). A new public interest corporation is also planned to assist Japanese study and intern programmes abroad, as well as providing job-seeking advice to students after they return to Japan (Daily Yomiuri 2012c).

3.2.2 Business Measures to Foster “Global Human Resources”

According to the Asahi Business Club (2011), measures undertaken by Japanese companies to foster GHR can be split into three categories: adopting English as the official language of the company (eigo no shanaikōyōgoka), making promotion reliant on language skills, and dispatching workers abroad/hiring more foreign workers. Some concrete examples are given in Table 3.

In terms of hiring, there is some evidence that more Japanese companies are interested in employing those with overseas experience. For example, although the ‘Tokyo Summer Career Forum’, aimed at English-speaking Japanese job-hunters, has been running since 1999,
it has only recently attracted major interest from Japanese companies, with 82 companies attending in 2009 and 124 in 2010 (Nikkei Business 2010). As mentioned in the introduction, even major banks have been ramping up efforts “to develop workers who can effectively work abroad” (sekai de tsiyo suru jinzai) to aid in the expansion of their overseas operations (Yomiuri Shimbun 2012c). Measures include setting up English conversation classrooms in branches, increasing personnel exchanges with overseas branches, and offering foreign students work experience and home stays to change the “mindset” of Japanese employees (Yomiuri Shimbun 2012c).

Although a number of high profile Japanese companies have taken concrete measures to cultivate GHR, there are suggestions that not all Japanese companies are eager to move away from traditional employment models and embrace those with international experience and values. A recent article in the Yomiuri Shimbun (2012c) is titled “Are those Coming Back from Study Abroad Cheeky?” and suggests that Japanese hierarchical corporate culture is not necessarily a good match with confident and outspoken return students: “Most Japanese companies want Japanese who are only good at English but obedient Japanese.” This is echoed in a report by the Global Human Resource Development Committee (METI 2010: 44):

Japanese companies lack of global awareness of the need to increase GHR has been echoed by Jennifer Stout, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Discussing the drop in Japanese students studying in the U.S., Stout goes beyond conventional discussions on uchimuki youth, suggesting that perhaps Japanese corporate culture doesn’t always rate overseas experience and English ability (Yomiuri Shimbun 2012f). Indeed, overseas experience can even be a disadvantage for job-hunters.11 A long article in the New York Times (2012) described the experiences of a number of Japanese with study

11 Following the Council on the Promotion of Human Resources for Globalization Development’s target that 10% of all 22-year-olds should study abroad (3.2.1), the Asahi Shimbun (2011b) printed a letter from a reader detailing her own struggles with job-hunting after spending a year studying abroad. The writer argued that Japanese companies first need to change the mindset that sees study abroad as a negative.
abroad experience who found Japanese companies unenthusiastic and reluctant to hire them. The article cites a survey of 1,000 Japanese companies on their recruitment plans in which less than a quarter said in fiscal 2012 they planned to hire Japanese applicants who had studied abroad.

The apparent ambivalence of some companies to embrace Japanese with international experience seems to contradict Keidanren’s stance that Japanese companies desperately need GHR but that that demand is not being met. In a report on how to foster GHR, Keidanren (2011: 2) notes that although globalisation has increased the aptitude and ability required to compete, currently the needs of industry are not being met by Japanese society. Specifically, Keidanren lays the blame on a decline in quality of university students and the spread of an uchimuki orientation creating a gap or disassociation (kairi) between what industry wants and what the university sector is providing (Keidanren 2011: 2). While we have already noted that a focus on uchimuki young people is more to do with society’s failure to meet the sudden changing expectations and needs of Japanese industry than any changes in young people’s values, the role of Japanese universities in fostering — or failing to foster — individuals with the skills — particularly English skills — required to deal with globalisation will be looked at below.

3.2.3 University Moves to Foster “Global Human Resources”

As discussed in 3.2.1, the 2009 Global 30 project has been at the forefront of efforts to “internationalise” Japan’s universities, although the project was framed more in terms of attracting foreign students than nurturing local students. In contrast, the natural successor to this project, the much broader 2012 “University Action Reform Plan”, is more firmly focused on fostering talent within Japan: a key pillar of the new project is to “nurture students to be capable of corresponding with globalisation” (gurōbaru ka ni taiōjinzai kyōiku) (MEXT 2012b). This shift from attracting foreign talent to nurturing local talent can be seen in moves by universities themselves. For example, in August 2012, five of Japan’s most “international” universities signed an agreement to work together to foster “international people” (kokusai-jin ikusei) (Yomiuri Shimbun 2012b). The first step is to provide training to staff on how to “deal with globalisation” (gurōbaru ka ni taiō), with the long term goal to improve global competitiveness (kokusai kyōséryoku).

Improving Japanese students’ English ability is one of the most common practical proposals for nurturing local talent, a goal often based on the claim that Japanese English ability is falling behind that of its Asian neighbours. Indeed, the low level of Japanese people’s English skills is a common refrain in GHR policy documents, with Japan’s low international TOEFL score frequently cited in policy documents (Kantei 2011: 8). Although Japan’s English ranking is not as bad as it is often made out to be, the need to reform English education in Japan is widely recognised. Thus, in policy discussions on GHR, linguistic and communication skills are defined as central to GHR (Kantei 2011: 7). Specific policy goals include using TOEFL and TOEIC scores as part of entrance examination reform and the doubling of classes held in English (MEXT 2012d: 11). In terms of practical measures, Tokyo university has taken the lead with the establishment of a new “Global Leadership Program” to cultivate students with advanced linguistic skills and nurture “future Asian leaders” (Dai-
ly Yomiuri 2012e). What stands out in these discussions is how English dominates measures to internationalise Japanese universities, often at the expense of all else (Yomiuri Shimbun 2012i).

4. The Uchimuki Red Herring: Japan’s Failure to Secure and Cultivate “Global Human Resources”

Writing about the relationship between Japan and the English language — particularly Japan’s slowness, compared to its Asian neighbours, in introducing English as a regular subject in primary schools — Honna suggests that there is a deep-seated notion in Japan that English is not a global language but something that belongs to Britain and the United States (Daily Yomiuri 2012f). This attitude epitomises Japan’s ambivalent attitude towards globalisation in general. One the one hand, the country is aware that in order to remain economically competitive it must open up, instigate reforms, and embrace globalisation in all its aspects; on the other hand, there remains a strong tendency to close in, reject global norms and standards, and retreat inwards. The discussions over GHR capture the dilemma of a country caught in two minds, a quandary which explains many of the contradictions in rhetoric, policy, and concrete reform detailed in this paper.

One of the biggest ironies in these discussions on GHR is how young people have been made scapegoats for Japan’s failure. Thus, Japan’s problems in attracting and securing gurōbaru jinzai are typically explained not by the rigid job-hunting system, parochial immigration policies, or conservative corporate culture but by inward-looking uchimuki youth. The notion that Japanese government policies, for example to encourage international students to stay in Japan after graduation or to recruit permanent foreign faculty, may be lacking or that many Japanese companies don’t actually evaluate international experience very highly is rarely discussed. In sum, it may be more accurate to talk of an uchimuki government or even society, one that remains rooted in an insular world view that sees globalisation as an external process even as it recognises that it has little choice but to embrace such movements and genuinely open up.

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