Reform of Higher Education in Japan
- Fostering responsiveness to society -

University of Tokyo

Jun Oba
Research Institute for Higher Education
Hiroshima University, Japan
oba@hiroshima-u.ac.jp
Contents

I  Education system in Japan
II  Higher education in Japan
III  Higher education and societal needs – How can universities be more responsive to society?
   1. Transition to universal higher education
   2. Diversification of universities and their programmes
Closing remarks
I Education system in Japan

The present school system

• Entire revision under the occupation
• Nine-year compulsory education
• Unified into a single track system
  – universities being open to every graduate of an upper-secondary school
  – abolition of distinction among higher education institutions
Organisation of the present school system

- **Pre-school education**
  - Kindergarten

- **Primary education**
  - Elementary school

- **Secondary education school**
  - Lower secondary school
  - Upper secondary school
  - Junior college

- **Higher education**
  - College of Technology
  - University (faculty)
  - University (graduate school)

- **Normal age**
  - Kindergarten: 1-3
  - Elementary school: 4-6
  - Lower secondary school: 7-10
  - Upper secondary school: 11-13
  - Junior college: 14-15
  - University (faculty): 16-18
  - University (graduate school): 19-21

- **School year**
  - Kindergarten: 1-3
  - Elementary school: 4-6
  - Lower secondary school: 7-10
  - Upper secondary school: 11-13
  - Junior college: 14-15
  - University (faculty): 16-18
  - University (graduate school): 19-21
A very good performance in primary and secondary education

- Ranking in the OECD's PISA 2000
  - first group for mathematics and science
  - second group for reading

- PISA 2003
  - still in the same groups as the PISA 2000
  - Japan slightly lowered its ranking by country.
II  Higher education in Japan

1. Foundation of modern higher education institutions

- Imperial universities
  - University of Tokyo (later Imperial University, then Tokyo Imperial University) in 1887
  - Other imperial universities in major cities
  - Based on the German model

- Other types of institutions of higher learning (public and private)
## Number of higher education institutions as of 1943

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Universities [imperial universities]</th>
<th>Specialised Schools</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governmental (national)</td>
<td>19 [7]</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local public</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>49 [7]</strong></td>
<td><strong>216</strong></td>
<td><strong>265</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics of pre-war higher education

- Well-organised bureaucratic administration system in governmental institutions
- Coexistence of the three sectors of higher education institutions – governmental (national), local public and private
- Limited number of governmental institutions and a larger number of private institutions
- Absolute priority to the national institutions, especially the imperial universities
After the war (as of 1949)

• 70 national universities without difference in legal status among them
• 17 local public universities
• 81 private universities
• Junior colleges (regarded as provisional)
2. The expansion of higher education and its decline

- Rapid growth of higher education in the 1960s and early 1970s

- Number of institutions
  - 1960 : 245 universities and 280 junior colleges
  - 1975 : 420 universities and 513 junior colleges

- Multiplication of students from 1960 to 1975
  - Universities : 2.77 times
  - Junior colleges : 4.28 times
Number of universities by sector
Number of junior colleges by sector
• Enrolment ratio (of the age cohort)
  – 10.3% in 1960
  – 38.4% in 1975
Student movements in the late 1960s and university reform

- Incapable of coping with the growth in the 1960s
- Student movements from 1966
- Central Council for Education's 1971 Report
  - diversification of higher education;
  - curriculum reform;
  - improvements in teaching methods;
  - opening of higher education to the general public
The planned expansion of higher education after 1975

- A decade plan for higher education from 1976 to 1986
- Creation of special training schools (advanced courses) as non-university institutions in 1975
Second expansion in the 1980s and early 1990s

• Number of universities
  – 1980: 446 universities (93 national, 34 public and 319 private)
  – 1995: 565 universities (98 national, 52 public and 415 private)
  – 2004: 709 universities (87 national, 80 public and 542 private)

• junior colleges have been decreasing however
Trends in 18-year-old population and access to higher education
III Higher education and societal needs – How can universities be more responsive to society?

1. The transition to universal higher education

- M. Trow's Model
  - elite phase
  - mass phase
  - universal phase
### Characteristics of the three phases of higher education system defined by M. Trow (1974)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Elite</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mass</strong></th>
<th><strong>Universal</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrolment ratio</strong></td>
<td>Under 15%</td>
<td>Between 15 and 50%</td>
<td>Over 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude towards access</strong></td>
<td>Privilege</td>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Obligation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary functions of higher education institutions</strong></td>
<td>Shape the mind and character of the ruling class; Prepare students for broad elite roles</td>
<td>Prepare a much broader range of elites; Transmission of skills</td>
<td>Prepare large numbers of people for life; Maximise their adaptability to society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Highly structured; Highly specialised and governed by the professor's notion</td>
<td>More modular, marked by semi-structured sequences of courses; Credit system; Movement between fields</td>
<td>Less structured and boundaries between courses being broken down; Rejection of academic forms and standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Diversification of universities and their programmes

- Towards the universal phase
  - Over 50% in 1987 (non-university sector included)
- Decade plan was over in 1986.
- Acceleration of diversification of higher education institutions
- Establishment of the University Council in 1987
  - academic and non-academic members
  - comprehensive study on higher education
• Abolition of subject areas in 1991
  – structure curricula reflecting their own educational ideals and objectives
  – no definition of subject areas, such as general education and specialised education
  – no requirement on obtaining a certain number of credits in each subject area (acquisition of a minimum total number of credits only)
Implementation of curriculum reform in universities (2001)

- Review of subject classification: 475
- Wedge-formed curriculum: 329
- Review of compulsory and elective subjects system: 365
- Review of credits calculation: 321
- Introduction of course system: 204
- Review of the number of credits required for graduation: 353
1998 Report *A Vision for the University of the 21st Century and Future Reform Measures: Distinctive Universities in a Competitive Environment*

- Improve the **quality of education** and research with the purpose of nurturing the ability to investigate issues;

- Secure university **autonomy** by making the educational and research system structure more flexible;

- Establish university administration and management with **responsible decision-making** and implementation; and

- Individualise universities and continuously improve their education and research by establishing multiple evaluation systems.
2002 revision of the School Education Law

- More flexibility for a reorganisation of faculties and departments
  - A reorganisation without change in the kinds and fields of degrees does not need ministerial authorisation.

- Introduction of a continual third-party evaluation system
  - Accreditation every 7 years by a accrediting organisation authorised by the MEXT (Ministry of Education)
Incorporation of national universities in 2004

- Change in the status of the governmental institutions
- Legal personality and more autonomy
- Non-public servant status for staff
- Participation of external people in university administration
Closing remarks

Three major factors for HE reform

• Diversification in students
• Changes in the demand for human resources
• Increased reliance of industry on academic research activities
Deregulation to have universities more responsive to society

• Differentiation of institutions
• Increased autonomy
  – institutional structure
  – curricula
For universities

- Continual reform
- Improvement of the management
  - Rationalisation of the administration
  - Development of non-academic staff
Government's role

- Definition of the grand design of higher education
- Maintaining an appropriate competitive environment
- Quality assurance
- Investment for the future (development of human resources)