International Student Policies:
Perspectives from the United States, Europe, China, and Japan
留学生政策：米国、欧州、中国、日本からの視点

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Abstract. International student mobility has become a significant aspect of higher education policies worldwide, contributing to cultural exchange, economic growth, and knowledge sharing. We conducted a comparative analysis of international student policies in four major regions: the United States, Europe, China, and Japan. This paper aims to offer insights into the diverse approaches taken by these regions to attract and retain international students.

要旨：留学生の流動性は世界中の高等教育政策の重要な側面となっており、文化交流、経済成長、知識の共有に貢献しています。 そこで、米国、ヨーロッパ、中国、日本の 4 つの主要地域における留学生政策の比較分析を実施した。留学生を引き付け、維持するためにこれらの地域がとっている多様なアプローチから、これら政策の戦略、課題、成果を考察した。

Keywords: comparative analysis, higher education, international student mobility, international student policies

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, international student mobility has emerged as a crucial aspect of higher education systems. Since the 1980s, tertiary education has undergone greater internationalization, facilitated by the movement of students, academic personnel, as well as programs and institutions (OECD, 2024). The overall count of mobile tertiary education students reached nearly 6.4 million in 2021 (UNESCO, 2023), exceeding 5.4 million in 2017, and marking a significant increase from 2.7 million since 2005 (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). The phenomenon transcends geographical boundaries, fostering cultural exchange, promoting economic growth, and advancing knowledge dissemination. As countries vie for a competitive edge in the global education market, the formulation and implementation of effective international student attraction policies have become imperative (Chevalier, 2022).

In recent decades, the global demand for higher education has surged, driven by factors such as increasing internationalization of curricula, advancements in technology facilitating cross-border learning, and the growing recognition of the benefits of a multicultural learning environment. Consequently, countries have intensified their efforts to attract a diverse pool of international students, not only to enrich their educational ecosystems but also to bolster their economies and strengthen diplomatic ties (Chevalier, 2022). Against this backdrop, the comparative analysis of international student attraction policies in U.S., Europe, China, and Japan assumes critical importance.

These regions stand at the forefront of global higher education, each with its distinct strengths and challenges in attracting and accommodating international students.

The historical trajectory of international student mobility traces back to ancient times when scholars traveled across continents in pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment (Teichler, 2007). However, the modern era of international student mobility can be traced to the establishment of formal education systems and the rise of universities in medieval Europe. Institutions such as the University of Bologna attracted students from diverse regions, laying the foundation for cross-border academic exchange. The 20th century witnessed a paradigm shift in international student mobility, driven by geopolitical developments, technological advancements, and the globalization of higher education. The aftermath of World War II saw the emergence of international scholarship programs such as the Fulbright Program and the establishment of organizations like UNESCO, which aimed to promote educational cooperation and cultural understanding across borders. Subsequent decades witnessed exponential growth in international student enrollment, spurred by factors such as increased air travel, advancements in communication technologies, and the liberalization of visa policies.

International student mobility has garnered significant attention from scholars, policymakers, and educational institutions worldwide due to its implications for global higher education. Scholars have employed various theoretical frameworks to elucidate the motivations, decision-making processes, and outcomes associated

with international student mobility (Tran et al., 2021). Push-pull theory, rooted in neoclassical economics, posits that individuals are driven to migrate by a combination of push factors (e.g., economic disparities, political instability) and pull factors (e.g., educational opportunities, quality of life) in their home and host countries (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Human capital theory emphasizes the role of education as an investment in human capital, whereby international students seek to acquire skills, knowledge, and credentials that enhance their employability and earnings potential (Blaug, 1976). Cultural capital theory, on the other hand, highlights the social and cultural capital accrued through international educational experiences, which can confer advantages in terms of social mobility, cultural competence, and cosmopolitanism (Sullivan, 2001).

A body of literature has examined international student attraction policies in diverse national and regional contexts, shedding light on the strategies, challenges, and outcomes associated with these policies. Studies have explored a wide range of topics, including visa regulations, scholarship programs, marketing campaigns, institutional partnerships, and support services for international students. Findings have highlighted the importance of policy coherence, stakeholder collaboration, and student-centered approaches in enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of higher education systems. Moreover, studies have underscored the need for evidence-based policy formulation, rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and proactive engagement with international students to address their evolving needs and preferences (Kamm & Chaloff, 2022).

Despite significant progress in understanding international student attraction policies, gaps in the literature persist, pointing to avenues for future research. Key areas warranting further exploration include the impact of geopolitical tensions on international student mobility patterns (Mihut, 2024), the role of digital technologies in facilitating virtual mobility and online learning (Kudryashova et al., 2020), and the intersectionality of factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status in shaping international student experiences and outcomes.

Emerging trends such as the COVID-19 pandemic have also reshaped the landscape of international student mobility, prompting institutions and policymakers to adopt innovative strategies and contingency plans to ensure continuity and resilience in the face of disruption (Mason, 2021). The rise of transnational education, cross-border partnerships, and blended learning models further underscores the dynamic nature of international student attraction policies in an increasingly interconnected world.

The purpose of this manuscript is to undertake a comparative analysis of international student attraction policies across four major regions: U.S., Europe, China, and Japan. These regions represent diverse educational landscapes, each with its unique set of challenges, opportunities, and policy approaches. It unravels the intricacies of international student mobility strategies, shedding light on the varying approaches adopted by different regions to attract and retain talent from abroad. By examining the policies, incentives, challenges, and outcomes associated with international student recruitment and retention, this study aims to provide insights into the factors driving global student mobility and the effectiveness of policy interventions. Through an understanding of international student attraction policies, stakeholders can glean lessons and best practices to inform future policy development and enhance the attractiveness of their respective higher education systems.

Methodology

A desk-review approach was adopted to collect data on international student attraction policies in U.S., Europe, China, and Japan. Data on international student enrollment, demographic trends, visa issuance, and employment outcomes were obtained from national statistical agencies, international organizations (e.g., OECD, UNESCO), and databases to provide insights into patterns and dynamics of international student mobility. A review of scholarly articles, research reports, and academic journals was conducted to synthesize existing knowledge and identify gaps in the literature on international student attraction policies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies relevant to the comparative analysis.

A comparative framework was used to guide the analysis of international student attraction policies across the selected regions. The framework comprises a set of criteria derived from the existing literature, aiming to capture the multifaceted nature of international student mobility and the diverse approaches taken by different regions to attract and retain international students. Key criteria include visa and immigration policies; scholarship and financial incentives; institutional support and cultural integration initiatives; employment opportunities and post-graduation pathways; promotion strategies; regulatory frameworks. By evaluating these criteria, the framework facilitates an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness of international student attraction policies in each region.

Policies and practices related to international student attraction in U.S., Europe, China, and Japan were evaluated against the criteria to identify similarities, differences, and areas of convergence or divergence among the selected regions. The effectiveness of international student attraction policies in each region was assessed in terms of their impact on student mobility, educational outcomes, institutional

competitiveness, and broader socio-economic benefits. The implications of the comparative analysis were examined in light of emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping international student mobility, with a focus on informing policy recommendations, strategic planning, and decision-making processes at the national, regional, and institutional levels.

Findings

Figure 1 shows the number of international students in various host countries from 2017 to 2021 (UNESCO, 2023). Across the board, there is a general trend of increasing numbers of international students, indicating a growing interest in studying abroad during this period.

Specifically, China, Germany, and the UK experienced consistent growth in the number of international students over the years. France and Japan also saw increases, although the growth was not as pronounced. Interestingly, the US, traditionally a popular destination for international students, witnessed fluctuations in its numbers, with a notable decrease in 2020 and 2021. This could be attributed to various factors such as changes in immigration policies, global economic conditions, or shifts in preferences among international students. The data reflects the dynamic nature of international student mobility and underscores the importance of understanding the factors driving these trends in each host country.
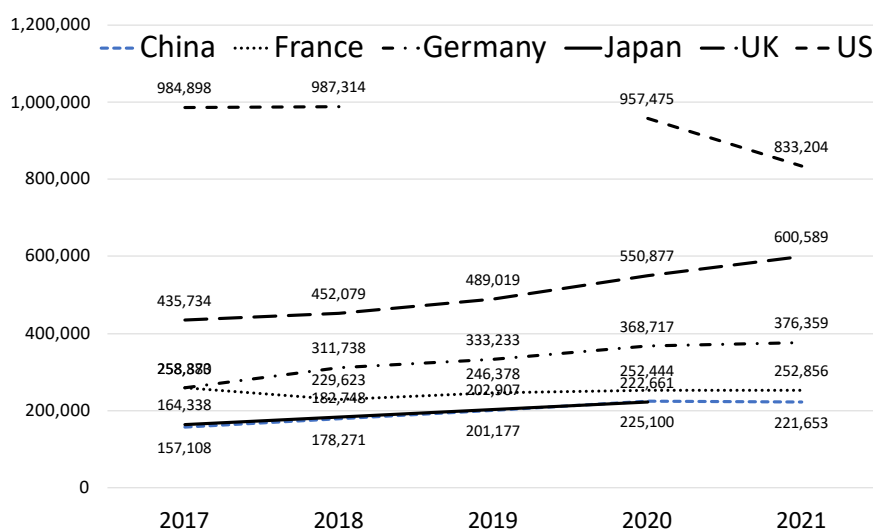

Figure 1. Number of international students by host country (based on UNESCO data).

United States

The U.S. has long been a magnet for international students seeking world-class education, diverse academic opportunities, and vibrant cultural experiences. The U.S. boasts a rich tapestry of policies and initiatives aimed at attracting and retaining international students, reflecting its commitment to global engagement and academic excellence. The U.S. offers a wide array of policies and programs designed to attract international students. Visa regulations, including the F-1 and M student visa and J-1 exchange visitor visa, facilitate entry for students pursuing academic and cultural exchange opportunities (US Dept. of State, n.d.). Additionally, the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program allows international students to gain practical work experience in their field of study for up to 12 months (24 months for STEM graduates) after completing their degree (US Citizenship, n.d.). Scholarship programs such as the Fulbright Program (Jeffrey, 1987), the Gilman Scholarship, and various institutional scholarships provide financial assistance to international students,

making U.S. education more accessible (US Dept. of State, 2024). Furthermore, universities across the country invest in cultural integration initiatives (Savage, 2007), including international student orientation programs, language support services, and multicultural student organizations, to ensure a welcoming and inclusive campus environment (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Lotkowski et al., 2004). In U.S., renowned for its prestigious universities and research institutions, international student enrollment has soared, driven by factors such as academic excellence, diverse course offerings, and robust scholarship programs (Choudaha, 2018).

However, challenges such as visa restrictions (Haddal, 2006), rising tuition costs, limited access to financial aid, pose affordability concerns for many prospective applicants. Issues such as discrimination (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007) and concerns about post-graduation employment opportunities (Shen & Herr, 2004) have posed significant hurdles for international students. Additionally, immigration policies have created uncertainty and deterred some international students from choosing the U.S. as their study destination (C.

Lee, 2022). Moreover, U.S. faces competition from other countries, such as Canada, Australia, and the UK, which offer comparable academic opportunities and more favorable immigration policies. The perception of safety and security concerns, particularly in light of incidents of gun violence and racial discrimination (Kim, 2024). It is reported that International Students in the US are facing microaggressions in the campus (Rodriguez et al., 2023)

Economically, international students inject billions of dollars into the U.S. economy annually, supporting local businesses, creating jobs, and bolstering the higher education sector (Esaki-Smith, 2023). Furthermore, many international students choose to remain in the U.S. after completing their studies, contributing to the country's workforce and innovation ecosystem (Sangganjanavanich et al., 2011). Despite the challenges, U.S. remains an attractive destination for international students seeking a world-class education and unparalleled opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Europe

Europe is characterized by its rich cultural heritage, academic excellence, and commitment to fostering cross-border collaboration. The region boasts a plethora of policies and initiatives aimed at attracting and retaining international students, reflecting its dedication to promoting educational mobility, innovation, and cultural exchange.

In Europe, the European Union's ambitious initiatives such as Erasmus plus and Horizon Europe (European Commission, 2023) have facilitated student mobility within the region while attracting talent from across the globe (Rodríguez González et al., 2011). Europe is known for its competitive tuition fees, with numerous affordable study opportunities available to international students. Many European countries offer free education to their own citizens, and there are even some locations where non-European students can pursue their studies without paying tuition fees (Team Study.eu, 2023).

The EU has spearheaded several initiatives to enhance international student mobility and cooperation within the region. The Erasmus+ program, a flagship EU initiative, offers opportunities for students, staff, and institutions to study, train, and collaborate across European borders. Horizon Europe, the EU's research and innovation program, facilitates international research partnerships and knowledge exchange, fostering scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) initiatives, such as the Bologna Process, promote harmonization of higher education systems, quality assurance mechanisms, and mutual recognition of qualifications, making Europe an attractive destination for international students seeking a seamless academic experience (Council of Europe,

2024).

National strategies implemented by countries like Germany, France, and the UK have further enhanced Europe's appeal as a destination for international students. European countries have also implemented national strategies and programs to attract and support international students. Germany's DAAD offers scholarships and support services to international students, facilitating their integration into German universities and society (Mawer, 2018). France's Campus France agency promotes French higher education abroad, providing information, assistance, and scholarship opportunities to prospective international students (Fund it, 2010). Despite the challenges posed by Brexit, the UK has launched initiatives such as the GREAT Campaign to promote British higher education.

Nevertheless, Brexit uncertainties, language barriers, and funding constraints remain key challenges for the region (López-Duarte et al., 2021; Souto-Otero et al., 2013). Europe faces a myriad of challenges in attracting and retaining international students, including Brexit implications, language barriers, and competition from other destinations. The uncertainty surrounding Brexit has raised concerns among international students regarding tuition fees, visa regulations, and future opportunities for study and employment in the UK (Moskal, 2017).

Language barriers pose another obstacle for international students, particularly those from non-English-speaking countries, who may encounter difficulties in accessing courses and integrating into European universities. Moreover, while Europe offer world-class education and diverse academic programs, competition from other global education hubs, underscores the need for continuous innovation and strategic positioning to maintain Europe's attractiveness as a study destination.

China

China has emerged as a dynamic player in the global higher education landscape, propelled by its rapid economic growth, commitment to educational reform, and strategic investments in internationalization (Guiaké et al., 2021; Yang & de Wit, 2019). The "Study in China" campaign (China Admission, 2023), along with generous scholarship programs (Lien & Miao, 2023; Wang, 2022), has attracted a growing number of international students seeking to experience China's rich cultural heritage and academic offerings (Lyu et al., 2023). China's "Study in China" campaign serves as a flagship initiative to promote the country as a desirable destination for international students. The campaign encompasses targeted marketing efforts, promotional events, and outreach activities to raise awareness of China's educational offerings and attract talented students from around the world. In addition to the

"Study in China" campaign, the Chinese government offers a variety of scholarship programs to support international students pursuing higher education in China. The Chinese Government Scholarship, administered by the China Scholarship Council, provides full or partial funding for tuition, accommodation, and living expenses, making Chinese universities more accessible to students from diverse backgrounds.

Chinese universities actively engage in institutional partnerships and collaborations with institutions worldwide to enhance their global reach and academic reputation. These partnerships facilitate student exchange programs, joint research projects, and academic collaborations, fostering cross-cultural understanding and knowledge exchange. Moreover, China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to strengthen economic ties, infrastructure development, and cultural exchanges between China and countries along the ancient Silk Road routes (Zreik, 2021). As part of the BRI, Chinese universities offer scholarships and educational opportunities to students from BRI partner countries, further enhancing China's appeal as a destination for international students (Aisi & Ruby, 2020; Peters & Zhu, 2021; Zreik, 2021). The influx of international students into China has significant economic and diplomatic implications for the country, enhancing China's soft power and global influence.

Despite its efforts to attract international students, China faces several challenges in achieving its goals of internationalization. Language barriers remain a significant obstacle for many international students, particularly those whose first language is not Mandarin. Cultural adaptation can also pose challenges, as international students navigate unfamiliar cultural norms, academic expectations, and social customs in China (Singh & Kaur, 2023). Quality assurance concerns, including variations in academic standards, teaching methodologies, and accreditation processes across Chinese universities, may deter some international students from choosing China as their study destination. Ensuring consistent quality and adherence to international standards is essential to maintain China's credibility as a higher education hub (Akram et al., 2019).

Japan

Japan has long been recognized for its rich cultural heritage, technological innovation, and academic excellence, making it an attractive destination for international students seeking quality education and cultural immersion. The country has implemented a range of policies and initiatives to enhance its attractiveness as a study destination and promote internationalization in higher education.

In Japan, initiatives such as "300000 international student plan" (Mozumi & Kazuyo, 2010), "Global 30" (Ishikawa, 2011) and "Super Global Universities" have aimed to enhance the international competitiveness of Japanese universities and promote cross-cultural exchange. Japan's "Global 30" initiative aims to internationalize Japanese universities by promoting English-taught degree programs, increasing the number of international students and faculty, and fostering global partnerships and collaborations. Under this initiative, select universities receive funding and support to develop innovative programs, enhance English proficiency, and strengthen international networks. The "Super Global Universities" (SGU) program, which aims to cultivate global leaders and foster cross-cultural understanding through comprehensive internationalization efforts. SGU-designated universities receive funding to implement strategic initiatives such as international joint degree programs, student exchange opportunities, and research collaboration projects.

The Japanese government offers several scholarship programs to support international students pursuing higher education in Japan. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) scholarships provide full or partial funding for tuition, living expenses, and other costs to outstanding students from around the world. Additionally, the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) offers scholarships, grants, and financial assistance to international students to alleviate their financial burden and facilitate their academic pursuits in Japan.

While Japan's rich cultural heritage and technological advancements appeal to many international students (Hennings & Mintz, 2015; Tran & Jin, 2021), language barriers, cultural adaptation and job hunting present obstacles to further growth in international student enrollment (Guo & Quan, 2006; Moriya, 2012; Park, 2012). Undergraduate degree programs in Japan are mainly conducted in Japanese, posing a barrier to international students who may not have proficiency in the language. While efforts have been made to increase English-taught programs, language barriers remain a significant challenge for international students seeking to fully engage with academic content and campus life. Cultural assimilation can also present challenges for international students, as they navigate unfamiliar cultural norms, social customs, and academic expectations in Japan. Moreover, demographic issues, such as Japan's aging population and declining birth rates, pose long-term challenges for higher education institutions in attracting and retaining international students amidst shrinking domestic student populations. Areas for improvement include expanding English-taught programs, enhancing support services for international students (Tran et al., 2022), and promoting cultural diversity and inclusion on campus. Moreover, Japan can leverage its strengths in innovation and research to attract more international

students. By addressing these areas for improvement, Japan can further enhance its attractiveness as a study destination and contribute to global knowledge exchange and collaboration.

Cross-regional comparison

Across the selected regions, several common themes emerge in international student attraction policies, including visa regulations, scholarship programs, institutional partnerships, and cultural integration initiatives. However, there are notable differences in policy approaches and emphasis. For instance, while U.S. and Europe prioritize diversity, research collaborations, and economic benefits, China and Japan focus on enhancing global competitiveness, cultural exchange, and soft power projection (Chansok & Presented, 2019; Lum et al., 2008; Seaman et al., 2021). Best practices identified through the comparative analysis include proactive marketing and promotion strategies, streamlined visa processes, robust scholarship programs, and comprehensive support services for international students. Moreover, initiatives such as institutional partnerships, joint degree programs, and research collaboration projects facilitate knowledge exchange and enhance the global reputation of universities.

The impact of international student policies on student mobility varies across regions. In U.S. and Europe, international student enrollment has remained relatively stable, with steady growth in certain countries and disciplines. However, recent geopolitical developments, such as Brexit and changes in U.S. immigration policies, have led to fluctuations in enrollment trends and destination choices. In China and Japan, international student enrollment has experienced significant growth in recent years, driven by government initiatives, scholarship programs, and increasing global recognition of Asian universities. However, language barriers, cultural adaptation issues, and quality assurance concerns remain challenges for international students in these regions, affecting their overall experiences and satisfaction.

The effectiveness of international student policies is contingent upon various factors, including policy coherence, stakeholder collaboration, and alignment with national priorities. While certain policies yield positive outcomes in the short term, their long-term sustainability hinges on factors such as funding stability, institutional capacity, and adaptability to changing geopolitical dynamics. Moreover, the sustainability of international student attraction policies requires continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation in response to emerging trends and challenges. Policies that foster institutional resilience, student-centered support services, and cross-cultural engagement are more likely to withstand external shocks and contribute to long-term success in attracting and retaining international students.

For universities, the findings underscore the importance of proactive engagement with international students, including targeted marketing efforts, student-centered support services, and cultural integration initiatives. By creating inclusive campus environments, universities can enhance the student experience and foster cross-cultural understanding. International students stand to benefit from policies that prioritize affordability, accessibility, and quality assurance. By leveraging scholarship opportunities, language support services, and employment pathways, international students can maximize their academic and professional growth while navigating the challenges of studying abroad.

Based on the study's findings, the following can be proposed to enhance international student policies.

Enhance affordability and accessibility: Policymakers should prioritize initiatives to reduce financial barriers, such as increasing scholarship opportunities and offering affordable housing options for international students.

Strengthen support services: Universities should invest in comprehensive support services, including language assistance, academic advising, mental health resources, and cultural integration programs, to facilitate the successful transition and retention of international students.

Foster institutional partnerships: Governments and universities should promote collaboration and knowledge exchange through international partnerships, joint research projects, and student exchange programs, fostering global networks and enhancing institutional competitiveness.

Streamline visa processes: Policymakers should streamline visa regulations and immigration procedures to facilitate the entry and stay of international students, providing clarity, transparency, and predictability in visa application processes.

Promote cultural diversity and inclusion: Universities should foster inclusive and welcoming campus environments that celebrate cultural diversity, promote intercultural dialogue, and combat discrimination and xenophobia.

Moving forward, research in the field of international student policies should focus on addressing emerging trends and challenges, including the impact of the pandemic, the rise of online learning, and shifting geopolitical dynamics. Longitudinal studies tracking international student mobility patterns, academic outcomes, and post-graduation trajectories can provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of student migration and the effectiveness of policy interventions.

Conclusion

The manuscript provides a rapid analysis of international student policies in U.S., Europe, China,

and Japan. The comparative analysis revealed diverse approaches to international student attraction policies across regions, encompassing visa regulations, scholarship programs, institutional partnerships, and cultural integration initiatives. While each region faces unique challenges, common themes of diversity, academic excellence, and global engagement emerged as central priorities. International student enrollment trends vary across regions, influenced by factors such as geopolitical developments, economic opportunities, and institutional reputation. Despite challenges, international students continue to make significant contributions to higher education systems and societies, enriching campus diversity, fostering academic innovation, and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

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