

Special Essay

Japanese Higher Education as Myth Revisited: Can We Learn Nothing from Japanese Universities?

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<Abstract>

The view of Japanese higher education remains largely negative. Based on highly-cited works such as McVeigh's *Japanese Higher Education as Myth* (2002), the general consensus remains is that there is little to learn from Japanese universities. Our piece attempts to think differently; to challenge this taken-for-granted assumption of deficit. To do so, we argue that marked changes in the landscape of global higher education over the past two decades prompts us to reevaluate Japanese higher education. These changes include the accelerated marketization and neo-liberalism managerialism prominent in Anglo-American universities, commodification of international student flows, the emergence of 'competition' in research, the dominance of for-profit publishing, and the politics of knowledge production. These changes push us to pause, rethink and reevaluate, shifting away from a view of Japanese higher education as lagging behind, toward recognition of perhaps different priorities at play there. The larger contribution we seek to make in this piece is to find ways to create a more equal dialogue, replacing the current one in which – due to international rankings and other recent developments in global

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higher education – Anglo-American universities are viewed as the sole global standard, a stance which leaves little space for nuance, alternatives, or learning from others.

1. Introduction

Viewed from abroad, the image of Japanese universities remains largely negative. One leading scholar of higher education – someone otherwise generally favorable to an “East Asian” model, its context, and its strengths – recently expressed explicit concern for the “current stagnation” of Japanese universities (Marginson 2011: 609). Globally minded, English-language news outlets covering Japan frequently carry negative headlines such as “Universities’ Failing Grades” (Japan Times 2016), “Failing Students: Japanese universities facing reckoning or reform” (Japan Times 2012), “Japan bets on \$90bn fund as universities lose ground to the West” (Nikkei Asia 2021), and “Japan falls out of the top 10 nations with most-cited scientific papers” (Asahi 2022). From this, it appears that Japanese universities are in decline, and the past three decades of earnest attempts to reform – *e.g.* incorporation (*hojinka*), improvements in teaching and learning, accelerating internationalization, strengthening research capacity, and raising a new generation of leading researchers – has failed. Nor are these English-language works out of sync with a similarly critical view within Japanese domestic research circles. The works of leading scholars such as Ikuo Amano from the 1980s-1990s also subscribed to the view that the Japanese university was beset by “crisis” (Amano and Poole 2005).

The current piece dares, in the face of such an overwhelming collective consensus, to think differently about Japanese higher education. What might be some of its strengths? What practices and priorities might form a counterpoint to currently dominant Anglo-American models? What might we, not just Anglo-American researchers, but those in other parts of the world too, learn from Japan? Quite honestly, we are not sure that such a defense can be made, particularly in the current climate of the policy discourse in Japan of an imminent massive 25-year reform (for details, see

the Nikkei Asia piece above). But we believe it worth trying, as one of our tasks as scholars is, as we understand it, to challenge our taken-for-granted images of our contemporary world.

As an entry point, we want to begin by reexamining Brian McVeigh's (2002) influential *Japanese Higher Education as Myth*. The work is, by far, the most widely read and cited work on Japanese higher education in the English-speaking world. Published 20 years ago this year, it argued that Japanese universities, whilst successful in occupational selection, labor market regulation, and socialization functions, failed miserably in their core role of "education". Japanese higher education was not substantial (*i.e.* real), but instead "simulated" education: "a grand spectacle of smoke and mirrors afforded a sense of reality" (McVeigh 2002: 237) among those seduced by the "myth". Embellished with strong rhetorical flushes, McVeigh's point was serious: Japanese society was set to pay a heavy price in raising its students in "simulated" education. By leading off our piece with McVeigh's late 1990s critique, we want to zero in on several key questions: What are the specific foci of these sorts of negative accounts? What sets of assumptions or theories undergird them? Which might have changed? Does empirical data exist that either corroborates or challenges McVeigh's claims (and those like it) of the "smoke and mirrors" nature of Japanese higher education?

Having critically examined the previous 'negative consensus' on Japanese higher education, we then turn to recontextualize Japanese higher education within a changed landscape of higher education globally, focusing on (i) accelerated marketization and neo-liberalism managerialism of Anglo-American universities over the past two decades, (ii) commodification of international student flows (*i.e.* fee-paying foreign students), (iii) emergence of a notion of competition in research (*e.g.* UK's REF; university rankings), (iv) debates over for-profit publishing and dissemination of research conducted under public grants, and (v) politics of knowledge production. Our argument is both that McVeigh's view of Japanese higher education was crafted out of a comparison with Anglo-American universities before the neo-liberal turn. But the subsequent changes in higher education worldwide, but especially in Anglo-American countries, push us to revise

our overall image of Japanese universities: away from a view of Japan as lagging behind; toward recognition of a different approach. Is the purported “stagnation” of Japan a failure to reform, or instead perhaps the persistence of a different set of priorities?

Against this new backdrop of (partial) endorsement, we then turn in the third part, to lay out a list of potential areas in which Japanese higher education has something to ‘teach’, including: (i) lower tuition rates, (ii) a high degree of freedom in research, (iii) lack of full-scale marketization and commodification of foreign students, (iv) a locally-run, open access publishing system, (v) investment and attention to local knowledge and language, (vi) copious amounts of research funding, (vii) increasing focus on and resources directed toward younger faculty. In the fourth concluding section, we step back, think globally, and underscore why this more balanced approach to viewing Japanese higher education may be important. The point, again, is not to deny some negative aspects of Japanese universities. But so much has been written on this already. Instead it is to point out some potentially positive aspects, in the interest of building up a new, more balanced perspective. This allows us to make a modest contribution to building the sort of creative, active, and globally-engaged response currently being demanded of Japanese university researchers today, those who we imagine – given the publishing venue – will be the primary readers of the current piece. That is, a sole focus on the negative aspects of Japanese higher education hinders global engagement, as domestic images come to reinforce the ‘negative consensus’ dominant globally. We return to this point in conclusion.

2. Starting Point: Brian McVeigh’s (2002) *Japanese Higher Education as Myth*

For a non-Japanese audience, McVeigh’s (2002) provocative critique of Japanese higher education has been decisive in setting the ‘negative consensus’ around Japanese universities. The crux of McVeigh’s argument was that Japanese universities were aimed at political and economic goals, rather than educational ones:

Japanese education is still very much governed by a state-managed technocratic view of education that works in tandem with powerful business interests and is driven by a fair measure of socioeconomic Darwinism. Culturally sanctioned notions, such as “shyness” and deference to those in power, legitimize the interests of those who administer the educational system. Together, state machinery, economic interests, and social norms work to produce obedient and efficient workers. In order to weed out those who lack the powers of memory and the psychological stamina required to succeed in the Japanese work world, the educational system has been constructed along the lines of an elaborate testing mechanism whose function is to evaluate and place individuals at the appropriate level (McVeigh 2002: 116)

Resolutely dismissing “misty cultural theorizing” (*ibid.* 115), McVeigh instead echoes, and then extends to the level of higher education, a realist (power) argument of the state of Japanese education. In doing so, it follows in a line of critique first laid out by prominent sociologist Ronald Dore. Dore’s (1976) famous remark about Japanese education was, of course, that: “The system works well enough – provided one thing of it as an enormously elaborated, very expensive intelligence testing system with some educational spin-off, rather than the other way around. One suspects that Japan’s more conservative leaders, though they are prepared to shake their heads over the system with those who deplore it, are secretly well satisfied” (48-9). Following Dore, McVeigh praises – in a tongue-in-cheek sort of way – Japanese universities for their role in occupational selection, labor market regulation, and socialization functions (producing ‘shyness’ and ‘deference’ to power).

McVeigh’s main critique is reserved for what he views as the complete lack of “education” function of Japanese universities. So lacking in the ‘learning’, McVeigh argued, that Japanese higher education was simply a “myth” – it did not really exist. It is highly likely that McVeigh drew inspiration for his thesis from reflections made by American scholars in the 1980s trying to get their heads around the Japanese educational ‘challenge’. For example, a piece in the New York Times in June 1983

provocatively entitled *Japan's Noneducation* argued that:

Although Japanese students demonstrate superiority in certain elementary and secondary school tests, their advantage slips drastically at the university level. It's something of a secret in the West, but a wide-open truth here that Japanese universities are a disgrace. As research institutions or instructional forums, as training centers in the liberal arts, science, education, or even in engineering, Japanese universities are a travesty – indeed, an embarrassing joke (Zeungner 1983)

Throughout his book, McVeigh uses “daigaku” in romanji to differentiate the way this poor Japanese copy differs from Western universities/colleges. Elsewhere he opts for the word “simulation”, a situation where rhetoric and reality do not match; where people or institutions say one thing and yet do something completely different. He gives repeated examples of this gap, often in table form, as reproduced here (Table 1).

Table 1 Examples of Disconnections Between Rhetoric and Reality at *Daigaku*

Rhetoric	Reality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-examination for those who fail exam • Maintain high standards • <i>Daigaku</i> offers quality education • Small classes • Professors express interest in teaching • <i>Daigaku</i> for students • <i>Daigaku</i> for teaching and learning • Treat students as adults • Treat students as learners • Students attend <i>daigaku</i> • “Free to study what I want” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must pass students who sit for re-examination • Do not fail students • <i>Daigaku</i> acts as employment agency • Large classes • Professors show up late for class, miss classes, rarely prepare, use old notes • <i>Daigaku</i> for administrators/professors • <i>Daigaku</i> for making profits (private schools) • Treat students as immature • Treat students as obtuse • Some students simultaneously attend vocational school and <i>daigaku</i> • Rigid rules and curriculum designed with administrators’ convenience in mind

Resource: McVeigh (2002: 146)

As shown here, McVeigh's focus was largely on teaching and learning, and his critique is equally directed at students, professors, and university administrators alike. All these parties conspire to make Japanese universities low quality. It is worth noting that McVeigh's reflections derived largely, although not exclusively, from his work in a private university, where research functions would have been less emphasized.

Based on this diagnosis, McVeigh suggests the consequences for Japan's future. To do so in a systematic way, McVeigh references Trow's (1986) article entitled *The State of Higher Education in the United States*, a piece that attempted to outline the benefits a given society stands to gain from a substantive (real) higher education systems. McVeigh first enumerates Trow's potential benefits, and then explains where contemporary Japanese society falls short (Trow in quotes, our paraphrasing of McVeigh thereafter):

1. "A positive effect on social attitudes," including appreciation of other cultures – In the case of contemporary Japan, however, McVeigh asserts that there persists "a passive, sometimes even 'polite discrimination' against outsiders...such sentiments are often legitimized by culturally deterministic viewpoints that are deeply embedded in Japanese society. What would be called racism, ethnocentrism, bigotry, or ignorance elsewhere, are often referred to as "custom", "tradition", "culture" and "misunderstanding" in Japan (241).
2. "A more sophisticated perspective of time" – McVeigh follows Trow here, a point the latter apparently derived from Modernization Theory. Here McVeigh has trouble turning the critique to Japan, admitting that the "Japanese apparently have no problem with this point." But McVeigh hastens to add that Japan's success with modern time does "not necessarily translate into other forms of knowledge that are just as valuable to the health of the society and that find their most convenient expression at the higher education level." We confess that we find McVeigh's point muddled here.
3. Citizens "learn how to learn" – McVeigh suggests that Japan's *daigaku* fails "to build upon the knowledge forms required for advanced

thinking and learning.” Here the implication is that in Japan there is no continuation of learning made in high school, and the lack of substantive higher education hinders “lifelong learning” across Japan. McVeigh attempts to further extend this point to its “political implications”: “the student is not trained to be a motivated, inquisitive learner, a good speaker, one attuned to the significance of controversial issues and current events.” (243)

4. Higher education has two key political functions, first as a “radical critic of the established political order” and “undermine the belief[s]..that merely serve the ‘cultural apparatus’ of the ruling elites to ensure the passage of power and privilege across generations” – Here on the first point, McVeigh’s inclination to view Japanese higher education as detrimental to politics is fully elaborated here: the “lack of solid higher educational training has not adequately politicized the populace” (243). On the second point, McVeigh claims that the mass of Japanese youth are simply lethargic, and have been convinced by the system to follow the dictates of the ‘ruling classes’.
5. Higher education aids “secondary education through teacher training and by conducting educational research” – McVeigh elaborates that colleges are where students “how to conduct basic research; how to utilize the resources of a library; how to write and articulate one’s thoughts coherently and effectively; how to listen, appreciate, and intellectually digest what others say; how to formulate convincing arguments; and how to debate without debasing” (245). Yet, the problem, according to McVeigh, is that “many Japanese students, even at the best *daigaku*, have not had such skills usefully honed.” (245).

To sum up then, McVeigh argues that the extremely poor quality of Japanese universities will bring a range of consequences for Japanese society: an insular mentality, low-levels of lifelong learning, citizens who fail to question the political order, and students who cannot conduct even the most rudimentary thinking/research tasks.

McVeigh’s critique has by now been widely accepted, as judged by level of citations (admittedly citations is a rough index, but his work is among

the most cited work on Japanese education over the past two decades), and by the sheer dearth of critical argument against his central claims. This ‘negative consensus’ appears widespread and deeply embedded now, uncritically accepted by university researchers around the world. But is Japanese higher education really so bad? Is there really nothing to learn from Japanese universities?

3. “*Japanese Education Isn’t That Bad*”: Can the Approach Be Extended to Japanese Higher Education?

Before pursuing these questions, it is important to pause briefly to explain our interest in this topic and the perspective we bring. For roughly the past decade, we have been engaged in research that attempts to understand Japanese education, largely policy and practice at the compulsory level. This work culminated in a popular book we co-authored entitled *Japanese Education Isn’t That Bad: Reimagining Through International Data* (Komatsu and Rappleye 2021). Our attempt in that book was to challenge the widespread popular belief that Japanese compulsory education was beset by a range of problems, including: lack of creativity, declining academic achievement, old-fashioned style of lessons, boring schools, bullying and so on. Through the use of a range of new large-scale international comparative datasets (e.g. PISA), international comparative surveys (e.g. National Institute for Youth Education, 国立青少年教育振興機構), and rigorous academic comparative studies (e.g. Stevenson and Stigler’s *The Teaching Gap* (1995)), we critically engaged with the ‘negative consensus’ that dominates domestic discussions of Japanese compulsory education. Although the use of international comparison in the process of reflecting on Japanese education is arguably a method as old as Japanese modern education itself, our approach perhaps brought an element of novelty in that it used comparison not to further a discourse of deficit, but instead to *challenge* the deficit discourse.

However, that book and other papers included no mention of higher education. Our personal engagement with higher education had been limited to hands-on policy work in Cambodia (Rappleye and Un 2018) and

Rappleye's reflections on his position as a foreign scholar in the Japanese system (e.g. Rappleye and Vickers 2015). Moreover, cross-country comparisons complexify as one moves 'higher' up an education system. In truth, when we wrote the 2021 book, we had not contemplated much how far 'up' our argument applied. The English-language academic literature on Japanese *compulsory* education had, in contrast to McVeigh's scathing assessment, been more favorable to the Japanese approach. So, in a sense, we started with more confidence that there was sufficient evidence to support our claims that 'Japanese education isn't that bad'. In this context, the invitation extended by Nagoya University's Center for the Studies of Higher Education to explore how far this research paradigm might add a new dimension to research Japanese Higher Education was both welcome and daunting at the same time. It started with less of a conviction that Japanese higher education was 'not that bad', more of an experiment in thinking differently. We would like to underscore here that it remains very much an experiment, for reasons we enumerate below.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to extending our work on Japanese compulsory education to higher education was a lack of comparative data. Global higher education rankings, such as the Times Higher Education (THE) exercise, do collect comparative data across various categories: Teaching (comprised of (i) reputation surveys, (ii) staff-to-student ratio, (iii) doctorate to bachelor ratio, (iv) institutional income), Research (comprised of (i) reputation survey, (ii) research income, and (iii) research productivity), Citations, International Outlook (comprised of (i) proportion of international students, (ii) proportion of international staff, and (iii) institutional collaboration), and Industry Income. Based on this, some rudimentary comparisons are possible (e.g. proportion of international staff). But, of course, whether or not international staff ratios are a good proxy for quality is open to considerable debate. Moreover, there currently exists no outcomes-based comparison, a perspective that would help us understand if, say, international staff does in fact raise student outcomes. Composite indices like THE fail to provide this sort of information. In short, there is no consensus that the currently dominant quantitative comparative measurements and indices capture a shared notion of a 'good' university.

Perhaps for that very reason, the OECD has been attempting to extend a PISA-like comparative exercise to the level of higher education. The Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education (AHELO) project was piloted from 2011-2012, and attempted to develop comparative indicators in the fields of Generic Skills, Civil Engineering (Science), and Economics (Social Science). Japan participated in AHELO, alongside 8 other OECD countries. Since the data was anonymized and restricted, it makes secondary analyses difficult. However, Fukahori (2014) who works for the National Institute of Education Research (NIER), a research division attached to Japan's Ministry of Education, did have access and was able to conduct some comparative analyses. Interestingly, his data-driven findings revealed something unexpected, with its obvious conclusions for policymaking:

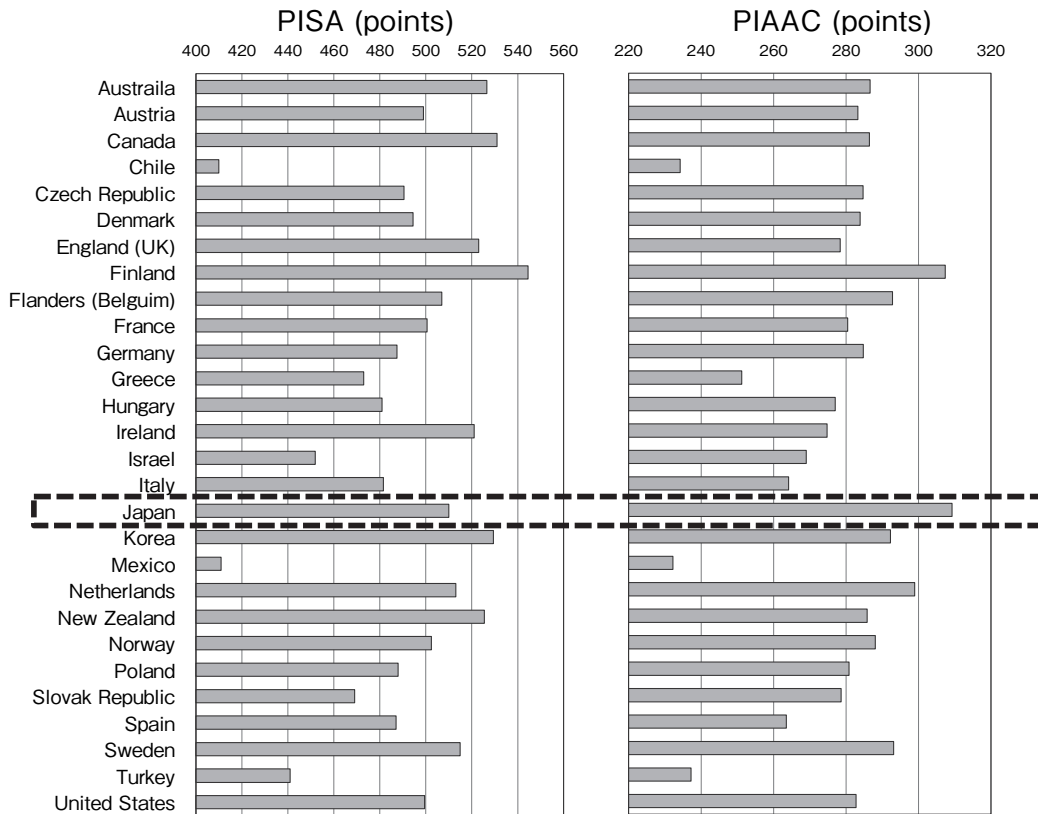
These results show that students in the Japanese universities surveyed, as compared with students in the other two countries, indeed receive lessons that are more centered on “lectures”, and the percentage of those receiving “interactive seminar and personal instruction” and “group activities” is relatively low. [Yet] In looking at the test scores, the Japanese students who received a higher percentage of “lectures” scored higher, while “interactive seminar and personal instruction” and “group activities” scored lower. From these results, it is not necessarily desirable to make the shift to lectures centered on student participation (Fukahori 2014)

Here, based on OECD-AHELO data, Fukahori suggests that Japanese quality is not lacking, and the rush to shift pedagogy makes no sense, at least from the perspective of achievement (outcomes). It is possible to imagine that AHELO, had it continued, would have generated a range of comparable data that could be used, as we had done at the compulsory level, to examine the accuracy of the negative consensus that engulfs Japanese higher education. However, AHELO quickly encountered heavy critique – rightly so, we feel – from leading scholars like Altbach (2015) who accessed the AHELO pilot as follows: “proceeding to a full-scale AHELO project seems like an extraordinarily bad idea. There is far from a consensus

or even a significant number of countries interested...The costs are quite high – in the millions of dollars.” Organizations like the American Council on Higher Education (2015) echoed this criticism. So it seems unlikely that we will ever see a “PISA for University” that would help us verify or challenge the ‘negative consensus’ through comparative data.

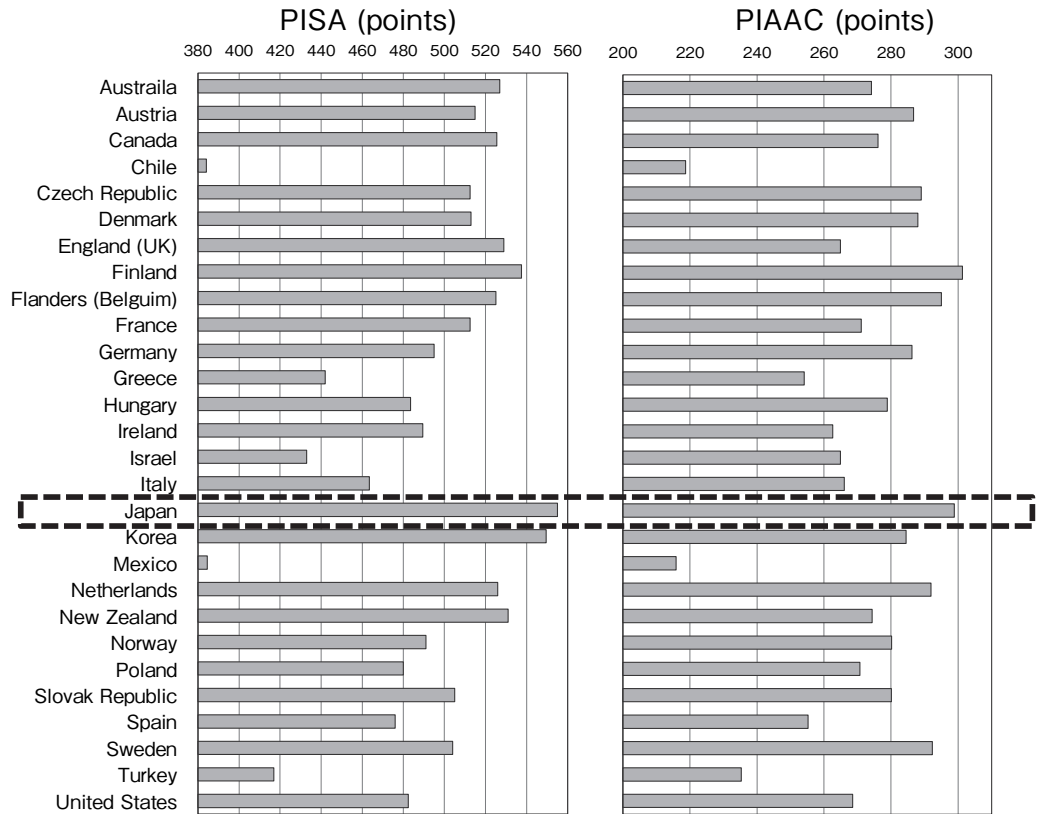
As such, currently the only way to use comparative international data to access Japanese higher education appears to be linking PISA and PIAAC scores. PISA tests students at the end of the compulsory cycle, while PIAAC allows us to see outcomes in numeracy and literacy at, say, age 25-29 years old. We ran a preliminary analysis, as follows. First, we calculated relative differences between PIAAC and PISA scores. Many of those participated in PIAAC at the age of 25-29 also participated in PISA 2000 and PISA 2003. Differences between PIAAC and PISA scores would represent students’ skill improvement after the age of 15. More specifically, we standardized PIAAC and PISA scores for a given country using standard deviations for PIAAC and PISA scores for the sample countries. The difference between these standardized PIAAC and PISA scores was defined as the post-PISA improvement for a given country.

The results are as follows. Among 28 OECD countries that had data for both PIAAC and PISA, Japan ranked 10th in PISA literacy and 1st in PIAAC literacy (Figure 1). Japan ranked 1st in PISA numeracy and 2nd in PIAAC numeracy (Figure 2). We observed substantial ‘skill’ improvement for Japan, but only for literacy. In fact, literacy improvement for Japan was the greatest among all the countries (Figure 3). In numeracy, the improvement for Japan was intermediate, compared to other countries. Here we can also see that while universities in the US and UK rank high in various global rankings, the improvements in literacy and numeracy for these countries were not particularly outstanding. In fact, in the case of England, a regression in scores was among the largest of any OECD country.



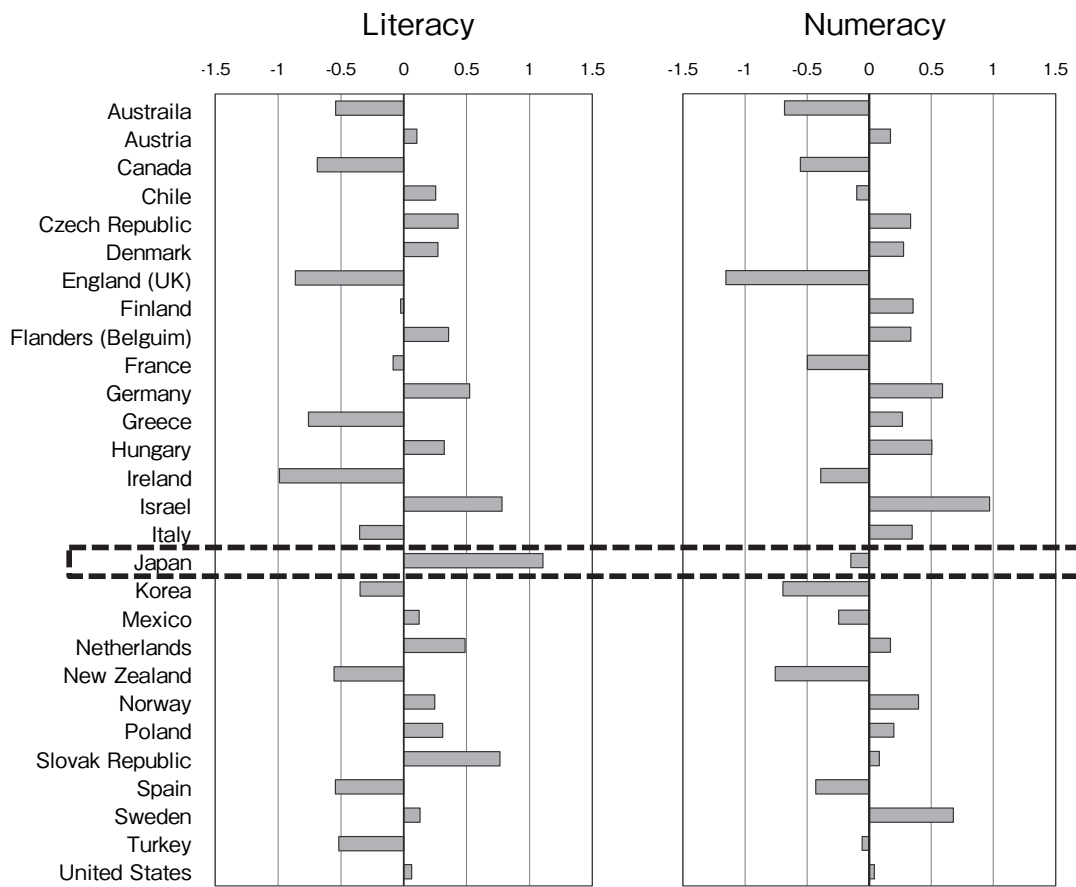
Source: Data were derived from OECD's PISA (<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/>) and Education GPS websites (<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/Home>).

Figure 1 Literacy Scores: PISA (the mean of PISA 2000 and 2003 scores) and PIAAC



Source: Data were derived from OECD's PISA (<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/>) and Education GPS websites (<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/Home>).

Figure 2 Numeracy Scores: PISA (the mean of PISA 2000 and 2003 scores) and PIAAC



Resource: Authors

※ Improvement = (PIAAC score - mean PIAAC score)/SD - (PISA score - mean PISA score)/SD

An improvement was defined by the difference between the PIAAC score for a given country and PISA score divided by the standard deviation of

Figure 3 Improvements in Literacy and Numeracy

Still, it is clear that PISA-PIAAC comparisons such as these are fraught with problems: Are the gains (literacy) a result of high school, college, or on-the-job training? In the end, we cannot go very far with this, and have little confidence in the analysis. Unfortunately, recent work that is more sophisticated (Loylaka *et al.* 2021), *e.g.* looking at skill gains in STEM education in several major countries, does not include Japan. It remains to be seen whether these studies will be extended to Japan and/or whether Japanese scholars will produce similar comparative studies in coming years. In the end, the point we wish to underscore here is that the data necessary to replicate our approach of our 2021 book to critically assess the claims of McVeigh are, at least at present, impossible.

4. Another Approach: A Changing Global Context

How then to proceed? We propose that, while we await robust comparative data, one way to take up this problem is push data to one side, and instead focus on a changed context. One's view of whether something is "good" or "bad" depends upon, of course, what one is comparing a given phenomenon with. Instead of measuring the distance from a utopian ideal of a 'perfect' higher education system, we are better to compare with different versions of higher education worldwide. Our claim in this section is that Japanese higher education may not look so negative if we draw comparisons with the contemporary situation in the 'leading' Anglo-American systems.

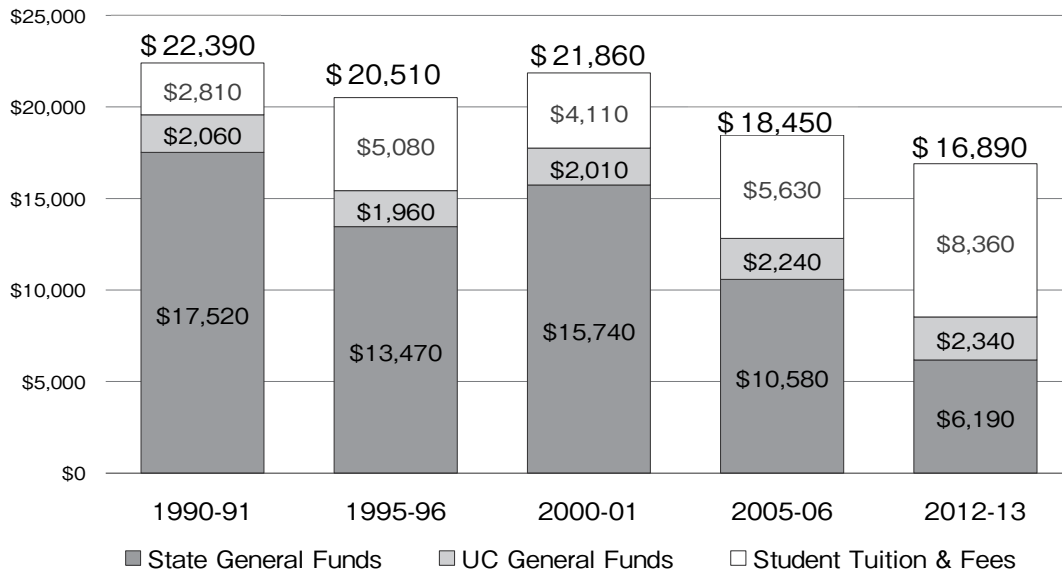
McVeigh's research on Japan was conducted in the 1990s, and he drew on academic works like Trow (1986) and Hall (1975) and popular works like Zeugner (1983) that were comparing against higher education in Anglo-American contexts of the 1970s-1980s. Under normal circumstances, this would pose little problem. But the 1980s were extraordinary in the level of dis-continuity from the past. The rise of Regan and Thatcher administrations inaugurated a period of policy shift, wherein the state's role was reduced and higher education was increasingly seen as a private good and/or motor for economic growth. The rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s had major impacts on policy in the 1990s. We assume all readers will be aware of this, so we need not rehearse all the details here. But in the UK, for example, there were moves to 'audit' research activity (the first research assessment exercise was conducted in 1986 under Thatcher, and has since become institutionalized), and look upon international students as a lucrative 'market' rather than a cultural and academic enrichment opportunity (home student fees were subject to caps, but higher fees could be charged of international students to increase revenue), among other shifts.

In the United States, public funding to universities was reduced, in part as 'punishment' for critical scholarship. In California, when Reagan was Governor (1967-1975), he reduced public support to the flagship University of California system. This was widely regarded as retaliation for critical student activism in the late 1960-1970s (*e.g.* the Vietnam War, the Counter

Culture Movement), particularly at the UC Berkeley campus. Marginson (2016) has recently contributed a highly insightful analysis of how the ‘California Dream’ envisaged by its prime architect Clark Kerr was dismantled by these Reagan’s policies. It is worth quoting at length:

The shift in the political economy led by Clark Kerr’s nemesis, Ronald Reagan, proved to be as influential in its own way as Roosevelt and the New Deal, and it has lasted almost as long. This shift has reshaped, and in some respects decisively limited, the economic and social potentials of American higher education. If the California Idea of higher education was partly utopian, then the Reagan-era political economy has heightened the utopian element, pushing further from reach the 1960s egalitarian vision. But at the same time, the alternative utopia, that of the market society driven by ever more unequal competition in society and higher education, has failed... In higher education, on all of the indicators except high-research performance (where the multiversity has been protected from wholesale privatization by intrinsic market failure, federal research funding, and academic cultures), American higher education has declined. Higher education is less well funded and less affordable, participation is wavering, academic learning is in question, and quality below the top institutions appears to be falling without limit. (Marginson 2016: 124)

The notion that the vaunted University of California system is now in “decline” often comes a surprise to Japanese scholars who, apparently like McVeigh, is comparing Japan with the pre-1980s context. But the change is real, and must be recognized. Take, for example, the rate of tuition rise at the UC’s: in 2004-2005 it was roughly USD\$5000, but in 2019-2020 it topped more than USD\$15,500 – a rate far outpacing inflation. As shown In Figure 4, not only has per pupil expenditure decline overall, but the percentage of that expenditure covered by tuition and fees increased. In other words, state support has been drastically reduced.



Resource: University of California (2015)

Figure 4 Per Pupil Funding by Source for the UC System (Inflation Adjusted)

The situation is so bad that UC Berkeley – the flagship campus of the UC system – is at an “existential tipping point” (Douglass and Bleemer 2018). Faced with budget deficits due to declining state funding, and yet trying to keep research capacity and instruction high, UC Berkeley has taken a last-ditch strategy: rapidly increasing student enrollment. More tuition paying students means more money. Without doing so, the budget crisis of Berkeley would be wholly unmanageable: the institution is near bankruptcy, as one former UC Berkeley Vice-Chancellor told one of us over dinner last fall in San Francisco. Yet facing anger from citizens of the town of Berkeley for crowding, the California Supreme Court recently ruled that UC Berkeley could not keep increasing enrollment indefinitely. UC Berkeley was thus forced into the odd step of “taking back” (rescinding) 5,100 offers for admissions it had already made for the 2022 September start. This “frozen enrollment” will exacerbate the already looming budget crisis. Although the political and economic situation is highly complex, the simple point here is that even here at UC Berkeley – perhaps America’s premier public land-grant university and located just a few minutes’ drive from a fabulously wealthy Silicon Valley – the policy shifts of the past three decades have completely changed the landscape of higher education there. ‘Participation is wavering’, ‘academic learning is in question, and ‘quality’

is 'falling without limit'. This is the new reality of Anglo-American higher education three decades on from the 1980s neo-liberal revolution.

Shifting our gaze from budgets to what it 'feels like' to learn, teach, and research in these new neo-liberalized systems, the changes are arguably just as drastic. Selingo (2013) details a "drop out" crisis in the United States, where some 400,000 students decide to leave the system every year, in large part due to the increasing tuition costs discussed above. The key question is whether or not an expensive degree is worth it at all: "Is a degree from Podunk U worth \$50,000 a year? Even if you go \$30,000 to \$40,000 into debt to get a diploma and then have trouble getting a job?" (26) (Podunk is a colloquial term used in American English for 'not-famous' and 'low-quality'). In an era of tuition hikes, students are saddled with more and more debt. Simultaneously, the "credential race" takes center stage, with institutions responding in ways that treat students as "customers". Put simply, American higher education has shifted away from cultural and academic goals, toward economic ones. But, of course, this should not be a surprise: this is precisely what neo-liberal policies were designed to do. Selingo (2013) seconds Marginson's diagnosis:

For most of the twentieth century, the United States bragged it had the best colleges and universities in the world – and rightfully so... Not anymore. Over the past thirty years – and particularly in the first decade of the new millennium – American higher education has lost its way. At the very top, the most elite and prestigious institutions remain the best... But at the colleges and universities attended by most American students, costs are spiraling out of control and quality is declining just as increasing international competition demands that higher education be more productive and less expensive (Seligno 2013: 40).

To support his argument, Selingo cites the work *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Arum and Roska 2011). We wonder aloud: How many Japan-based scholars are aware of this work? The book paints a dismal empirical picture of the quality of American higher education: almost half of American college students show no gains in critical thinking in the first 24 months of college; fewer than half of 2nd

year students had taken a class that required 40 pages or more of reading a week. Put simply, as opposed to the image of hardworking elite students reading all night and debating all day, the reality of most American higher education today is poor and declining quality, despite the skyrocketing price tag.

Turning to research and teaching – the role usually assigned to professors – there are increasing signs that research is declining. Marginson (2016) highlights a decline in the growth of science papers in the United States beginning in the 1990s, a fall centered primarily on the public research universities – such as Berkeley – that were subject to declining public financial support. This decline happened *despite a growth in federal research grants* overall in the 1990s, and comes at a time when China has overtaken the US in the category of highly cited scientific papers (2018-2020). Attempting to produce the same amount of research, yet with fewer resources and with many more students (the earlier point about UC Berkeley increasing enrolments), has naturally led to the sudden acceleration of the life of the professoriate in Anglo-American circles. Shahjahan (2015) points out: “In the neoliberal academy, time is meant to be used to accumulate grants, publications, and patents, as well as improve teaching evaluations, and structure service commitments: these are the marks of a ‘good academic citizen’” (492). In other words, shifts in Anglo-American institutions have accelerated the professor’s life in ways that are not always conducive to quality, even if – on paper – these look like ‘improvements’ (e.g. more papers published, more grants acquired). It is little wonder then that recent years have seen the rise of the “Slow Professor” movement, an explicit attempt by professors to challenge the speed of the neo-liberal Anglo-American academy:

If there is one sector of society that should be cultivating deep thought in itself and others, it is academia. Yet the corporatization of the contemporary university has sped up the clock, demanding increased speed and efficiency from faculty regardless of the consequences for education and scholarship (Berg and Seeber 2016: back cover)

So popular has the “Slow Professor” movement become that it has been

featured in a variety of popular news outlets and praised as the key to bringing creativity back to universities, improving teaching, and fostering greater trans-disciplinarity and collegiality.

Our point of this section of the piece has been to show a drastically changed context for higher education in Anglo-American contexts. The neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s have rippled down to today in the form of higher tuitions, fewer resources, more students, lower quality, less research output, and a heightened pace of work that some believe hinders creativity. It is these Western contexts which remain – following the catch-up pattern inaugurated in Meiji – overwhelmingly the reference point for drawing comparisons of relative strengths and weaknesses of Japanese higher education. Yet, at least in the English-language literature, the existing comparisons oddly seem to draw comparisons between the 1970s Anglo-American situation and the contemporary Japanese situation. This stems, in part, from the fact that the “classic” works – *e.g.* Trow – do not include discussion of what happened recently. It also stems, in part, from the tendency for postwar Japanese scholars to inflate the strengths of Anglo-America and imagine Japan as “catching up” (Rappleye and Kariya 2011). Our analytical point here is that such comparisons are distorting. They distort because they hold up an idealized image of Anglo-America to the ‘ugly’ face of Japanese higher education. This may serve its purposes for scandalizing the Japanese system domestically, a common strategy in Japan (and not just Japan, to be fair) to push for, say, additional funding or advancing political positions. But when viewed internationally, this move produces a distorted image of weaknesses of Japanese higher education.

As such, we propose a different set of questions: *What might come into view if we, instead of comparing Japanese universities with Anglo-American ones prior to the 1980s, and compared them Anglo-American universities today? Would we still argue that Japanese higher education is simply a “myth”?*

5. Daring to Think Differently: Potentially Positive Aspects of Japanese Higher Education

Thus far we have argued that the ‘negative consensus around Japanese higher education entrenched over the past few decades is not easy to examine ‘objectively’, given the lack of robust comparative data. As an alternative approach, we argued that we may start by recognizing that the landscape of Anglo-American education has changed dramatically in the intervening decades, and thus it is necessary to reconceptualize the comparison. Refusing the utopian nostalgia of the past, we should instead ask: Does Japanese higher education share the same negative aspects generated by neo-liberal policies in Anglo-American higher education? In this section, we turn to enumerate how some of the ‘strengths’ of Japanese higher education have been generated by Japan’s ‘failure’ to follow trends outlined above.

1. Japanese higher education has not been marketized to the same extent, allowing the system to retain a primary focus on education

As discussed earlier, the neo-liberal induced shift towards marketization has lowered quality in the Anglo-American systems, particularly in the ‘middle’ and ‘lower’ institutions of United States. Japanese higher education has not been marketized to the same extent. Today, students remain overwhelmingly ‘students’ rather than customers. This keeps the focus of higher education on teaching and learning, as opposed to focusing on ‘improvements’ in the student experience, it prevents grade inflation, and allows professors to maintain standards, pursue knowledge (as opposed to student satisfaction), and ‘fail’ students if necessary. In other words, the standards remain resolutely academic in Japan, as opposed to being turned over, at least in part, to a market mentality (*e.g.* ‘I am paying so I deserve a degree’). This point suggests that the underpinning logic of higher education has not shifted to become entirely economic. We do not want to exaggerate this, as surely there has been economic rationales given for various reforms (*e.g.* global human resources). But within universities themselves, one rarely finds professors, students, and/or administrators

discussing markets or using a market-based language. Admittedly, declining birth rates give rise to some of this language among Japanese private universities. But that is contextually-rooted response; quite different reason from neo-liberal logics.

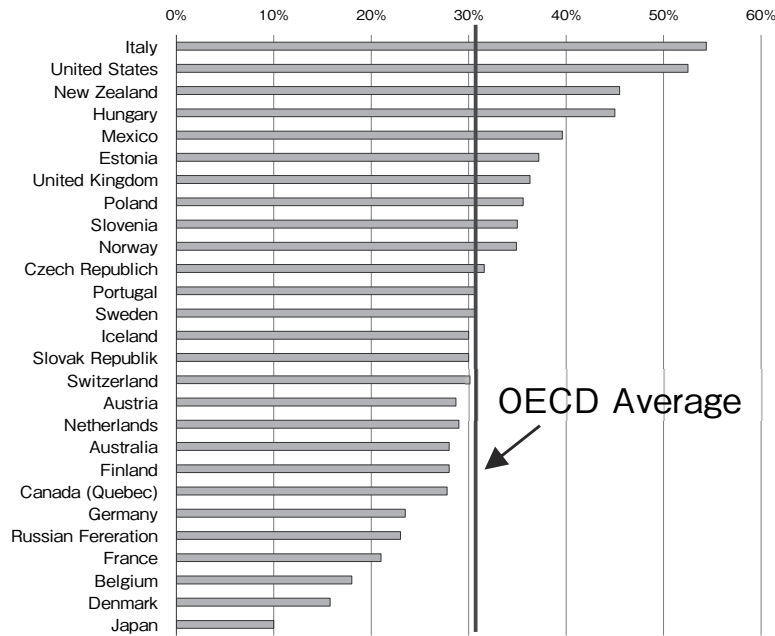
2. Tuition payments are manageable, and virtually no Japanese students are in serious student debt

Closely related to the previous point, the lack of marketization and the maintenance of the ‘basic’ student experience has kept tuitions manageable. Under 50% of Japanese undergraduates attending 4-year colleges take out loans (the figures is also under 50% for Master students). Among Japanese students obtaining a Master’s degree, only 35% ended with debt, of which 17% owned more than 3 million yen (approximately US\$20,000) (Nippon DC 2021). Note that this includes students in medical, dental, and pharmaceutical schools. The comparison in costs for a 4-year degree between, say, UC Berkeley and Tokyo University is stark: four years at the University of Tokyo at a cost of ¥2,425,000 (2019, at current exchange rates USD 16,000), while UC Berkeley costs \$152,264 dollars for California residents (¥ 22,680,103) and \$ 268,232 for non-California residents (¥42,652,250) (Jweekly 2019). That is 10x times the amount, despite both being public universities. Meanwhile, for graduate school education, the costs differentials are even more stark, as US institutions often look upon Masters degrees as a major source of revenue, and rarely offer financial aid.

3. Drop-out rates remain low, suggesting satisfactory quality and less waste

As discussed above, drop-out rates in US colleges are extremely high. As shown in Figure 5 below drawn from OECD data, the gap in dropout rates between the US and Japan is stark (as cited in Martini and Fontana (2015)). Although it is impossible to draw a straight line from low-drop out rates to quality, following the logic of Seligno (2013) above, we can at least surmise that Japan’s university quality is not so low as to end in drop-out. Drop-outs always entail enormous waste as well – administrative, financial,

and logistical. But Japanese universities with among the lowest drop-out rate in the world arguably have less ‘waste’ of this sort.



Resource: reproduced from Martini and Fontana (2015: 9)

Figure 5 University Drop-Out Rates for OECD Countries

4. Virtually unlimited freedom in research, without government-led assessment and/or disciplining around citation indices (e.g. SSCI)

As a foreign scholar working in one of Japan’s flagship research universities, Rappleye has been constantly amazed at the absolute lack of pressure/incentive/discussion around publication. To what degree this is unique to Kyoto University is something we wish to explore further. It is clear that this freedom traces roots, in part, to the postwar reconstruction, when the Allied Occupation made an effort to increase university autonomy, particularly in academic matters (in English: Cummings and Amano (1977)). However, it is clear that national policy does not strongly promote research production through assessment, review, and particularly sanctioning. Evaluations are usually self-evaluations that, at least in our experience, few professors take seriously. In Japan, there is nothing like the UK’s Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), nor is there any serious movement towards quantifying quality through use of measurements like, say, the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). We acknowledge that this may soon change,

and a few research universities are already experimenting with these sorts of indices. Nevertheless, the effects of this loose, virtually non-existent, approach are enormous: scholars are free to pursue scholarly themes, rather than focus on ‘impact’ (recently added to the RAE); free to engage in long-term projects and book writing, as opposed to pursuing a hurried strategy of publishing smaller articles to fulfill external requirements within given time frames; free to attempt projects that have a small chance of success, but if successful would be paradigm shifting in their implications (more on this below). We do not want to romanticize this, but the freedom in Japanese universities is genuine and worth considering following the rush to audit university research since the 1980s.

5. Research funding remains generous, particularly for topics that are not immediately ‘relevant’ to economic needs

Closely related to this, research funding remains generous in Japan. The Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) is one of the largest public research funding agencies in the world. JSPS funds are allotted from the government’s annual budget, and have steadily increased, adding some ¥2.73 billion yen since 2011 (Kodera 2015). In other words, research funding is both generous and it is growing in Japan. Moreover, JSPS is managed by scholars: once the funding allotment is made from the National Treasury, the administration of the system (review, screening, allotment categories, etc.) is made by scholars, as opposed to bureaucrats. This ‘independence’ has been in place since 2003, when JSPS was re-established as separate from MEXT. Perhaps for this reason, there has not been the characteristic drift in research funding priorities towards market or policy relevance witnessed in Anglo-American contexts. Connected to this, there has actually been a proliferation in research funding categories designed to intentionally break the existing paradigms of research and society: the “Transformative Research Areas” category aims of JSPS to “create research areas that will lead to radical transformation of and change in the existing framework and/or direction of research”, whilst the “Challenging Research (Pioneering/Exploratory)” category aims at a similar “radical transformation” of existing approaches.

6. Publication has not been marketized, as many university departments and academic societies continue to produce in-house journals

Over the past decade, an increasing number of scholars based in Anglo-American universities have pointed out the way that for-profit publishing companies (Routledge, Springer, Elsevier, and others) have profited handsomely from the combination of publicly-funded research and increasing pressures on scholars to publish. Moreover, there are concerns that potential contributions are locked behind paywalls that few non-academics can access. As a result, there are increasing calls to publish open-access or create, utilizing new digital media, scholar-run journals. The Educational Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA) established in 1993 which is peer-reviewed and fully open-access is often held up as one positive model in the field of education. EPAA was established by scholars at Arizona State, its editors are professors there, and its modest production costs are covered by the College of Education there. What is fascinating here is that this ASU model is basically the KIYO (紀要) model that Japanese universities have traditionally had. Nearly all departments in research universities across Japan, and sometimes each course within each department, have their own journals. This is particularly true for the humanities and social sciences. The journal in which the current article appears is one such in-house journal. At the same time, most Japanese academic societies run their own journals as well. Virtually all of these journals now post all articles online. All this is done without paying exorbitant fees for an “open access” option. Some leading Western and Japanese scholars writing in the 1980s-1990s (*e.g.* Cummings and Amano 1977: 213-214), derided this in-house publishing system, arguing it “inhibited” production and distribution of new ideas. McVeigh (2002) was also negative about the system of *daigaku kiyo*, arguing it prevented peer review (140). Here again though, the strengths of the KIYO system made now need to be re-accessed, now that we recognize the failings of an overly marketized and monetized system of research dissemination in Anglo-American circles: this ‘cutting edge’ of the US is, surprisingly, already present in the ‘traditional’ Japanese context.

6. Beyond the Western Horizon: The View from Non-Anglo-American Systems

Thus far, we have reviewed the potential strengths of Japanese higher education by contrasting it with Anglo-American systems, particularly the United States. While this may be useful for scholars working in a field of research dominated by Anglo-American comparisons (*i.e.* rankings inevitably lead to a focus on top Anglo-American institutions like Ox-bridge, Stanford, and the Ivy League), it does leave out aspects of Japanese higher education that may be recognized as strengths in non-Western contexts. To gain new perspectives, we need to think beyond a simple comparison with the Anglo-American countries/institutions and rationales. In doing so, a different set of strengths come into focus, including:

1. Manpower planning remains possible to achieve within this system

Before the neo-liberal turn, higher education policy in many parts of the non-Western world was linked to the manpower planning needs of a given country. “Manpower planning” was a buzzword of the 1970s, signifying the ways that governments could strategically plan the sorts of talents and skills needed in the next generation. In most Western European contexts, the historically-rooted cultural institution of the university was gradually reformed to meet manpower needs, then – in the 1980s – shifted again to meet market needs. Yet, in many non-Western contexts universities were, from the beginning, linked to manpower planning (modernization) (Altbach and Umakoshi 1995). A country like, say, China looked upon the system to create the scientists (*e.g.* engineers) needed for national development, *i.e.* the dam and bridge builders, the transport engineers, etc. Although the government-led planning function of higher education has been heavily critiqued in a neo-liberal era, it is obvious that many non-Western countries still utilize universities for ‘national development’. The fact that Japanese higher education, particularly national universities, has not been fully turned over to the market means that they are still able to fulfill that role. And, the fact remains that some future *social* challenges can arguably only be met by this ‘older’ manpower planning approach. For example, relying

only on market demand it is unlikely that Japanese universities would try to expand places for foreign students or hire foreign faculty: there is virtually no market incentive for that. Similarly, there is little to no market incentive to open programs in sustainability (Kyoto University recently opened the School of Human Survivability). Yet, for Japan beset by rapid population decline – one which needs to create a society open to immigrants – these proactive, ‘manpower’ planning moves are necessary; for a world that needs to make the turn to sustainability/survivability these forward-looking programs become possible. Places like Cambodia are now struggling to recalibrate their universities back to a manpower planning function, after two-decades of neo-liberal style higher education reforms led by the World Bank and other donors (Un and Sok 2018).

2. Translation of Overseas Knowledge (Internationalization)

Citing data from the early 1990s, Altbach and Umakoshi (2000) pointed out that the number of books translated from English to Japanese, was nearly 1,000 times the number translated from Japanese to English (2,290 books to 33). Unfortunately, we were unable to track down more recent statistics. Yet anecdotal evidence based on walks through book stores in Japan and the United States suggests these trends have only increased. Through the lens of modernization theory, this imbalance might be read as ‘proof’ of the superior state of Anglo-American research, and *prima facie* evidence for Japanese deficiency. Yet, through the lens of learning – *i.e.* a drive to expand one’s existing thought horizons – these same statistics can be read as evidence of Japan’s enduring intellectual drive to learn from others. One major study from the early 1990s suggested that more Japanese scholars thought understanding international trends in research important, as compared with their American counterparts (Boyer, Altbach, and Whitelaw 1994). This points to the role Japanese scholars and institutions play in the ‘translation’ of overseas knowledge. In many countries around the world, higher education institutions are utilizing old curricula, as they lack awareness of recent global trends. Or, even if professors themselves can read the English books, there are few local language texts to introduce to students. In recognizing that higher

education in non-Western contexts has always meant, at least to some extent, learning from the dominant discourse of the Western world, we can recognize that Japanese universities play this role extremely well. In our current post-colonial mood we may lament the lack of creativity this purportedly entails. But, in fact, any ‘world leading’ intellectual contribution from the non-Western world will inevitably come through engagement and fusion with Western knowledge (Rappleye 2018). In the ‘mixing’ process, Japanese institutions have made major contributions that we feel are yet to be recognized globally, due – in part – to an enduring lack of scholarly emphasis on learning across cultural/civilization borders.

3. Domestic Language Based Scholarship, providing access to domestic policy and public

Related to issues surrounding translation, we must recognize the Japanese achievement of an entire higher education system conducted in the Japanese language. In virtually all areas colonized by Western powers, higher education systems remain fragmented between European languages and local languages. Often, the most prestigious institutions were set-up by colonizers and European languages remain dominant. One may think here of Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Singapore. Many scholars in these colonial institutions continue to look to Western countries for research direction and trends, and often publish in European languages. For some, this seems unproblematic: it leads to greater global connectivity. However, when it comes to translating European-language scholarship into local languages for purposes of policymaking or shaping public opinion major problems arise: the already existing gap between higher education and society grows even wider due to the language barrier. The ability for intellectuals to conduct research in one’s own language, write in one’s own language, and thus appeal to peers in one’s own context is rare among non-Western countries. To be clear, we are not arguing that Japanese institutions shouldn’t work to improve the foreign language abilities of their students and faculty. We are only seeking to underscore the value of being able to work in one’s own language, particularly for the more expansive aims of higher education, *e.g.* engaging in public debate.

4. Advancement of 'Local' Knowledge

Both of the previous two points support the final, larger point: Japanese universities do a relatively good job of preserving and advancing 'local' knowledge forms. That is, Japanese higher education still shows more elements of its indigenous intellectual traditions, as compared with other non-Western systems worldwide. This point may come as a surprise to Japanese scholars, those who envisage that there is nothing particularly 'Japanese' about Japanese higher education, except the particularity of deficit. But interestingly, many Chinese scholars recognize that Japanese universities are playing a role in preserving indigenous intellectual traditions. Yang (2017) argues that Japan "juxtaposed" Western and Japanese approaches, as opposed to China which tried to "integrate" – a process that has not gone smoothly, as Western modernity has dominated. Interestingly, Yang's remarks echo a former President of Peking University and former Minister of Education in the early 1920s, who remarked that "If you want to know something about Tang civilization, go to Japan. Upon a foundation of Tang culture, Japan made herself great by the absorption of Western science." (Jiang 1943). Even Anglo-American scholars recognize the relative distinctiveness of Japanese higher education (Hayhoe 1998, Altbach and Umakoshi 1995). Logically, the struggles of Japanese universities to accept non-Japanese and the enduring problems of explaining Japanese scholarship to non-Japanese audiences also implicitly underscore that indigenous elements remain strong. For many scholars operating in a deficit mindset, the persistence of such differences is troublesome. But within increasing interesting post/decolonial trends in research (see Takayama 2018, Connell 2007), these same elements can be understood more favorably: the persistence of differences that ensure the continuation of 'local' knowledge forms; safeguard diversity within a homogenizing intellectual world. At Kyoto University, where we have been privileged to work, there is continued interest in the 'indigenous' theories of those like Nishida Kitaro, Imanishi Kinji, and others.

In concluding this section, it is important to underscore that we are not arguing that Japanese higher education is all good. Numerous problems

certainly exist. Those should be addressed. Unfortunately, it is too often the case that only deficits are discussed in the literature. This bias implicitly reinforces the already dominant ‘negative consensus’ around Japanese universities. Instead, the points enumerated above are meant to bring nuance back to the discussion; a set of initial suggestions about what the strengths of Japanese higher education might be, hypotheses that must be followed up with rigorous, comparative empirical exploration. Sato’s (2017) recent reflections on his experience teaching at the University of Tokyo and Princeton is a rare, but inspiring example of the balanced approach we might envisage. It is unlikely that any one system has all aspects ‘right’, instead – through less biased formulation of research questions and more nuanced comparison – we can foster mutual learning, replacing our current taken-for-granted image of advanced, world-class Western institutions and backward, second-tier Japanese ones.

7. Conclusion: Towards a Wider Horizon for Studies of Japanese Higher Education

For Anglo-American observers of Japanese higher education, McVeigh’s (2002) scathing critique remains preeminent. From the *Japanese Higher Education as Myth* perspective, there is nothing to learn, and every reason to be pessimistic about Japan’s future. Recall the earlier review of McVeigh’s predictions of the ‘price’ Japan would pay for the “smoke and mirrors” show that it confuses for substantive higher education: (i) ethnocentrism, racism, ignorance, (ii) a more sophisticated perspective of time, (iii) lack of initiative for lifelong learning, (iv) ability for radical critique of the established political order, and (v) able to conduct basic research. Today’s Japanese college students are the children of the college students McVeigh described. Are they less ethnocentric/racist, more on time, more interested in learning, more radical politically, and able to research? Hampered by the lack of empirical data, we cannot answer this question, albeit with one significant exception: Japan’s PIAAC scores, which measure achievement levels across the adult population – ‘lifelong learning’ – are superior to both the United States and England (Rappleye and Komatsu

2019, recall also Figure 4). Moreover, it is hard to argue that the ‘leading’ systems of Anglo-America have been well-served by their purportedly ‘substantive’ higher education systems: in addition to a rising tide of conservatism, isolationism, and racism (*e.g.* Trump, Brexit), rising political apathy among youth there (*e.g.* US voters aged 20-30 turn out for presidential elections at a rate 20-30% points less than older groups, a figure largely unchanged from the 1980s (Pew 2013), and the lack of literacy in basic scientific research findings (*e.g.* mask-use and vaccinations during the COVID pandemic). Then, of course, there are all the issues that McVeigh’s analysis misses: skyrocketing tuitions, marketization, declining research production, drop-outs and low-quality. Scholars tend to use their research to adjudicate based on utopian ideas about what an “ideal” system should look like. But the point of our “Japanese Education Isn’t That Bad” (Komatsu and Rappleye 2021) approach was to (re)ground comparison in reality: making judgements, rooted in comparisons based on evidence.

Here is where the deeper contribution we seek to make in the current piece becomes fully visible. Foreign scholars who favorably cite McVeigh (2002) tend to view Japanese education within one of two horizons: utopian or cultural. Japan is in deficit either because it doesn’t live up to the ideal of a given researcher, or because it looks so different than the cultural model the researcher carries around in his or her head. In both cases, there is an implicit hierarchy – a “better” system that Japan has failed to achieve. For those working in Japan, for much of the past century, the Western world has – even if not viewed as perfect – has been deemed the culturally ‘superior’ reference for Japan; the lodestar that orients meaning and reform. McVeigh’s (2002) analysis is representative of a whole genre of ‘catch-up’ style scholarship (see Kariya 2019, Rappleye and Kariya 2011). Both the utopian and the cultural place Western systems on a pedestal and then attempt to figure out which levers to raise the Japanese system up to that level. What we have been pushing for in this piece is a new horizon from which to evaluate Japanese higher education. Instead of a hierarchy of systems, we need more research that explores which aspects of which system might offer novel approaches. The point of comparison is not critique or competition, but mutual learning.

In this vein, it may be more useful to rethink Japanese higher education from the perspective a *different* model rather than a deficit model. The assumption of universality is already implied in the very term ‘university’. This creates much confusion but it derives from the historical roots of universities: the assumption was that there was one knowledge universally applicable the world over. But hasn’t research over the past few decades disabused us of the notion of context-free, universally “best” models? If so, then isn’t it time we think about how different models, of which Japan is one, solve different problems to a greater and lesser extent? Particularly now that Anglo-American systems have gone headlong towards marketization, the differences are more apparent. Within this new horizon, Japanese scholars would have an opportunity to not just ‘learn’ from the strengths of other systems (something admirable and that should be continued), but also *contribute* something to the global conversation. It is worth noting that Chinese scholars have been quite active in recent years in developing such a pragmatic, difference-based approach (Yang 2017, 2022, Marginson and Yang 2022), while Japanese scholars have been largely silent. One larger contribution we intended in this piece – as we did in our 2021 book – has been to argue for a shift in horizon, from a deficit, ‘negative consensus’ starting point to a difference, mutual learning approach, and thereby show the path to greater global engagement.

Put more simply, isn’t it time to be critical of all the critique to date, instead asking: What can we learn from Japanese universities? The question is not meant to replace the existing question: What can Japanese universities learn from elsewhere? But only to redress an imbalance, one that no longer makes sense after the Anglo-American embrace of neo-liberalism, and one that (re)produces a silence that keeps Japan-based scholars from contributing to the larger global conversation.

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Authors' Contribution

Rappleye, J.: conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, writing

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日本の高等教育の神話を再考する

－日本の大学からは何も学べないのか？－

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＜要 旨＞

日本の高等教育に対する見解は依然として概ね否定的だ。ブライアン・マクビー（2002）の著書『神話としての日本の高等教育』が頻繁に参照されるため、日本の大学から学ぶことはほとんどないという認識が定着している。本稿は、このような日本の大学の負のイメージに対して、従来とは異なる見解の提示を試みる。この20年間で高等教育を取り巻く状況は世界的に著しく変化したため、日本の高等教育の再評価が必要だと著者らは考える。これらの変化には、英米の大学で顕著にみられる市場化の加速と新自由主義的な経営主義、留学生の商品化、研究における「競争」の出現、商業主義的出版社による学術出版の支配、知識生産の政治性などが含まれる。これらの変化があるからこそ、私たちは立ち止まり、日本の高等教育を再考・再評価しなければならない。そのことを通じて、日本の高等教育を英米から遅れたものとする見方から、日本の高等教育を英米とは異なったもの（異なった項目が重要視されている場）とする見方に転換すべきである。この論文で私たちが成し遂げたいのは、より公平・公正な対話を作り出すことである。現在は、世界大学ランキングや他の国際的な高等教育の変化によって、英米の大学が唯一のグローバルスタンダードとみなされている。その結果、細かなニュアンスは抹消され、異なるモデルを見出してそれから学ぶことが不可能な状況である。この状況を変えたいのである。

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