HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN SRI LANKA
UNDER JAPANESE ASSISTANCE:
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

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Saliya De Silva**

I. Introduction

The human capital and its role in economic development often viewed as a debatable phenomenon in the development economics. The main reason for this is that it always contradicted with the concept of capital and its appearance role in economic development. In the sense of conventional definition, capital means money, credit and shares that can be invested to produce further income and other outputs over a long period of time. In contrary, the human capital refers to the productive capacities of human beings as income producing agents in the economy (Eatwell et al., 1987: 681). As noted by Becker (1993: 15), education, training, expenditure on medical care, and lectures on the virtues of punctuality and honesty are capital too in the sense that they improve health, raise earnings, increase productivity or add to a person’s appreciation of literature over much of his/her life time. As a result, it is fully keeping with the concept of capital as traditionally defined to say that expenditure on education, training, medical care etc. are investments

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1 See Becker (1993) for detailed information on difference between capital and human capital and their role in economic development.
in human capital. Becker further argues that these produced human, not physical or financial, capital because one cannot separate a person from his/her knowledge, skills, health, or values the way it is possible to move financial and physical assets independent of the owner. This implies that the economic development of a country cannot be achieved only with the availability of resource endowments and capital unless the country attempts to enhance its people’s knowledge or so-called human capital. This means human capital is another *sine qua non* for achieving a sustainable economic development.

In this study, human capital development (HCD) limits its scope to the enhancement of human potentials achieved through imparting proper knowledge, skills, and attitudes by higher education and training institutions. The presumption has been that proper knowledge, skills, and attitudes are the architects of capacity to mobilize and organize non-human resources which accelerate the economic and social growth.

There are mixed findings in the literature pertaining to the relationship between human capital and economic growth: one group supporting a very strong correlation while others found negative or insignificant relationship between these two variables. The researchers who are supporting positive relationship have identified two major benefits which have been defined by different terms such as ‘public’ and ‘private’ benefits (Bloom et al., 2006: 15); monetary and non-monetary benefits (Hill et al., 2005); social and economic benefits etc. For example, the private benefits for individuals include better employment prospects, higher wages, and a greater ability to save and invest. These benefits invariably contribute to improvement of the health and quality of life, thus increasing life expectancy. It also raises labour productivity, creativity, ability to use of modern technologies and promotes entrepreneurship. The public benefits also derive from the private gains, as higher earnings for educated individuals raise tax revenues and
increase consumption rate, reduce growth rate of population and crime rates, and increase civic participation, voting rate, and understanding the responsibility etc.). These will lead to further enhancement of capital accumulation leading to modernization or so-called industrialization of the country (Bloom et al., 2006: 15; Lopez et al., 1998; Kent et al., 2005).

In contrast, some studies found that education as a main component of the human capital by itself does not guarantee successful development, as history has shown in the former Soviet bloc, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and the Indian States of Kerala and West Bengal (Lopez et al., 1998). Pritchett (1996) also stressed that increase in educational capital have had no positive impact on the growth rate of output per worker. Similarly, Friedman and his wife Rose originally suggested that there was no evidence that ‘higher education yields social benefits’ over and above the benefits that accrue to the students themselves. On the contrary, they hypothesized that higher education may promote ‘social unrest and political instability’ (extracted from Bloom et al., 2006: 1). The education has to be combined with the following two major factors if it is expecting a worthwhile benefit for economic development: the first, appropriate policy environment; and second, quality and usability of the education. As emphasized Lopez (1998: 5), the policy environment determines what people can do with their education. Mismatch of demand and supply of the labour market; and mismatch of the requirements of the labour market can cause insignificant impact of education on economic growth. The quality and usability of the human capital trained at the various educational institutions are also important factors that crucially influence the impact of education on growth. For example, it is universally recognized that Japan’s postwar economic success was overwhelmingly dependent on the quality and usability of its human capital compared any other country in the world.

Instead of these disagreements, the main components of the human
capital, especially education and training are widely accepted as major leading factors for enhancing economic growth in developing countries in the last half a century. The economic growth in these countries is considered as the most relevant and powerful strategy to find a lasting solution to mitigate incidence of poverty. Keeping this fact as a base, the international organizations and major donor countries have exclusively focus on human capital development as a major way to reduce poverty and promote economic growth in developing countries in the world.

Japan as a major donor country in the present world has given a prominent emphasis on strength of human resource development as an important factor to support ‘self-help efforts’ in recipient countries to achieve sustainable development by the people themselves. The concept of self-help efforts refers to the acceptance of responsibility or ownership, by developing countries themselves, for the future of their countries, and entail the expenditure of effort by the citizens of these countries to further development of their countries (ODA White Paper, 2007: 38). In this respect, the Japan’s annual ODA budget has allocated a huge amount of financial and material assistance under ‘technical cooperation’ to enhance human capital in developing countries to help their nation-building efforts. In addition, there are number of government and semi-government or private institutions like Ministry of Higher Education (Monbusho), the Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship (AOTS), Japan Foundation, Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement-International (OISCA), Japan Vocational Ability Development Association (JAVADA) etc. giving large number of educational and training programmes to augmentation of human capital in developing countries in the last few decades. For instance the number of foreign students in Japan has increased by 21 times from 5,573 in 1975 to 118,498 in 2007 (JASSO Home Page, 2008). From Sri Lanka alone, a total of 1,181 students from different fields have
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Source: JASSO  * Japanese Government funded (Monbukagakusho) students
entered to various education institutions in Japan in 2007 (Table 1). There is no doubt that these educational and training programs under different types of institutions in Japan are largely influenced by its own remarkable economic growth largely due to accumulation of human capital, especially education in its long history.

Naturally, all these efforts must have had a substantial contribution to nation building efforts of developing countries, specifically Asia although it cannot be evaluated numerically. However, there are disparate opinions on the quality of human resource developed under Japanese assistance compared to people who have received similar education and training under European and American assistance. Many argue that quality of human capital developed under Japanese assistance remains in lower level than that of the European and American.

Therefore, it is important to examine how Japanese government and its various institutions have assisted the improvement of human capital, the strengths and weaknesses of its educational programs and its role in socioeconomic development of Asia. Although foreign training in Sri Lanka dates back to 1812 when De Serum family studied at Oxford University, there are hardly any studies done in Sri Lanka to find out the strengths and weaknesses of such foreign training and evaluate the actual contribution of those foreign scholars to the Sri Lankan economy. This study aims to explore how returning Sri Lankan students and trainees are contributing to their own economy after studying in various academic disciplines in Japanese educational institutions under Japanese assistance in the last five decades. Emphasis is given to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the educational programs in Japanese institutions under various financial assistance programs, while comparing with similar academic programs in other countries, especially in the USA, Europe, and other western countries. As the terms imply, strengths and weaknesses are the factors that are internal to the education programs in Japan, thus
could be controlled. The results of the study, we sincerely hope, will contribute to the improvement of the policies of education, research and training of the public and private sector institutions in Japan to meet the human capital demand in developing countries. At the same time, it will also contribute to the improvement of various ongoing policies and programmes towards internationalization of Japanese university education. Thus, the results of the study are anticipated to contribute to develop Japan as an education centre of excellence in Asia in the future.

II. Methodology

The survey results are based on the literary survey and a sample survey carried out in Sri Lanka during the period of August to September 2008. A series of interviews were carried out in various organizations which employ scholars trained in Japan as well as organizations which are directly and indirectly involved in providing assistance to such scholars to train in Japan. Few interviews with academicians and officers trained in westerns countries were also held to support the findings. The primary data collection methodology includes a questionnaire survey, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions carried out from August to September 2008, which are presented in Table 2. A preliminary questionnaire survey included 32 academicians at University of Peradeniya who have had higher-level education and training in Japanese universities. These scholars had various backgrounds in science (biology, and chemistry), applied sciences (engineering, agriculture, dental, and veterinary) and arts (management, political, and geography) subjects. The total sample of the questionnaire survey, the key informant interviews and focus group discussions included 94 Individuals who have had training in various Japanese educational institutions under different assistance programs and officers directly or indirectly involved in
providing such assistance to Sri Lanka. The idea was to determine the strengths and weaknesses, thus the emphasis was given to obtain their attitudes and perceptions rather than quantitative measures. Therefore, the analyses are also rather qualitative and descriptive.

**Table 2:** Sample of the Survey and Major Data Collection Methodology

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<td>Informant Interviews, &amp; Focused Group Discussions</td>
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Notes: Focused Group Discussion—Discussion with scholars trained in Japan
* The governing body of Sri Lankan higher education institutions
** The first Japanese funded hospital in Sri Lanka

### III. Human Capital Development under Japanese Assistance in Sri Lanka: Strengths and Weaknesses

In this section, the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese education system are presented as perceived by scholars who have returned to Sri Lanka after their training in Japan. The perceptions of
the scholars from the western countries were also used to strengthen and validate the strengths and weaknesses. Because of the heterogeneous nature of the scholars, who varies in their education program, subject fields and sources of funds, it is really difficult to provide detailed lists of strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, the following strengths and weaknesses are of a general nature. They are neither exhaustive nor comprehensive and some are interrelated.

1. **Strengths of Japanese Higher Education System as Perceived by Sri Lankan Scholars**

   ① **Familiarity of Japanese culture**

   One of the hardest difficulties that any foreign student would face in another country is the “culture shock”. Most of the time, students face difficulties in adapting to new food habits, language, customs, value systems and even to the climate. Since Japanese people basically have Asian Buddhist values, unlike western countries, Sri Lankans would find it easier to adapt to their new conditions. In contrast to the West, which would be a far-reaching change, in Japan one would find shrines and Buddhist temples as religious places, ‘matsuri’ i.e. traditional festivals where community gather, rice as a staple food, and values such as groupism, power distance, and so on which are more similar to what they have had in Sri Lanka. However, for many Sri Lankans, unlike English which they are used to, Japanese language becomes one of the most serious hurdles to live in Japan. Nevertheless, some learn Japanese, at least the spoken Japanese quickly, since it has grammatical expressions similar to Sinhalese (main language in Sri Lanka). According to many respondents, knowing a 3rd language has become very handy once they returned to Sri Lanka. For many Sri Lankans, their Japanese supervisors never allowed them to speak in English particularly at the seminar class, which is held weekly where all of their students get together to discuss
subject matter.  

One serious problem Sri Lankans find in the west countries is discrimination, which is still happening in a covert way according to many who have studied there. In contrast to the West, Japanese people would never consider a Sri Lankan as a stranger. Sri Lankan students are considered as a part of their own community without any discrimination. Japanese community respects the Sri Lankan culture, their values and customs thus the students are often invited for cultural exchange activities.

An important criterion of effective learning is the pragmatism, and applicability of what Sri Lankans learn in foreign countries to Sri Lanka. Many who have studied in the West find it difficult to apply what they learn since the conditions are totally different. Japan is an ‘ideal model’ for Sri Lanka, if its people want to rebuild the nation. In two–three decades, Japanese have managed to overcome their difficult periods and developed into the second largest economy in the world from their devastated economy in the Second World War.

② Positive attitude towards Japanese training

One important observation that many make about training in Japan particularly in the last decade is change of rather a pessimistic attitude into an optimistic attitude. The attitude has changed from “not What you learn but Where you learn” to “not Where but How and What you learn”. In the former, people believed that whatever you learn whether it is appropriate or not, one should get it from the popular educational

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2 One eminent scholar holding a top administrative position indicated that, because of this practice, finally he was able to get the Regional Speech Prize in Japanese. Furthermore, he said at this seminar he made sure to ask a least one question and actively participate in it. This helped him to develop his leadership qualities and get rid of shyness.
institutions in the West. Development of such attitude is fairly straightforward as Sri Lanka had been a colony of Europe for more than 450 years. People who could get education and afford foreign training were the ones who could adapt to western culture, their values and customs. Most of the senior academicians particularly in the old universities are western qualified. These western biased people with colonial values have negative attitude towards training provided by other countries like Japan. It is hard for them to realize that Japan is the second largest economy in the world and they have strong social systems and cultural values which cannot be seen in other parts of the world.

The development of optimistic values towards Japanese training was not that smooth and quick. Many factors contributed to such change. People are becoming aware of dangers of colonial value systems and dependence mentality as well as the importance of Asian values and patriotic culture. Japan has long been a partner in Sri Lanka’s development process as there has been a significant continuous growth of Japanese aid. People now realized that Japan is far ahead in terms of the quality of goods and services they produce compared to western countries. Another major contributing factor is the outstanding performance of the people returned after training in Japan (will be discussed later in this section). Because their extraordinary performance, it has become easier for them to get into senior academic positions in the universities. All these factors have positively contributed to create an optimistic attitude toward Japanese training. Now one could find many senior professors who have studied in the West keen on educating their children in Japan rather than the West. In next 5-10 years time, Sri Lankan universities will be led by scholars trained in Japan. New ways of administering the universities will be there, and possibly some of the existing problems in the Sri Lankan university education will be disappeared.
Exposure to development principles and technology transfer

Japan rates number one in the world in many economic, technological, environmental, political and social development indicators. Technologically, Japan occupies first three slots in the world. They are also the number one in terms of the quality of goods and services offered. Sri Lankan scholars get exposed to all these development principles. The strength of Japanese training is that they explain why a certain technology or process is being used. Rather than teaching most advanced technologies, they teach the basic technology first. One scientist mentioned that he was really got annoyed at the beginning as he was asked to learn the basics and conduct only basic research by his supervisor. Until he could explain about the principles of a particular technology to his supervisor, he was never allowed to use the advanced technology and conduct applied research. But after some time he realized how important it is to learn the basics if he wants to use a particular technology in Sri Lanka.

Supervisors always encourage students to address a real problem in Sri Lanka in their PhD dissertations. Some training programs are specifically designed for a particular country, for example JICA sponsored training program in vegetable seed production for Sri Lanka. This approach helps them to effectively transfer the technology from Japan to Sri Lanka. Technology transfer from developed countries to developing counties has always been a strategic decision. However, compared to the West, Asian countries have been more liberal in transferring technology to developing nations like Sri Lanka. In the macro perspective this is very clear-cut as none of the countries colonized by Europeans are technologically advanced even today, but the Japanese colonies like South Korea and Taiwan have become some of the most technologically advanced societies in the World.
Practical orientation of the training programmes

According to many scholars who had studied abroad, Japanese training is very practical oriented in contrast to the West which is more theoretical. In Japan, students learn a lot by “doing things” rather than “hearing things”. There are no assistants to conduct research. According to one prominent vegetable breeder from the Department of Agriculture; “There weren’t vegetable plots to do my experiments. My supervisor (professor) only tells me that, there is the tractor, and there is the land, you can start ploughing”. So they could learn a lot of things and gain the skills by practically doing things personally from the beginning. Japanese training relies on trying to understand the ground realities. They encourage doing deep research in the field (‘gemba’ in Japanese) so that students can capture the ground realities. Most scholars value the training that they got more to the degree certificate from the university.

The importance of such training is highly visible among scholars returned to Sri Lanka. Returning scholars are more research oriented. The researcher from the Department of Agriculture mentioned that since he had to do his research alone, without any assistants, he could do the same thing here without depending on labourers to assist him. Compared to other breeders, the outcome of this approach has been very positive as he has managed to release few hybrid vegetable varieties within a short period of time. Similarly one economist mentioned that, although the usual practice in Sri Lanka is to manipulate statistics from the Central Bank and the Department of Census and Statistics to do desk research, he managed to do research in the field level. He mentioned one example of a research on urban poverty, where he had to survey about 3000 three-wheel drivers in difficult conditions. According to him, there are a lot of

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3 Many of these 3-wheel drivers live in urban slumps, and conditions are not that conducive to conduct research by outsiders as there are mafia, underworld activities, and illegal activities going on.
issues to be addressed at the ground level, and for him it was very rewarding. He could get his professorship at very young age as he could write many research articles and books based on his field research.

5 Holistic training and moral support

Japanese training is not only on academic affairs or on a particular subject area. Most of the time the academic supervisors do not only act as a teacher or a coach, but also as a mentor who looks into development of a broadminded person with full of potentials. There are a lot of other things that one can learn from the academic staff and the supervisor, as well as from friends, community and the general public. Some of these skills which are generally termed “soft skills” are very important to have an effective and efficient career later. These soft skills include areas such as, how to live in harmony with other people; emotional intelligence; punctuality; being patient; continuous improvement; keeping the promises, hard work, honesty, love for the nation and organization, trust and so on. For example, these are very important for an academic to dedicate himself to an academic life; collaborate in research work; do research in those areas mostly important to the country and then to the international community; and so on.

Another important aspect of Japanese training is the moral support a student receives from his/her supervisor. Professor understands the “psyche” of foreign students and he becomes the 2nd father. They go out of the way and help students. One scholar stated that once his supervisor, Professor Shimoda from Tokyo University, who was in England at the time he requested an acceptance letter for a friend had to return to Japan to issue the letter and go back to England to continue his assignment. Although there is no frequent formal monitoring system of the academic work of the students, every day the supervisor meets the students may be over a coffee or tea and ask about the progress. Very importantly, they
never hurry-up things.

6 Research amenities, facilities and student welfare

Sri Lankan scholars who train in Japan are very fortunate to have unlimited access to most of the facilities. Their libraries are up to date with a variety of journals, books, etc. They have unlimited access to IT facilities and Internet. Every student is provided with a latest computer and original software needed. University labs are equipped with latest technology and equipment. Consumables like chemicals are in adequate supply. Massive amounts of money are spent on equipment and consumables (e.g. photosynthesis machine) even they are being used by a single student if the supervisor feels that they are important to carry out his research. Very often supervisors spends their own money to purchase these equipments. An important thing is that these facilities are available not only for scholarship holders but also for private sponsored students.

Apart from these research amenities, other facilities such as hostels, canteens, etc. are also provided by the higher education institutions. A cooperative is available in every university, where student can purchase almost all the necessary goods and services required from a pencil to apartment. There are housing facilities available in the university vicinity so that individuals or families could easily find accommodation. Both parents can learn, as there are day care centers where parents find them even safer than their homes. Special welfare systems are available for health insurance, housing rents, and child birth of foreign students and their families.

There is a university paid academic tutor for each and every foreign student to guide and help them in their academic and personal problems. Unlike other countries, the peers and other university students are very friendly and are very helpful, perhaps deriving from their group culture. They become very handy when conducting the field research. In addition,
there are volunteer groups to help foreign students. These volunteer
groups attend to various matters of not only the students but also their
families. These include language training; classes on various Japanese
culture/arts; helping students find bicycles and household equipment; and
even legal services. At large, community is very helpful for the foreign
students. One scholar mentioned that when both of them (i.e. he and his
wife) were learning, the next door lady took care of their children after
the daycare. There are financial support systems for almost all students
who do not get a scholarship. These financial supports include tuition
waivers, assistantships, and scholarships from the university, city/
prefectural government, non-governmental agencies, private sector, and
individuals, etc.

7 A favorable value system

Among other thing, one of the most important aspects of Japanese
training is the learning that happen outside the classroom; things that
they can learn from the culture. Patriotism, which Sri Lanka has lost
perhaps due to colonial influence over a long period, is very high among
Japanese people. The world development history tells us that unless a
nation has patriotic values, thus a majority of people who love their own
country, none of them could develop. In Japan, country becomes the first,
then the organization and the individual at last. In the West, the approach
is different; what ever they do, it is for individual development first, and
then the organization and the nation. Unfortunately, this is the kind of
attitude that most of Sri Lankan students have when they graduate,
perhaps due to the influence of teachers trained in the West. Thus, a
change of attitude of the Sri Lankan graduates on how to use the higher
education for development of the nation, thus the organization, which
would eventually lead to individual development, is important. This
change and patriotic values are an important byproduct that the Sri
Lankans trained in Japan get. Recognizing the importance of such a value system to rebuild the nation, the chairman of the UGC in fact suggested making “moral education” a compulsory subject for all the university students in Sri Lanka.

Another principle that the Japanese scholars learn is hard work. In the universities, like many other places in Japan including the government offices, one would see people work till 12 midnight. In the universities, they work 14 to 16 hours in the labs everyday. One respondent equated his 3½ years training in the Sri Lankan university to one month in Japan. One observation made by an official in JBIC was that; “Sri Lankans do only what is asked from them but not anymore. There is no plus alfa work. People who work extra, are believed to be taking money/bribes from someone thus they get the bad name”. Due to some reason, Sri Lankans are not motivated to work. This hard working behavior was important for Japanese to earn their lost status in the Second World War devastation. Scholars trained in Japan are also trained for this type hard work. For example, students are expected to continue their research until the terminal part of their degrees and until they find something worthwhile. They are expected to publish a few papers in refereed journals, which is very difficult.

Another aspect that goes in parallel is the importance of time management. Japanese may be the most concerned society about managing time in the world. In Japan, a few minutes delay would cause series problems in most aspects of life. They are well organized and well planned society. Decisions are taken very carefully well in advance. For example, scholars who could not manage their time properly, i.e. who could not finish his/her degree program during the stipulated time period, have to face consequence of losing their scholarship. The general attitude about Sri Lankans is that they are always late even the ones those lead the country and organizations, which is often true. For Sri Lankans
learning time management would be really important. It was revealed that the scholars return to Sri Lanka always try to keep their work on time.

Another important aspect of Japanese training is independence. As discussed in the section on practical training; supervisor act as a mentor rather than a coach. Unless there is a difficult situation, there is minimum support from the supervisor to understanding the subject matter and/or carrying out the research. Knowledge should be earned rather than spoon-fed like in Sri Lanka. This practice helps them to develop good self confidence and over–come the dependency syndrome that most Sri Lankan graduates possess.

Japanese scholars also get training on mutual respect and discipline. There is mutual respect among people irrespective of the position they hold in the social stratification. There is no conflict among different strata of the society, for example in the universities among the administrators, academics, non-academics staff, laborers, etc. and even the students. Students come and talk their problems with teachers and there is mutual understanding of each other. Sometimes the supervisor becomes a good friend, parent, a brother or a sister but inside the lab/classroom he is always a teacher. These roles do not mix and students always respect their teachers.

⑧ Return rate of Sri Lankans trained in Japan

It is assumed that the scholars studied abroad furnish corps of middlemen trained in both cultures who can act as a link between Sri Lanka and the developed nations. Scholars who go to the West get “Westernized”, which is more artificial to Sri Lankans. Once returned, they are unable to make the type of adjustment and become museum like custodians of Western culture rather than active catalysts in a developing society. In other cases, they feel completely unable to return to Sri
Lanka, and thus become a part of the “brain drain” which siphons off the talents to the countries where such talents are already in greatest supply. According to the UGC Chairman, many scholars who study in the USA, Australia, the UK, New Zealand and Canada never comeback. Their educational experience in the West has been a process of cultural change, which has destroyed their roots in their native country and made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to return to a constructive career in Sri Lanka.

On the contrary, perhaps due to value system inculcate while in Japan most of the scholars return to Sri Lanka to serve the country. This is easy for them since there is no misfit between what they learn and what they apply. According to the JICA reports, in 1994 Sri Lanka ranked second in disappearing of trainees. But now no one runs away and stays in Japan. More importantly even the scholars who stay in Japan tend to support Sri Lanka, perhaps more than they could have done if they return to Sri Lanka, compared to ones stay in the West.

In Sri Lanka, there are ample of opportunities to scholars trained in Japan. According to the JETRO, there are 80 Japanese companies in Sri Lanka, thus they can find employment in these companies. There are also 105 JBIC funded large projects in Sri Lanka, with total fund allocation of 7,000 billion Yen. According to the JBIC, some of the scholars who had Japanese training are performing very well in Sri Lanka starting their own companies. For example, MAGA and Shanken Lanka, two top construction companies in Sri Lanka were established and headed by people who have experience in working with Mitsue Corporation, Japan.

9 Returnees progress of work

Although a full-scale comparative study was not done, the preliminary survey indicated that the scholars return to Sri Lanka after Japanese training perform very well. They take challenges by involving
in various administrative posts; engage in regional and national
development activities; and most of all they thoroughly engage in
conducting applied research. Table 3 shows the average number of
papers in refereed journals, non-refereed journals, presentations and
books published by the scholars returned after Japanese training. The
statistics do not show any outstanding performance as far as number of
publications per year. However, in Sri Lankan universities, there is
minimum emphasis on research and dissemination of knowledge
generated. In such a culture, these statistics would be definitely better
than the average.

Table 3: Research Output of the Scholars Returned from Japan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publications</th>
<th>Average Number of Publications per year</th>
<th>Average Number of Publications per Scholar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of papers in refereed journals</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of papers in non-refereed journals, presentations, &amp; abstracts</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of books</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to their university teaching, research, and administration
services, they are actively taking part in various government, non-
governmental, and private sector organizations. They have taken various
responsibilities such as consultants to ministries (e.g. peace building,
transportation, agriculture, irrigation, industrial development,
education); advisory and steering committees (road traffic accident
prevention); boards of directors (e.g. Sri Lanka Foundation Institute,
Veterinary Drug Control); chairpersonships (MILCO, National Institute
of Business Management); country coordinators of international agencies
(e.g. Cap-Net) and as consultants in private sector organizations (e.g.
Richard Peiris Co. Ltd). Various awards have been won including
Presidential Award, National Science and Technology Awards, awards

— 20 —
for best paper presentations, research fellowships (e.g. JASSO, Commonwealth) and grants (e.g. National Science Foundation) and so on for their outstanding performances.

Since there is hardly any misfit between what they learn and what really happens in Sri Lanka, they have been able to apply various things such as 5S system, Kaizen centers, time management, and “seminar” as a subject in the curriculum, establishment of similar labs (e.g. GIS), establishment of new departments (e.g. business management, computer engineering in Peradeniya Universities) in Sri Lanka. There was a clear distinction of the offices of the scholars returned from Japan and others, where the former was well organized and kept nice and clean. Scholars who return to Sri Lanka develop proposals for their own sectors and most of the time they have been able secure funds for these proposals from Japanese universities, JICA or elsewhere. All these result in, as it was observed among scholars who have studied in Japan, a steady career progression. Most of them have got their promotions comparatively in a shorter period of time.

Moreover, in contrast to the West, Sri Lankans studied in Japan maintain a very strong relationship with Japan, the supervisor, the university, and the community. For academicians there are follow up programs by the Monbugakkusho (Ministry of Higher Education) itself.

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4 In Japan, 5S [Seiri (tidiness), Seiton (orderliness), Seiso (cleanliness), Seiketsu (standardization), Shitsuke (discipline)] is commonly known as a structured program to systematically achieve total organization, cleanliness, and standardization in the workplace. A well-organized workplace results in a safer, more efficient, and more productive operation. It boosts the morale of the workers, promoting a sense of pride in their work and ownership of their responsibilities (http://www.siliconfareast.com/5S.htm).

5 One scholar who has done his PhD in the period 1981-1987 (20 years before) told that they had three Japanese families for their daughter’s wedding ceremony in Sri Lanka in 2008.
Supervisors, often arrange sabbatical jobs in their universities. They develop friendships and engage in collaborative research. The supervisors visit Sri Lanka 4-5 times and provide assistance in terms of expertise, finance and equipment to carry out research in Sri Lanka. These practices are very important to keep their knowledge up to date. Scholars also develop link programs between organizations where they studied and where they work after return. For example Dental Faculty of the University of Peradeniya has links with five sister universities namely; Saga, Niigata, Hokkaido, Tsurumi, and Tokyo Medical and Dental University (TMDU). The Faculty of Agriculture in the same university has links with four sister universities namely; Saga, Obihiro, Ehime, and Yamaguchi.

There is also an alumni association of graduate students (JAGAAS) which was founded in 1994. They engage in various development and cultural exchange activities. For instance recently they conducted training for nursery teachers on storytelling (‘Manga’ reading); origami, etc. In addition, the JICA Alumni Association also conducts various social welfare programs such as eye camp in Anuradhapura; vocational training; and solid waste disposal under ‘api wawamu rata nagamu program’; Bibile orange workshop; making plates from Banana Leaf; and so on.

So far what was discussed in this section falls into positive aspects, strengths and opportunities in Japanese education and training system. However, not all scholars who had foreign training have the same opinion. According to many, there are several weaknesses of the Japanese education system and scholars trained in Japan. These weaknesses are summarized in the following section.
2. Weaknesses of Japanese Higher Education System as Perceived by Sri Lankan Scholars

① Negative attitude towards scholars trained in Japan

At present, most of the top positions, particularly in the old higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, are occupied by the staff trained in the West as they were the only opportunities had at that time. These western-biased scholars have negative attitudes towards all other nations including countries like Japan and India, which have some of the best education systems in the world. Not only the senior staff, even the recently returned staff members from the West have similar value system. There are reports showing that these Western biased staff members who are in the top, discriminating scholars from other countries including Japan. These reports include for example discriminating staff trained in Japan when selecting for the university council, various administrative posts like headships in the departments and various university centers and deanships, etc. They are underrated on the basis of lack of proficiency in English language, the language of higher education in Sri Lanka; lack of quality of their journal articles as others believe in Japan anything that is written can be published, and as people greedy of money. Development of such attitudes is fairly straightforward. Scholars cannot improve their English language proficiency in Japan. Majority of the scholars who studied in Japan, particularly in the early period when there was economic boom in Japan, were exposed to various business opportunities. At that time, many ignored their main objective of learning and started engaged in various business activities.

However, as discussed in section III ②, these negative attitudes toward Japanese training, are now changing into more optimistic ones. Even some senior academic staff members indicated that they should have studied in countries like Japan and India so that they could have
better served Sri Lanka. There are many who believe that Japanese scholars are more versatile and they have fulfilled most of their requirements in academic as well as personal lives. They live a better life⁶, having basic amenities like a house to live, vehicle to travel, etc. without ignoring their contribution to the workplace, region and the nation. However, there is a long way to go in order to develop a total optimistic picture towards scholars trained in Japan, and that task is up to the scholars who return.

② Imbalance life

Although, Japan provides a balanced training, some believe they are more ‘workaholic’. Japanese teach students “how to work” but not “how to rest and enjoy the life”, which is different to the Western countries. In the West, weekends, holidays, vacations, and time off during a day have their true meaning of rest. But in Japan, they exist only for the namesake. People are often seen work during their off time and they do not claim for overtime for the extra work they do. Because of this, Japanese form one of the most stressful societies in the World. Some indicated that their Professors and Associate Professors, who are under sever stress, palm it down to foreign students. Most of the scholars trained in Japan tend to continue their lifestyle in Sri Lanka too. There are many instances where such scholars have ignored their family life and totally devote their lives to the workplaces.

③ Too much power of the supervisors

Unlike in other countries, in the higher education system of Japan,

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⁶ Japanese scholarships are one of the best in the world in terms of financial support. Students get a very generous stipend in addition to waivers to tuition and other university charges. If properly managed, students can save up to about 50 percent of the scholarship.
the supervisor is very powerful. He or she can decide whether the student gets the degree or not. Students believe that they cannot tell their grievances to anyone, and if they tell, those complaints will be bounced back with serious negative consequences. This type of system where a single professor has such power is not observed in most other countries. Therefore, falling into the right hands become paramount importance if the student to get an effective training program.

Many respondents indicated that, Japanese universities should develop criteria when appointing supervisors for foreign students. These criteria include that the supervisor should have at least 1–2 years foreign exposure, so that they would understand foreign students better. Quoting an example, one scholar explained that once his Assistant Professor went to India, and after his return he was a changed person and started treating him well. Another scholar explained that she was asked to do research on wheat for about six months, which cannot be grown in Sri Lanka, and she believes that it was a waste of time. Supervisors should also have the ability to communicate in English. Some of the supervisors are easy going, and they do not monitor their students well. Students end up in such laboratories tend to engage in various other activities like business, and totally ignore the purpose they went to Japan.

4 Absence of course work and assessment system

In Japanese degree programs, a minimum emphasis is given to the coursework. At the PhD level, course work is almost non-existence. Even the courses offered are not very effective for most foreign students since they are conducted in Japanese. Lecturing system is similar to Sri Lanka, where there is no constructive discussion inside the classrooms but delivering of lectures. There is no strict examination procedure applied at the graduate level. Most of the time, students only have to give a report at the end of the course. The graduation depends mainly on
publications, thus research work continues until the last moment. If the research is depended on uncontrollable external factors, like the weather, the assurance of getting the final target in stipulated time period of three years is nil. This can create severe stress among the foreign students. For Sri Lankan students, who are used to listen to whatever the things preached by the lecturer and repeats the same to pass the exams, this system could create more frustration.

Therefore, some suggested having a continuous evaluation system like in other countries. They further expressed that they should get theory lessons at least during the first few years and have a balance of theory and practical. However, some other senior scholars, comparing the PhD programs in different countries, explained that in the UK there is mainly research, and in the USA there is mainly course work, but in Japan one gets both course work and research. Whatever the proportion is, compared to other foreign students, Sri Lankan students must be in an advantageous position in Japan, since they get good theoretical knowledge from their undergraduate studies in Sri Lankan universities. Therefore, involving directly in research may not be a great difficulty for most Sri Lankan students.

Along the same line of thought, in certain disciplines like the dental and medical sciences, Japanese universities do not provide clinical training for foreign students. The reason is being that Japanese patients do not like to be investigated and treated by foreigners. Nevertheless, Japanese trainees who come to Sri Lanka get similar training, which Sri Lankan scholars believe a total injustice. However, countries like the UK and Australia, foreign students get such training. According to them, for clinical degree programs, Japan is a waste of time.

May be not at this gravity, even in other disciplines, trainees get limited exposure to Japanese industries. Practical knowledge of the foreign students in disciplines such as engineering, IT, and business
management are conducted mainly in the laboratories. The importance of industrial training particularly for disciplines like engineering and applied sciences in order to develop the fullest potential of passing out graduates is now well recognized. May be due to language difficulty, this opportunity is not given to foreign students. If an internship could be arranged, like in other countries, foreign students would be benefited more.

5 Non-existence of the generalized screening and selection system

It is an obvious fact that the quality of output depends on the quality of input. Therefore, when students are selected, there should be a stringent selection procedure. Students who do not have necessary qualifications, like basic theoretical knowledge and certain proficiency in English language, also get absorbed into Japanese universities. Some of these students get involved in various businesses, part-time jobs, and other illegal activities. This can create a negative image among Japanese academicians about students of those countries. Thus, minimum educational qualification level, such as high GPA score, Japanese proficiency test level 1 or 2 and cutoff points of standard exams such as TOEFL, GRE/GMAT to enter Japanese universities should be set.

One such criterion set by the Monbukagakusho is the age barrier. In order to get a scholarship the student should be below 35 years of age. Some indicated that this is too low, as in countries like Australia; the maximum age is 45 years. However, the idea of having such a low age limit is not that difficult to understand. In order to get sufficient return on investment, the training should be given during the early stages of a life.

Another criterion is that these scholarships are given only to government employees in Sri Lanka. The reason behind is that government employees are easy to control since they have to sign a legal
bond, which cannot be done with private sector employees. This selection criterion may be useful in 2-3 decades ago, because there were sufficient job vacancies available in the public sector and they were very attractive. However, in the recent times such public sector vacancies were not created and most of the high performing graduates join the private sector since they are more attractive. Therefore, selecting trainees only from the public sector may not be a good criterion today, if the trainees are to create a significant contribution to Sri Lanka once they returned. The approach to human capital development should be identifying areas of economic activities which Sri Lanka is seriously handicapped due to shortage of technical, professional, and skilled manpower and prioritizing these strategically important human resources for training and development, may be from the private sector rather than selecting only from the public sector.

One major difficulty in foreign training is difficulty of releasing a staff member, particularly in the private sector, for a long period of time (i.e. three years to complete a PhD). Therefore, some scholars suggested sandwich PhD programs, in which 50 percent lecturers is conducted in Sri Lanka and the balance 50 percent practical is conducted in Japan. According to them this is a win-win strategy, where Japanese government could reduce the cost while staff members can work while having lectures in Sri Lanka for the first half of the degree program. They even suggested that the first half of the program could be offered online as it is now well developed. Some others suggested giving short-term stepwise training (i.e. stage I, II, III, etc.) for ones who return and attempt to implement what they have learnt from Japan.

6 Strict regulations and lack of flexibility

Another criterion for selection of the Monbukagakusho scholars is having a placement letter. Bright students may not get a placement letter
from a good university, and/or good supervisor because of the time limitation. Many indicated that such criterion is a disadvantage for bright students and may end up in places that are irrelevant. If students are expected to find their own universities, Japanese universities should market their universities like the US, the UK, and Australia. There is lack of awareness of the opportunities available in Japanese universities. Most of their web pages are in Japanese language and they cannot expect foreign students to read them. Therefore, Monbukagakusho should guide the students and provide the students with relevant placement.

Once a placement letter is issued by a supervisor, students are not allowed to change it. Most of the time, students are compelled to work with one supervisor even when the field is different. This system is not a problem for Japanese students because they study about the university, the field and particularly about the professor, before selecting them.

Some indicated the displeasure of having entrance examination only in Japanese language. Everybody knows that to master Japanese language, one would require at least 4-5 years. When the technical terms are in kanji characters even Japanese find them difficult to read. Japanese language training is given for only about four months and it is not enough to pass an entrance examination. Furthermore, this language training is given only for the Monbukagakusho sponsored students, but not for private sponsored students. Nevertheless, the importance of Japanese language for an effective training is well understood. For the universities where entrance exam is conducted only in Japanese, the language training should be extended to at least one year and passing at least the second level of Japanese proficiency test should be made compulsory. Otherwise, once selected for the scholarship, it should be informed to the students well in advance and should request them to learn and sit for a proficiency test in Japanese in their own country before they come to Japan.
General problems

Apart from these major areas, some general problems were indicated by the respondents trained in Japan. In Japanese system there is certain degree of informality within the formal systems. Unlike the West, personal relationships matter very much when making decisions although formal and standardized procedures are laid down. Depending too much on these personal relationships can hamper the sustainability of the programs. For instance, one senior scholar who has obtained his PhD from a Japanese University in 1990 mentioned that after his Professor got retired and the Department was restructured the link program that they established was cutoff. Institutionalization of such personal relationships thus becomes very important to have sustainable educational link programs.

Another major problem they face is the language barrier in day to day life. Since all the documents and instructions, even in public places like hospitals, bus stands, railway stations, city halls are in Japanese language, foreigners find it very difficult to live there. This language problem extends to Japanese universities as well. Most of the documents and the instructions are published in Japanese language. Some respondents indicated that they had only Japanese books in their libraries.

There were some other general problems like difficulty in coping up with winter season, allergies created by pollen, and problems with Japanese food. Although some of these are beyond the control of any authority, some steps can be taken to minimize the difficulties. For example, the National University of Singapore has various food outlets such as Indian, Chinese, Western, and Dessert corners inside the university canteen so that students can eat whatever they prefer. These types of measures will be important if the Japanese universities to market themselves as international universities in foreign countries.
IV. Concluding Remarks

The importance of human capital as a major contributing factor to socio-economic development has been seem intuitively obvious and receive apparent supports in all countries of the world instead of their development stages. A large number of studies have been proved that the correlation between these two variables, human capital and economic growth remained significant. These studies have found enhancement of human capital benefited not only for the economic growth but also for social development. It was also found that these benefits of human capital invariably contribute to utilization of limited material resources efficiently in the development process of developing countries. The major factor behind of this is that augmentation of human capital contributes to improvement of formal and informal institutions, which remain as main pillars of utilization of material resources and financial capital in development process.

However, it should be accentuated that development of human capital itself may not guarantee any benefits to the country unless macroeconomic policies of the country make opportunities to use such human capital productively. Moreover it should be also noted that quality and usability of the human capital are more important to achieve fruitful benefits from the human capital. These factors have been recognized as the major hindrances of failure of Sri Lanka to achieve a successful development along with the considerably improved education level.

It can be argued that Japan's exceptional emphasis on human capital development in its huge ODA budget has been substantially influenced by her own development experience since Meiji Restoration. The philosophy of self-help efforts of Japan’s ODA policy is the one of most important factors in its enormous efforts in human resource development activities in developing countries. As noted Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007) in
Japan, assistance for human resource development is considered as a
decisive factor in strengthening self-help efforts or ownership of
developing countries to support for their nation-building efforts. Keeping
this philosophy as the fundamental principle of her ODA policy, it has
extended diversified programs under management of government, semi-
government and private institutions allocating a large sum of money not
only for training and education of the people in developing countries, but
also for providing necessary infrastructure facilities in those countries
during the last half a century. There is no doubt that all these efforts
have had a substantial contribution to nation building efforts of
developing countries, specifically Asia though it cannot be evaluated
numerically. However, there are disparate opinions on the quality of
human resource developed under Japanese assistance compared to people
who have received similar education and training under European and
American assistance. Many argue that quality of human capital
developed under Japanese assistance remains in lower level than that of
the West. The present study found that the main reason for this opinion
chiefly related to ‘European Complex’ among the people in Asia as a
result of hundred years of colonial influences.

The sample survey in Sri Lanka on human resource development
under Japanese assistance found that there are more strengths than
weaknesses. One important factor found in this survey is that change of
attitude about studying in Japan particularly in the past decade from
rather a Pessimistic One to an Optimistic One. The attitude has changed
from ‘not What you learn, but Where you learn’ to ‘not Where but How
and What you learn’. In the former, people believed that what ever you
learn whether it is appropriate or not, one should get it from the West.
Development of such attitude is fairly straightforward as Sri Lanka had
been a colony of Europe for more than 450 years. The study found that
negative attitudes towards Japanese education and training are gradually
changing along with the surge of active and productive roles of the people who studied and trained in Japan in the various sectors of the Sri Lankan economy. The following are the most influential factors of this optimistic attitude towards Japanese human resource development: familiarity of the culture and acceptance of Sri Lanka students as their own community without any discrimination; exposure to development principles and technology transfer; practical-oriented training; fourth, holistic training and moral support; availability of research amenities and facilities; favourable value system; high returning rate of Sri Lankans trained in Japan; commitment to work; and prolonged relationship with academic supervisor and people in Japan. All these factors have been remained as most important and strong factors of human resources trained in Japan, which cannot be received at any level in Western countries. These were contributed to strengthen of working culture of the people in Sri Lanka and therefore the economic development.

However, the present study also found number of weaknesses of Japanese way of human capital development, particularly higher education in Japan. Nearly 90 percent of the respondents emphasized that they learn ‘how to work’ but ‘not how to rest and enjoy the life’ during their study period in Japan. In addition, lack of generalized evaluating system and provision of unexpected powers to academic advisor have been noted as major weaknesses of the Japanese education system. The prevalence of these deficiencies often makes not only limitation of student’s right or independence, but also caused uncertainty of academic results among the international academic arena. The most of the respondents noted that academic adviser in Japan is having rights to give any level of results according to his own wishes largely based on level of human relationship rather than academic achievements. This will make internationalization of Japanese education system difficult in the future.

The study also found the absence of course work and non-existence
of generalized examination system as major weaknesses of Japanese higher education system compared to Western countries. Many of the respondents said that they were surprised Japan's unified examination system asking to use only one A3-size paper at the very beginning of their entrance examination. Moreover, according them, Japanese universities do not have a generalized internal examination system common to all staff members. This may also directly hamper the reliability of Japanese grading system of papers and academic degrees.

Furthermore, according to most of the answers of the survey, robustness of informality within the formal system, language difficulty, unavailability of information on various regulations relating to students’ studies and lack of foreign exposure of Japanese professors who are acting as academic supervisor of foreign students are also major weaknesses of Japanese education system at present. All these weaknesses have to be addressed if Japan is expecting to increase foreign student population up to one million while making Japan as a centre of excellence in education and training in Asia.

Finally, it could be noted that the findings of the present study may have some limitations because they were overwhelmingly depending on the sample survey in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is important to conduct a comprehensive survey on this subject in other countries for further understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese human resource development efforts.

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