



## EDUCATION

# Japanese Universities Try to Prevent Espionage

May 28, 2022

Japan is asking its universities to better investigate their foreign students and professors.

The request is part of an effort to prevent technology leaks to places like China. The issue is important for Japan's national security and for protecting exchanges with the United States and European universities.

Many Western countries have expanded security measures to prevent spying at their universities.

Japanese officials say a series of arrests in the U.S. of Chinese **academics** created a sense of urgency.

"Around the world, export controls are getting more **stringent** on foreign nations like China," said a Japanese trade ministry official who did not want to be identified. The official works with universities on ways to keep better watch on students and high-risk technology data.

"We want Japanese universities to be trusted for their security and trade controls so that joint research with the United States or Europe can continue," the trade ministry official said.

Last year, Japanese media reported that nine Chinese researchers had left Japan to work in the defense industry back home. They had studied missile technologies.

## New guidelines

Under the new guidelines, effective this month, universities are being asked to investigate and flag students, professors and researchers who have ties to foreign governments or the defense field.

In the past, such investigation had been limited to cases of people trying to send sensitive information and goods overseas.

The U.S. embassy in Japan said it welcomed the new security measures. In an emailed statement to Reuters, it said the United States would look for new ways to help Japan protect against what it called "real and serious" research security problems in both countries.

Japanese government data shows that Chinese students made up 44 percent of Japan's 279,597 foreign university students in 2020. The United States was the top destination for Japanese researchers, followed by China, in 2019.

## Effectiveness

But questions remain over how effective the new system will be. And, some academics are opposed to it.

Takahiko Sasaki oversees export controls at Tohoku University. He said it will seek signed agreements from professors. By signing, the teacher promises not to teach sensitive technology to people with ties to foreign governments, unless specially permitted.

That would be on top of an existing policy asking foreign faculty and students to submit a promise in writing to follow Japanese export control regulations, he said.

Sasaki added, "We are not intelligence operators. Checking **resumes** and academic records - that should be the extent of our job as a university."

I'm John Russell.

*Ju-min Park and Kaori Kaneko*

---

## Words in This Story

**academic** – *n.* a person who is a teacher in a college or university

**stringent** – *adj.* very strict or severe

**resume** – *n.* a short document describing your education, work history, etc., that you give an employer when you are applying for a job

---