

Küster, Georg H.

Article — Digitized Version

Results of a traineeship in Japan

Intereconomics

Suggested Citation: Küster, Georg H. (1967) : Results of a traineeship in Japan, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 02, Iss. 5, pp. 130-131, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02930364>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/137742>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.

fewer people. In South America, the urban population is already increasing by over 5 % annually, while rural population growth is not more than 1.5 %. Overpopulated countries are threatened with acute food shortages and mass unemployment on a steadily increasing scale. The aggravation of the situation may strengthen socialist tendencies in efforts to master

the problems by centralized control, although experiences in certain countries show that the inept handling of state control can make economic conditions even worse. In any case, there is no escape from the prospect that the North-South gap in all its ramifications will supersede the East-West conflict as dominant factor of world politics in coming decades.

TRAINEE PROGRAMMES

Results of a Traineeship in Japan

By Dr Georg H. Küster, Hamburg

In order to give more effect to the theoretical university education a stay in foreign countries for the achievement of practical experiences is increasingly promoted. The German Committee of the International Association of Students of Economics (AIESEC) as a leading organisation is making efforts to realise a programme for the exchange of students to improve their professional training. These attempts are supported by the State and private institutions. In the following contribution the author reports on his experiences in Japan and discusses the various functions which can be fulfilled by a student traineeship on an international basis.

Japan and Geisha, Japan and tea-ceremonies, Japan and Chrysanthemums—these are wellknown associations which are evoked when one speaks of that country in the Far East. Japan as the greatest toy-exporter of the world, Japan as the leading nation (by far) in the world's shipbuilding industry, Japan as the country with the highest rate of growth among Western industrialised nations—these are facts which have only just begun to slowly force their way into the consciousness of Europe. Japan, which is in the words of one of its most famous economists "a rather singular example of a marriage between a traditional and an industrial society", is also an unusual example for the way in which a student traineeship should be interpreted and carried out.

The success of a practical training abroad is at first dependent on certain organisational and financial preconditions, which in the case of the Japan-traineeship the AIESEC fulfilled in a most praiseworthy manner. These preconditions included not only the procurement of suitable trainee places and the bargaining for an acceptable fare for the flight, but also the arrangement of introductory seminars and other programmes for the foreign students, viz. regular meetings, receptions, weekend tours, etc.

The Traineeship Programme

These preliminaries are the indeed necessary, but not sufficient preconditions for the success of such a project. The decisive factor here is above all the actual practical realisation on the part of student and company. The basic difficulty in this connection is attributable to the various interpretations and success-criteria of a student traineeship. While the university as an indirect participant would like to see the theoretical knowledge applied and illustrated, the students also consider the satisfaction of their sight-

seeing inclinations as the aim, and the traineeship as the means wherewith to achieve this. On the other hand it is hardly the concern of the enterprise to supply cultural and scenic impressions, but to increase its productivity. Put into a nutshell: Every student traineeship abroad hangs in the balance between information and productivity, between education and tourism, on the one hand, and student labour, on the other.

The principal experiences here covered are based on a traineeship with the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., which in 1965 had the second place in the Japanese sales hierarchy. The two German students who received a practical training from this concern were first instructed for three weeks in its head office, which is situated in Tokyo-Marunouchi, the Manhattan of Japan. There they learned about the firm's organisational structure, the assignments of the respective departments and the administrative background of the company's production. But this was not done in the way characteristic of traineeship in German enterprises where the students go through particular departments learning in each to fill out a typical kind of form, but with the help of introductory speeches by the heads of department and through short reports specially prepared for this purpose. In the discussions following each of these introductory courses the trainees had the chance to answer the frequent questions about the relevant circumstances in the German economy. This theoretical introductory programme in the head office was given a lighter touch and supported by visits to the company's board-inghouses and exhibition center, to the concern-owned economic research institute, and by showings of advertising films, etc.

The students received the practical information in the concern's factories. The visits to the shipyards

of Kobe and Nagasaki, the car factories of Mizushima and Nagoya, the machine factories of Takasago and Nagoya and the aircraft factories of Nagoya served the study of the production process and programme, and was to give an idea of the high technical standard of Japanese industry. The last two weeks of the traineeship which were spent in the head office, had the aim of allowing a comparison between the theory and the practice, the administration and the production of this enterprise.

The Japanese Flavour

The traineeship, however, was not only given its typically Japanese flavour as a result of the high quota of economic information, for the Japanese enterprises saw the traineeship rather as a form of education which was to communicate not only economic but also social and cultural impressions and insights. So for example some directors of the concern took time to discuss with the German students economic and political problems of both Japan and Germany during meals laid on specially for this purpose. The trainees' desire for sight-seeing was met by the journeys to the factories, situated in various regions of Japan, as well as by trips to wellknown objects of interest, organised and financed by the firm. To acquaint the students with the customs of the Japanese people it was arranged for the trainees to stay in Japanese style boarding-houses, to visit the ancient Japanese Sumo-wrestling, tea-ceremonies and Kabuki- and Noh-theatres as well as for them to receive an introduction to Japanese night-life—everything on the initiative of the students' personal advisers.

The wide range of information the trainees got from the organisation of their traineeship by Japanese firms can be seen to have two causes: the social organisation of Japanese enterprises and the particular aim of a traineeship from the point of view of Japanese companies. The system of a Japanese enterprise must be seen as a feudal-patriarchal structure which is copied from the Japanese family system. The company as clan exercises countless familial functions which from a European viewpoint intrude into the individual's personal affairs. There is a relationship of personal trust between a company's management and its workers. This results in the notably high working ethos of the employees, on the one hand, and on the other hand the extensive expenditures for workers' welfare institutions, and the employment-guarantee granted to regular workers by the company. It is obvious that in such a social framework trainees are treated more like guests and are more widely informed than for example in German enterprises, where the efficiency principle of a market economy forms the basis of the social structure of an enterprise.

The second reason for the wide range of information of the traineeship in Japan has an economic character. Japan is an economy strongly dependent on exports which, however, suffers from the unpleasant stigma of

being a typical low-price economy whose products have a low quality. The reputation of only being able to produce goods of a lower quality restricts Japanese export possibilities especially in the established industrialised nations, and thus a continuation of the Japanese economic miracle. Japanese industry undergoes considerable costs to remove this psychological obstacle to an increase in exportation. For this reason the traineeship of the German students was regarded as a welcome opportunity to break through this psychological barrier and cause Japan's reputation as an economy producing on the highest technical level to infiltrate into Europe.

Between Information and Productivity

The sales-political significance of foreign trainees should not be underestimated in mature economies, where more and more notice is being taken of sales-possibilities. Seen in this way, there is an evident way out of the initially formulated conflict of ends between a broad horizon of information—which implies larger expenses for the trainees on the part of enterprises—and a narrow basis of productivity. There is also on the sales side of an enterprise a considerable reservoir for increases in productivity, which can be added to by the granting of traineeships and relatively extensive information for the foreign students. And those to whom the idea of the "trainee as advertiser" might appear too much the product of a market-economy rationality should be reminded that it is among other things the advertising revenue of radio and television which bestow upon us the Third Programme, and therewith the transmission of cultural treasures which we could hardly expect otherwise.

It is probably too much to expect from the student a productive share in the running process of production during his traineeship. But there is also on the input side a solution of the conflict between the productive and informative aspects of a traineeship, if one considers that in the long run an internationally experienced rising generation of managers is thus created for an economy. The importance of this factor, especially for heavily export-orientated industrialised nations, should not be disregarded in a time when the international division of labour is continually increasing. Japanese enterprises, however, do not seem to have fully grasped this idea. The inherent possibilities of this direction are indeed recognised, but in economic practice such foreign experiences do not play a very weighty role. Persuasive indeed is the observation that Japanese enterprises do not allow their employees with foreign experience to make a contribution to the firm's production which would correspond to their actual ability. The traditional heritage of Japan's isolation-period (Tokugawa-Period) considerably impairs here the fulfillment of this country's (and its economy's) wish for international contacts. Seen from this viewpoint German enterprises have doubtless understood better the signs of the times.