

[Note]

# Reforms in the Japanese University System & Changes in the Contributions of Universities toward the Japanese Society

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## I Introduction

On 22 December 2006, the Fundamental Law of Education (FLE) was amended after more than half a century of being untouched. Besides the insertion of controversial phrases such as “patriotism”, “value for tradition”, or “community” which may remind people of the values of Japanese imperialism before WWII (e.g. Wikipedia–FLE 2006), many new articles have been added to it. Among them, article 7 stipulated that “universities shall contribute to social development through the cultivation of advanced culture and professional abilities, but also through the creation of new knowledge to be made available to the society at large.”

Why, nearly 60 years after its enactment in 1947, has the Japanese state found it urgent to clarify these goals in a legal framework? After all, modern universities are supposed to be specialised institutions where the research function is combined with an educational one, hopefully contributing to the wealth of the nation.

It does not seem credible that Japanese universities would not have been fulfilling these duties, since the existence of an educational and research elite is critical for Japan to compete on the global market and remain a leader among the developed nations.

The new formulation in the FLE must rather reflect the commitment of the state to pursue its reform in order to improve higher education’s output toward society.

First, a brief survey will show how the role of Japanese universities has changed from the Meiji period. Secondly I will describe some of the main issues they have been facing, and the reforms they are undertaking to tackle them, in particular from the 1990s, after the bursting of the bubble economy. In the third section, the Ryūkoku university case -- Japan's oldest private university -- will serve to illustrate the recent challenges and possible directions chosen by private institutions. In conclusion, both the beneficial consequences and the potential risks of recent policies will be considered.

## II Overview of Japanese university role evolution

To better understand the situation of universities in Japan today, three major educational turning points need to be mentioned: the Meiji period reforms (1868), the Allied Occupation reforms (1945), and the Nakasone reforms (1984).

### 1. The Meiji period (1868–1912): Elitism and Modernisation - Learning from Europe

After 1868, the year imperial rule was restored, Japan was set on a rapid course of modernisation. The Meiji leaders established a public education system to help Japan catch up with the West and strengthen

the foundations of the new state (Wikipedia-Meiji 2007).

Research in science and technology, along with the promotion of the industries, were strongly encouraged by the government. In 1877, the first Japanese modern university with an admission system based on meritocracy was established i.e. the University of Tokyo. Its mission was to train an elite and to introduce Western science to the Japanese society, factors essential to the modernisation of the country (Cutts 1997).

Nine years later, the imperial university system (and the Ministry of Education) came into existence. According to the Imperial University Ordinance of 1886, their main priorities were "the teaching of, and fundamental research into, arts and sciences necessary to the state". Their role was therefore subordinate to the state's goal, that is to say to the national strength (Okada 2005: 33).

In this way, most of the higher education system was controlled for political and economical reasons. Some private advanced education institutions were founded independently from the authorities (Keio, Hitotsubashi, Waseda universities among the well-known ones) but, into the 20th century, the state would extend its power over them (McVeigh 2005).

By the 1890s, the education system became more reflective of conservative Japanese values, especially those concerning the obedience to the hierarchy and the traditional morality embodied in the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education (Wikipedia-EducationHistory 2007).

The Meiji Restoration added great impetus to industrialisation which eventually transformed Japan into a militaristic power. Actually, the industrial corporations did not concern themselves with industrial oriented research (R&D) since it was the role of the engineering faculties at universities, which were funded by foundations and the government. So, when the Pacific War broke out, the state took quick measures to increase scientific and technological departments at universities along with new research laboratories set up to conduct technological development and contribute to the war effort (Hashimoto 1999: 234-238).

## 2. The American Occupation period (1945-1952): Democratisation and Uniformisation

With the end of the war, the Allied Occupation implemented a number of important changes in order to democratise all aspects of Japanese society. In particular, the Imperial Rescript on Education was replaced by the FLE in 1947. Also, higher education institutions were all converted into four-year universities, and five-year technical colleges were established. Administratively, there was a temporary move toward a decentralisation of the state control in favour of local autonomy (system of Boards of Education, popularly elected) (Foreign Press Center 1995: 11-12).

Simultaneously, the American Occupation's GHQ's Economic and Scientific Section (ESS) was active in disbanding large Japanese enterprises. But around 1947, the rapid advent of communism forced the American to reconsider their earlier decision to reduce the economic power of Japan. So, some officials at the ESS began to emphasise the importance of academic research in industrial applications, and attempted to strengthen the ties between the universities and the industries to restore the Japanese economy. However, their proposal was strongly opposed, and eventually eliminated, by the GHQ's section responsible for the educational system democratisation. For them, the university's primary goal was indeed "to train and produce all kinds of leaders needed for a free society." In this way, university professors and the university education role were separated from industrial motivations. That is how large corporations came to import foreign technologies and create their own research laboratories (Hashimoto 1999: 238-248).

### 3. Nakasone's tenure (1982-1987): Individualisation and Globalisation - Endogenous reform

During the 1980s, criticisms about the postwar education system intensified. Some of the main repercussions following the rapid quantitative expansion of education were 1) the overvaluation of school background leading to fierce competition to access prestigious schools (the "examination hell"), 2) the uniformity and rigidity of the system, 3) the decline of home and community educational functions, 4) the lack of ethical education, leading presumably to bullying, school refusals, classroom violence, and juvenile delinquency, 5) the low quality of the teachers and principals ( Foreign Press Center 1995: 45-46).

To deal with these problems and the future prospects for education, the then Prime Minister, Nakasone Yasuhiro (LDP, 'neo-conservative') created the *Ad-Hoc* Council (AHC) in August 1984 reporting directly to himself. It should be pointed out that the influence of the *Kyoto Group for the Study of Global Issues* (chaired by the industrialist Matsushita Kōnosuke and partially composed of leading businessmen) was probably decisive in the final recommendations issued by the AHC (dissolved in 1987) (Hood 2001: 40-48).

Among the steps to be taken to improve the higher education functions, AHC advocated liberalisation and privatisation. In addition to the foreseen reduction of the public expenditure, the resulting market economy would introduce competition between these institutions, resulting theoretically in diversification and the survival of the "fittest". Another consequence was that university curriculum would be reformed, since the Ministry of Education would relax its strict regulation. In this case, students would have more options to pick from and therefore get more opportunities to develop their creativity and to keep their motivation high. The whole idea was then to emphasise the "individuality" of both people and institutions. A further ramification would be that universities would have to find external financing to make up for the lost state funds. (Okano 1999: 210-226, Roesgaard 1998: 88-96, 146-237)

The second pillar of these recommendations is the stress on lifelong education. It became clear that learning all which is needed during one's school education was no longer possible because of the rapid changes in society (globalisation and computerisation included). The new focus on adult learners is an attempt to solve the issue of over-emphasis on academic background and its inherent problems (i.e. "examination hell" or juvenile violence), but it cannot be denied that industry's need to retrain their manpower was also at stake.

It was hoped that lifelong learning would make universities open their doors to the community at large and then contribute more directly to its welfare (Hood 2001: 145-148, Roesgaard 1998: 197-202).

Today it can be said that the AHC's reports have constituted a reference for the national educational policy since their publication (Roesgaard 1998: 202). In October 1987, the MOE appointed a University Council composed of universities and business representatives to launch concrete measures (Foreign Press Center 1995: 62). It is worth mentioning as well that a *Lifelong Learning Promotion Law* was passed in 1990, and that the Ministry of Education established a Policy Bureau, the lifelong learning being also promoted by the METI -- Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MEXT-lifelong 2007, Roesgaard 1998: 199-200). Moreover, the Fundamental Law of Education amended in 2006 now includes articles reflecting the importance of the community, and lifelong education (and even of traditional values) -- strikingly similar to Nakasone's wishes (Hood 2001: 100-101, Beauchamp 1991: 66).

### III Recent reforms and issues

Since the early 1990s, the pace of university reform has been accelerating in Japan. There are two major reasons for this: the demographic trends (rapid decreasing number of children, and ageing of the population), and the breakdown of the bubble economy. Three resulting important changes and related issues will be described below: the incorporation of national universities, the increase in the number of graduate schools, and finally the Center of Excellence Program.

#### 1. The incorporation of state-run universities: Toward a better administration?

In April 2004, state-run universities were transformed into independent corporations that were to be managed like private-sector organisations. They are then ostensibly allowed to handle their finances independently i.e. to use the state funds for their own plans and operations. Moreover, curriculum or personnel changes -- president included-- are allowed without prior permission from the government (Goodman 2005: 1-2).

A pressing factor which probably facilitated this incorporation is that Koizumi Junichiro, who was Prime Minister from 2001 to 2006, pledged to cut the number of public servants and reform public corporations (Okada 2005: 45). But independently, the Education Ministry and the METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) had been working in collaboration to promote the economic role of the universities. The incorporation is indeed the completion of a series of consecutive policies: establishment of technology licensing offices and administrative units to support joint research, de-regulatory measures to facilitate university handling of external contracts, new regulations to permit university professors to act as consultants and be involved in technology transfer.

However, these recent policies are not sufficient for the universities to be able to work with outside companies in a business-like manner. They cannot negotiate contracts autonomously, nor can they own their intellectual property rights. Real changes may take a long time to fully materialise (Hatakenaka 2005: 55-56).

The danger of pure privatisation should be noted though. Indeed, will the market be fair for the small and middle-sized universities? Inevitably, the prestigious universities with longer-established programmes, well equipped, and with academic staff of quality. (i.e. the ex-national and some private bodies) have the highest probability of attracting the best students, keeping their best teaching staff, and therefore of winning the "race".

Besides this major administrative reform, what have become of the training function of the universities?

#### 2. The graduate schools: Toward a better education?

Postgraduate programmes are essential in the production and dissemination of knowledge but they are also privileged elements to train future university teachers. They are also crucial for specialists to adapt to advanced technology and to the globalisation.

Concerned by the shortage of such schools compared to Europe and US, the MOE and the University Council have been promoting the creation of more of them (Hada 2005: 219-220).

Between 2000 and 2005 alone, their number increased from 356 to 409. In 2005, 12% of the graduates advanced to higher level courses (41% of them in Engineering), to be compared to the 6.8% in 1990. Also, in terms of internationalisation the numbers are speaking for themselves: 94,521 foreign students, that is to say 330% more than in 1990, came to Japan to study in a post-graduate course (MEXT-stat 2007). But the

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academic environment often precludes foreign scholars from successfully carrying out their research (Pinti and Van Drom 1999).

In the case of business, the demand for graduate schools is coming from the Japanese companies. With the sluggish economy, they have thus come to rely increasingly on the universities to highly train managers or staff who are dealing with international business (Hada 2005: 238-240).

Ironically, globalisation itself is making it easier than ever to study abroad in older and more prestigious schools in Europe or in the US, long-distance learning or Internet-based curriculum being increasingly available as well.

Among the programmes set to encourage the research function of the universities, one of the most promising is probably the COE.

### 3. The Center of Excellence (COE) Program: Toward a better research?

The 21st Century Center of Excellence Program is an initiative launched by the Education Ministry in 2002 to raise standards of research in universities by financially rewarding innovation and 'excellence'. Similar to the Research Assessment Exercise in Britain (RAE 2007), the idea is to identify universities and departments in which to concentrate national research funding. Evaluation committees were established in 2002, 2003, and 2004 to consider bids from individual universities wishing to create these centers. The requirements were draconian: scholars with track-records in research had to be members of the research teams. Each accepted programme would receive around 100 million yen per year for five years, the budget for the final three years being approved or refused by an interim progress review committee (Eades 2005: 301-302).

As expected, most of the awards went each time to the national institutions, in particular to the former imperial universities. Like in Britain, the program seems to lead to an increasing polarisation between the 'research universities' and the rest (Eades 2005: 296). Indeed, that increasing governmental support somehow distorts the market, to the benefit of the already well-funded and prestigious institutions (Hada 2005: 239).

Moreover, the COE interim review made apparent two distinct academic strands: on the one hand, many scientists who are used to writing in English for the international community, and on the other, the humanities whose publications are more often national and written in Japanese, and whose competitiveness on the international stage is therefore more difficult to assess (Eades 2005: 316-317).

From the previous paragraphs, it can be inferred that a prestigious university has less to fear from the current reforms and policies than the small and medium-sized private universities which are more representative of the higher learning institutions (over 75% of all the universities), being attended by 74% of the students (MEXT-stat 2007, figures for 2005). I will describe one of these, Ryūkoku University, along with its functions.

## IV The Ryukoku University case

First, it is the oldest private university in Japan. It was started in 1639 at the Nishi Hongwanji temple (Kyoto) as an educational facility to train their Buddhist priests. It became a university in 1922. Today, it is a comprehensive university (18,500 students and 480 full-time faculty) which consists of three campuses (Ōmiya, Fukakusa, and Seta) providing a base for seven faculties and six research institutions (Ryukoku

2007).

The second reason for my interest is that one of their professors, Kawamura Yoshio, is the founder of the Ryūkoku Extension Center, and a key actor in the establishment of the Consortium of Universities in Kyoto, both inspiring concepts for numerous Japanese institutions.

### 1. The Ryukoku Extension Center (REC): the third function?

In the US, the idea of 'extension' goes back to the Morrill Act of 1862 which donated federal land to universities which in return had to contribute to their local community's welfare through two channels: the University Extension which is a lifelong education system, and the University Cooperative Extension, with a focus on its research function (Kawamura 2001).

In Japan, the promotion of local industry through universities centres providing training and research was indeed proposed by the AHC in 1988 (Roesgaard 1995: 192-193).

One year later, Ryūkoku University was invited by Shiga Prefecture and Ōtsu city to set up the Seta Campus (Faculty of Science and Technology and of Sociology) on their territory. By way of thanks for the land, professor Kawamura Yoshio (Faculty of Economics) proposed to create a center integrating both 'extension' missions, combined with one unique characteristic which is the incubation of small-scale industries supported by a laboratory rental: a first in the history of Japanese higher education. The REC has been fully operational since the completion of the facility in 1994 (Ryukoku-rec 2007). It is essential to stress that the "REC university-industry cooperative" focuses on local small-scale industries, trying to help some of them ("Only One Company") competing at a global level (Kawamura 2001).

Interestingly, the Education Ministry refused at first to subsidise the project, claiming that a university was not supposed to develop ties with industries. But Ryūkoku decided to proceed with it anyway with their own funds. Today, after being recognised by the METI, and consequently by the MOE itself, other universities have emulated REC with similar centres. It is worthwhile noting that the university-industry linkage can take various shapes. For instance, Ryūkoku University rents laboratories to small companies who are provided with academic advice. Ritsumeikan University has ten research institutes running on fees (one billion yen) collected from companies interested (often of medium size or higher). Researchers from both sides work together, and any output is evenly shared. As for Kyoto university, heavily subsidised by the state, it can develop its own high level technology (notably in Nanotechnology) and create spin-off industries or develop joint research with the biggest institutions (Kawamura, interview, 31 October 2006).

Among the numerous achievements of the REC, it is worthwhile mentioning the lifelong centre "Community College" which is offering to the community about 180 educational courses for almost 10,000 persons, more than the number of students on the campus. On the joint research and consultation side, 31 small enterprises have graduated from the programme with a new technology of marketable products (Ōyanagi, interview, 18 December 2006).

For Kawamura (2001), *extension* should therefore become the third social function of a higher education institution in the same capacity as research and education.

### 2. The Consortium of Universities in Kyoto (CUK): a new type of joint venture?

Created in 1994, under the name of "University center in Kyoto", the presently named CUK is a regional alliance of 55 organisations: the Kyoto municipal government, 50 universities and junior colleges and four Kyoto-based economic organisations (Consortium 2007).

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Financed half by Kyoto city, and half by the members at the rate of ¥1,000 per enrolled students, the foundation has six fields of expertise: 1) a research programme on the collaboration between universities, local communities and industries, 2) a programme of information distribution concerning the universities to local communities and industries (notably the database of university researchers in the Kyoto area), 3) an internship programme, 4) a lifelong education system in which courses are proposed by member universities or requested by the CUK, 5) the coordination of a credit transfer system (46 universities are offering 552 courses), and 6) a programme of faculty and staff development.

Presently, 30 or so CUK-like consortia have come into being all over the country (Kawamura, interview, 2 February 2007; Mitsuishi 2002: 54-73).

The CUK makes full use of the high density of universities in Kyoto and its surroundings to facilitate reforms in its often resources-limited institution members struggling to respond to the market competition, especially since the 1990's.

Thanks to a synergic effect, each university, in particular the small ones, can therefore concentrate their energy to develop their uniqueness through projects less risky since they are backed up by the other members (Kawamura and Mineno 2007: 177-198).

An interesting example is Ikenobo junior college, specialising in Japanese flower arrangement. Before integrating with the CUK, the students, female for the most part, were not motivated and gave little attention to their courses. Needless to say that the professors were demotivated as well. Now that the college is part of the CUK, and its credit transfer system, their ikebana courses are attended by many students from other CUK universities, male this time. According to the president, the atmosphere has completely changed, everybody being re-motivated. The system also appears to be a way to protect and perpetuate traditional arts of Kyoto, in this case (Kawamura, interview, 2 February 2007).

Today Kawamura (2006) is trying to establish new ties between the University of Ryūkoku as part of the Consortium, and European higher education institutions (notably in France).

## V Conclusions

In conclusion, we have seen that the role of the university in Japan emerges from a complex relationship between academia, government and industry agendas.

Born during the Meiji era, universities were created with clear economical and industrial purposes and not for the sake of the knowledge itself, like it was in the West. After the end of the war, their research facilities were disbanded and ties with industries severed. Companies were forced to import foreign technology while developing their own R&D.

The Nakasone reforms in the 1980s were triggered by issues within the country, but as a consequence, authorities were eventually prompted to think again about the universities' role, to be transformed from *a means of selection to a means of contribution to the community*.

By the 1990s, the collapse of the economic bubble led to a strong convergence between Nakasone's recommendations and the governmental policies tackling economic issues. First, the emphasis on individuality, internationalisation, and the importance attached to lifelong learning, can of course be considered as measures *to improve the quality of the university education role*. But at the same time, they also help both the universities coping with the decreasing number of 18-year old young people, as well as the companies needing talented people but who cannot afford anymore in-house training for their new recruits.

Secondly, the creation of more graduate schools and programmes such as COE should *lead to better*

*research in universities* and improve their international reputation, but it should also bring about new technologies which may become both a means of self-funding and an edge for industries struggling to maintain their competitiveness on the global market.

Finally, the incorporation of the national universities may be interpreted as the will of the government to reduce its spending on administration, but above all it probably aims at facilitating the creation of a liberal market where universities could compete freely and become “better”, while implicitly being forced to turn to the private sector (see Appendix).

However, we have underlined the bias in favour of the ex-national universities (and well-known private ones) which would be caused by a straightforward privatisation or by COE-like programmes, as well as the danger of putting faculties of technology and other faculties on an equal footing. The competition would be unfair and may lead to three *separations*: between education and research, between human/social sciences and natural sciences, and further, between fundamental and applied sciences, as observed in the US (Miyoshi 2006: 54–80). Inversely, the REC and CUK initiatives seem to point toward integration: with the addition of a third university function 'extension', and with the establishment of cooperation between regional bodies.

It remains to be seen in which direction -- separation or integration -- the Japanese universities will develop.

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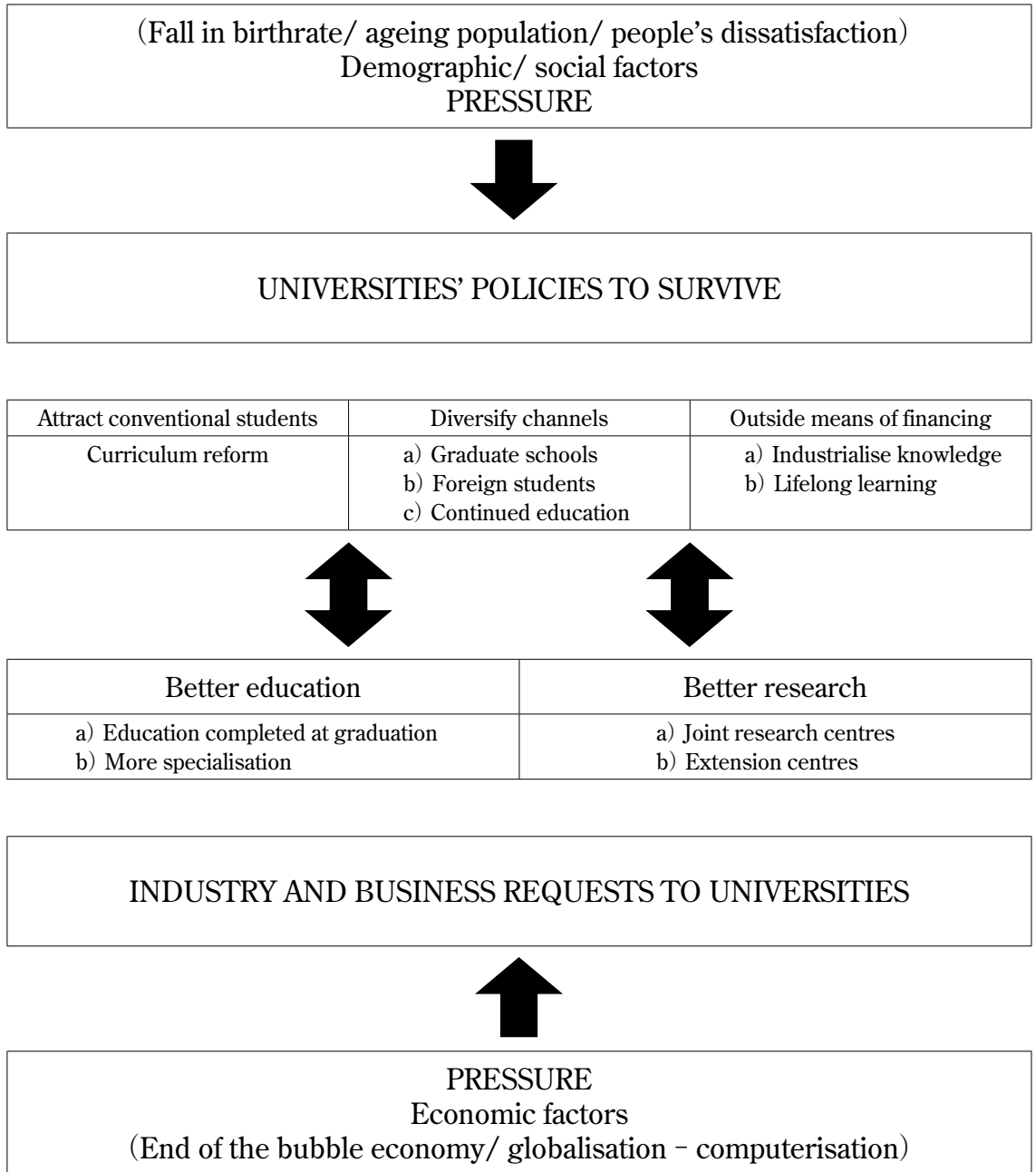


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*Linkages in Japan and the United States.*

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Appendix



Rapprochement between universities and private sector

(2008年7月11日掲載決定)