



# Contemporary Reform of Higher Education in Japan : Universities in the Era of Evaluation and Competition

Kengo Mochida | Professor, Kyushu University, Japan

## I . Introduction

In the past ten years or so Japanese higher education institutions have been subjected major and constant reforms. Among factors driving these reforms reverse of supply and demand in higher education with reduction of population of youth, the governments neo-liberal policies of higher education and stiffened financial conditions can be selected as the most pertinent factors in the reform of higher education in Japan. But national universities compared to private ones have been particularly under pressure for the reform since they were regarded as lagging behind in coping with the new 'competitive'

environment. It is said that national universities in Japan are now under the third major reform since their establishment in the Meiji Restoration. In this paper I would like to describe trends of contemporary reform of higher education in Japan in the past outlining major government's reform initiatives focusing on particularly those targeted to national universities.

## II . Application of the Market Principle in Higher Education

Higher education system in Japan has been long characterized as a system under the tight control by the government. But in accordance with the global trend based on

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1) As for the global trend, Mok and Welch commented that "What has become increasingly implemented as governance in higher education are corporate models and market-oriented approaches. By 'corporate model', we refer to turning universities into 'corporations' or 'entrepreneurial universities' under which organizational structuring and functioning is altered in light of the belief that education should serve economic purpose." (Mok, K. and Welch, A.(eds)(2003), *Globalization and Education Restructuring in the Asia Pacific Region*, Palgrave, p.11).

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neo-liberal ideology stressing the market principle<sup>1)</sup>, higher education policies of the government have shifted heavily toward the competition from the control.

The first indication of recognition of necessity to adopt neo-liberal policies in education based on the market principle was shown by the 1986 report of the National Education Council. It was formed by the Nakasone administration in order to propose major reforms of Japanese education system and it was suggested that neo-liberal ideology exerted some influences with the presence of council members favoring the ideology. Concerning reforms in higher education, the report emphasized that “the key to reforms should be found in relaxation of various government controls, particularly the University Establishment Standards” and “it is necessary to simplify [the Standard] with the perspectives of enhancing flexibility and openness among the institutions.”<sup>2)</sup>

With the pressure from proposals by the Ad Hoc Council of Educational Reform the Ministry of Education agreed to revise the Standards to simplify and liberalize the standards to allow more freedom to individual universities. The relaxation was particularly concerned with the curriculum of individual universities. Before this reform, the provisions

of the University Establishment Standards required categorization of general academic subjects into humanities, social science, and natural science. It also required the categorization of all the courses offered at each university into general education, foreign language education, health and physical education, and specialized education. It also specified numeric standards for variety measures including the required number of credits to be earned in each subject, the number of students to be allowed in each class, and even the number of library books and chairs. All of these specific standards were eliminated and replaced by general guidelines.<sup>3)</sup>

This reform was the most prominent indication for relaxing controls over higher education institutions in Japan and it signaled change from the system based on what the Japanese call the ‘convoy ships’ principle to the market principle. Thus the Japanese higher education system has entered the era of competition in the market in 1990 and it has been experiencing accelerated move toward the market model since then.

Then what are the current government policies of higher education in the era of market? An important report which

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2) The National Education Council, quoted in Amano, I., Structural changes in Japan’s higher education system—from a planning to a market model (1997), *Higher Education*, 34, 125, p.136.

3) Murasawa, M. (2002), The future of higher education in Japan : Changing the legal status of national universities, *Higher Education*, 43, p.145.

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established basic principles for contemporary reform of universities in Japan in the 21st century was issued in October 1998. It was the report by the University Council which is to consider matters relating to higher education and to make recommendations for reforms. The title of the report was “*A Vision of Universities in the 21st Century and Reform Measures : To be Distinctive Universities in a Competitive Environment.*” Basic principles on which the Council based were ‘diversification’ and ‘individualization’ of higher education institutions.

The report set out four basic principles in order to achieve diversification and individualization. Those are :

1. Qualitative enhancement of education and research with the aim of cultivating student’s ability to pursue one’s own ends
2. More flexible education and research systems to secure universities’ autonomy
3. Improvement of the administrative structure to facilitate responsible decision-making and implementation
4. Individualization of universities and continuous improvement of education and research by establishing a plural evaluation system<sup>4)</sup>

As shown in the subtitle the report was an

official proclamation by the government to steering the direction of reform of higher education into both national and international competitive context.

The University Council issued another important report on higher education entitled “*On the State of Higher Education required in the Era of Globalization*” in November 2000. The main purpose of the report was to make recommendations on measures to enhance international competitiveness of higher education. It outlined five ‘viewpoints’ which should be foundations for the reforms with this purpose :

1. Improvement of education to betterment of qualities of persons to be the support and driving force of Japan in the globalization era
2. Innovation of science and technology, and development of advanced and diversified education and research corresponding changes of society and economy
3. Utilization of information and communication technology
4. Enhancement of international mobility of students and staffs
5. Improvement of administrative structures of higher education institutions and securing financial foundations to develop front line education and research<sup>5)</sup>

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4) Ibid.

5) The University Council(2000), *Gurobaruka no jidaini motomerareru koutou kyouiku no arikata ni tsuite(On the State of Higher Education required in the Era of Globalization).*

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Basing on these recommendations the government intended to reform Japanese higher education system. Government white papers on educational reforms of Japan succinctly describe concrete measures of the reforms in higher education.

### III. Implementation of the Recommendations of the University Council

In white papers published in January 2002 and in February 2003 the government outlined its efforts in reforming higher education. Concerning reform of universities and colleges four major objectives were put forward and measures to achieve these objectives were described.<sup>6)</sup>

#### 1) Quality Improvement of Education and Research

The paper mentioned that systematic faculty development have been introduced and implemented in order to improve contents and methods of lessons by enhancing teaching competencies of faculty members. It also emphasized that the government encouraged for individual universities to set an upper limit to the number of credits which students can take in

one school year or one term. This measure intended to prevent students' over-registration and to help students' rich learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom and to enable students to study fewer subjects more substantially.

#### 2) More Flexibility for Diverse Learning Demands

For this objective three measures were specifically mentioned. First, a special measure of grade skipping was introduced. Officially in Japan the standard period for a bachelor's degree program remains four years. But if a student wishes to graduate earlier and if he/she has excellent grades in many courses compared with ordinary students under the rigorous grading method, and if the university admits that it is appropriate, the student can graduate with less than four years but more than three years of residence in a university. Moreover entering a university after two or more years of attendance at a high school was made possible in other fields than physics and mathematics. Second, students can now acquire up to 60 credits of 124 credits required for the graduation through the internet in the case of day universities and students of correspondence courses can

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6) MEXT(2002), *21seiki no kyouiku kaikaku : Monbu kagaku hakusho(Education Reforms of the 21st Century : A White Paper of Education and Science)* and MEXT(2003), *Atrashii jidai no gakkou : susumu shotou chutou kyouiku kaikaku, Monbu kagaku hakusho(Schools in the New Era : Ongoing Reforms of Primary and Secondary Education, A White Paper of Education and Science)*.

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acquire all the necessary credits through the internet. Moreover students who completed correspondence course of a foreign university while living in Japan and finished 16 years of educational course now become qualify to enter a graduate school of a Japanese university. Third, in order to positively accept adult students more in masters programs three specific measures were implemented. Long-term masters degree programs in which students can reside certain period of time longer than the standard period for master's degree programs were introduced. One-year master's programs in which students can complete programs less than two years but more than one year of residence was introduced to enable more adult students to have opportunities to receive short-term and intensive advanced education to acquire or refresh their ability. Correspondence doctoral programs were also introduced to allow adult students who completed master's programs continue more advanced studies.

### 3) Establishment of Responsible Administrative Structure

Concerning this matter reforms of administrative structure of national universities were specifically mentioned in the white paper. The 1998 report of the University Council emphasized the necessity to establish new administrative structure to manage universities more effectively in accordance with demands by the society.

These recommendations were aimed to national universities in which conventional structure based on autonomy of each faculty were increasingly regarded as very ineffective in steering the whole university in response to the changing society. The main point of the reform was to increase the power of the 'center', i.e. the president and his/her executive office, and to reduce the power of each faculty. The Council report recommended that the president should be in the center in considering and making decisions on issues that whole university must deal with. Moreover it was recommended to form an organization for assisting the president the administrative meeting consisting of vice-presidents, faculty members assigned by the president and a secretariat. This recommendation was a change of administrative style from collegiate style to executive style. With these recommendations this structure was quickly introduced in all national universities with the result of increasing the power of the 'center' within individual university's administrative structure. It is anticipated that this change will be accelerated more and more by making national universities independent administrative corporations.

Another notable reform in administrative structure of national universities is establishment of a university administrative council which is an organization to 'listen to the opinions of outside knowledgeable people

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on universities concerning educational and research objective, future plans, budget, self-evaluation and the like.' This change is regarded as one of the moves to make national universities more 'open' to the outside world.

In addition to these major reforms mainly targeting national universities which require special attention were also implemented. These reforms are introduction of the third-party evaluation, incorporation of national universities, Structural Reform Plan of Universities, and Program of Construction of Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century.

#### IV. Introduction of the Third-party Evaluation

As for the evaluation of higher education institutions main methods that Japanese universities adopted were self-monitoring and self-evaluation. But there has been growing concern that although bulky reports of self-monitoring and self-evaluation were published by many universities and faculties, the activities did not necessarily lead to actual and effective improvement and reform within universities and faculties. With this concern in mind the report of the University Council of 1998 strongly recommended adoption of the third-party evaluation system. Thus the government decided to reorganize the existing

National Institution for Academic Degree to add functions of evaluation of universities and reorganized it and University Evaluation (NIAD-UA) was established in April 2000.

What are purposes of the evaluation by NIAD-UA? Report on the Founding of a National Organization for University Evaluation clearly stated those purposes :

To allow universities to develop with distinctive individuality in a competitive environment, university evaluations will be made to serve the following purposes:

1. Multifaceted evaluations will be undertaken with respect to the educational, research and social-service activities of each university. The results of those evaluations will be processed so that they serve as feedback to each institution, thus assisting it in the process of improving its educational and research activities.
2. The conditions and results produced by the activities at each university will be detailed using a multifaceted approach, and these statements will be made public in an easily understood form. In this way, universities will be more accountable to win the broad public understanding and support in terms of the way they are administrated as public institutions.<sup>7)</sup>

7) Preparatory Committee for Founding a National Organization for University Evaluation(2000), *Report on the Founding of a National Organization for University Evaluation*, p.3.

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The objects of evaluations are universities and inter-university institutes. The decisions as to whether any given institution will actually receive evaluation will be left to the founder of each institution. But for the time being only national universities are to be objects of evaluation and thus private universities are excluded.

One of characteristics of the evaluation by NIAD-UA is the multifaceted evaluation. This is thought to be necessary in order to 'support and promote the autonomous efforts of each university to enhance its individuality and the quality of its educational and research activities.' This multifaceted nature of evaluation is to be assured by undertaking evaluation work in three areas :

1. University-wide thematic evaluation
2. Evaluation of educational activities in each academic field
3. Evaluation of research activities in each academic field

Evaluations on these three areas are to be undertaken in the following methods : The implementation policies and practical procedures for evaluations are established by the Committee for University Evaluation and the subcommittees formed in NIAD-UA from members of the university committee, together with learned and experienced individuals from outside the university. Next, site-visit surveys and hearings will be conducted by trained members of the subcommittees. These surveys and hearings

are based on the self-monitoring and evaluation reports submitted by each university, as well as the self-monitoring performed by each institution in accordance with the format suggested by NIAD-UA, together with the materials and data independently collected by the same institution. Finally, the Committee for University Evaluation undertakes deliberations(including peer review by members of the subcommittees where appropriate for specific matters of each field), and the result of evaluation is compiled as a tentative report for each item evaluated. Before finalizing the evaluation report, the university concerned is informed of the text, and an opportunity is given to the institution to express its opinions in response to the tentative report. Based on those opinions, the Committee for University Evaluation will reconsider the initial report and compose the final evaluation report, issuing it together with the opinions professed by the evaluated university.

As shown above evaluations of NIAD-UA is based on self-evaluations of object universities and evaluative works are to be undertaken for activities of the last five years of universities concerned. Basic criteria of evaluations are purposes and objectives of each university. Activities of each university relating to evaluation items should be evaluated whether those activities were effective in achieving stated purposes and objectives of each university. The evaluations

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are not meant to compare different institutions by making the ranking order.

Evaluation works started in FY2001. As for university-wide thematic evaluation(UwTE) 'Education Service to Public' and 'Liberal Education' (primary survey) were selected. Targeted institutions for this evaluation were all national universities(98 universities excluding the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and junior colleges) and all inter-university research institutes(14 institutes). For evaluation of educational activities in each academic field(EEA) and evaluation of research activities in each field(ERA) natural science and medicine(excluding pharmacy and nursing) were selected and six different institutions were targeted for EEA and ERA. In FY2001 for UwTE, 'Liberal Education' (continued portion) and 'Cooperation with Society in Research Activities' were the themes. For EEA and ERA fields of law, education and engineering were selected. In FY2002 selected public universities in addition to national universities were included in the targeted institutions. For UwTE 'International Cooperation and Exchange Activities' was the theme. Humanities, economics, agriculture and comprehensive science were fields for EEA and ERA.

This type of evaluation is the first experience for all targeted universities and many universities have spent long time and put in great resources to prepare for the

evaluations. After the first year of evaluation many questions were put forward by universities. One of frequently mentioned questions was ambiguity of grading. The kernel of evaluations by NIAD-UA is evaluations concerning extent of achievement of purposes and objectives of each university or faculty. But it was claimed that meanings of the grade set by NIAD-UA were not clear. Thus there was possibility that a big difference might occur between self-evaluations of universities and evaluations of NIAD-UA. The most notable example of this kind of difference was EEA of Faculty of Medicine of Kyoto University. For undergraduate course of Faculty of Medicine the evaluation of NIAD-UA was very low. Of course medical faculty of Kyoto University is known to be one of the most competitive faculties in entrance examination. Thus the result of the evaluation was regarded as a surprise to many people and newspapers specifically reported of the evaluation. Kyoto University submitted extensive objections but the result was not largely modified. This incident indicates difficulty to reach agreed criteria for evaluations.

## V. Incorporation of National Universities

In April 2004 all national universities in Japan will become independent administrative corporations. Incorporation of national



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universities is the biggest reform in governance of national universities since the end of World War II.

The Administrative Reform Council which published a final report in December 1997 can be regarded as a thrust to move to incorporation of national universities. The main objectives of the Council were “to slim down the government(with a major target being the reduction of the fixed number of national public employees) and to make it more efficient.”<sup>8)</sup> It recommended establishment of independent administrative incorporations to achieve these objectives and it mentioned the possibility of incorporation of national universities.

Thus the move to incorporation of national universities started as a measure of administrative reform of the government. Important goals are slimming down and making administrative organizations more effective. In April 1999 the Cabinet decided a basic plan to slim down government administrative organizations and making them more effective and to implement incorporations of 89 governmental administrative works. In the plan it was stated that for incorporation of national universities the discussion should be continued as a part of university reform respecting university autonomy and a conclusion should be reached by 2003.

Against this initiative by the government the Japan Association of National Universities expressed that independent administrative corporation system as it is was not an appropriate for national universities and therefore in considering incorporation of national universities special measures which took into account of nature of university as education and research organization should be taken. But the Association acknowledged that if special measures were taken incorporation of national universities could have certain significance in terms of acquiring corporate status, enhancing independence and autonomy, and developing individualization of each university. The Association strongly objected to application of General Law of Independent Administrative Corporations which was enacted to incorporate other governmental organizations. As a part of the move toward incorporation of national universities the Policy Research Council of the Liberal Democratic Party announced a statement on ‘The State of National Universities in the Future’ in May 2000. In the statement the Council mentioned that giving corporation status independent of the government to national universities was significant but also emphasized that it was inappropriate to apply General Law of Independent Administrative Corporations. Thus it

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8) Ibid., p.146.

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recommended to legislate a special law specifically designed for incorporation of national universities. It also demanded to accelerate the speed of process of incorporation to give corporate status to national universities as soon as possible. With these political climate in the background in July 2000 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology(MEXT) set up Research Committee for the Incorporation of the National Universities within the department to consider and decide outlines of independent administrative corporations of universities. The Committee issues a final report entitled 'New Image of the National University Corporations' in March 2002. After the publication of this report the government presented a bill of the Incorporation of the National Universities in February 2003 and the Incorporation of the National Universities Law was approved in July 2003. With the legislation 89 corporations of national universities will start under the new governance system of universities in Japan on April 1, 2004.

What are characteristics of this new system of national university corporations? First, by giving individual national university corporation status independence and autonomy in decisions of budgets and organizations of each university are to be significantly enhanced. With less regulations by the government each university is expected to run the university with its own

clear objectives and plans. But as for objectives and plans of each university the Law prescribes that it is the responsibility of the Minister of Education and Science to decide mid-term(six year span) objectives and to present them to each national university corporation. But it is also emphasized in doing so the Minister should take into account opinions of the corporation concerned. Each corporation should set mid-term plans according to mid-term aims and the plans should be acknowledged by the Minister as well.

Second, introduction of new management style similar to private companies is strongly emphasized. At the center of executive office of the corporation the Board of Directors is instituted to promote 'top-down' management. This is regarded as a necessary arrangement to make management of the corporation more effective.

Third, systematic participation of persons outside the university in management of the university is established. Among members of the Board of Directors persons outside the university should be included. In addition to the Board of Directors the Governance Council is set up in each corporation to deliberate important matters concerning management and over a half of members of the Council are required to be persons outside the university. Moreover in the Committee for Selection of the President persons outside the university should also be members.

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Fourth, all teaching and clerical staffs will become non-civil servant in the new corporations. The purpose of this arrangement is said to make personnel system more flexible. By becoming non-civil servants teaching staffs will be put under less regulations on working and thus allowing them to cooperate with private companies more. Even appointing a foreigner the president of the corporation is anticipated. It is also regarded to develop set term appointment system to increase the mobility of staffs.

Fifth, the post factum third party evaluation system will be introduced. In this system evaluations are twofold. Evaluations by NIDA-UA are concerned with achievement of education and research of each university. The Evaluation Committee of Corporations of the National Universities which is independent of MEXT is set up to evaluate 'whole' achievement including not only education and research but management. An important point is that these evaluations are linked to budgets of each corporation which are continued to be granted by the government.

As shown in this outline of the system of national university corporations, national universities in Japan will change from parts of the national government organization to independent organization. But still they will be largely funded by the government. Against this system oppositions were expressed from

university academics who feared that this system would lead to strengthening control by the government and thus to threatening university autonomy. Particularly they are concerned about the arrangement in which the Minister of Education and Science would decide mid-term objectives of each university and would acknowledge mid-term plans conforming to the objectives. They feared that with this arrangement intentions of the government for directions of education and research of universities could be introduced more easily than the former system which could lead to degeneration of basic fields which might be evaluated as not producing good results in the competitive environment. Thus almost all stakeholders who took part in designing this system, including high rank officials of MEXT, expressed that the Minister of Education and Science should have maximum respect for drafts mid-term objectives complied by universities and should refrain from intervening strongly.

Another concern posited by critics of this system is power granted to the president of each corporation. In the former system of management of Japanese national universities the autonomy of consisting faculties was the most important element. In that sense the autonomy of university was based on the autonomy of consisting faculties, but this system has been increasingly criticized that universities could not change or reform themselves in conforming rapid

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societal changes. Thus the government was making effort to reform internal management style of national universities to increase power of the president and the executive office since the University Council report of 1998. With the system of corporation substantial decisions should be made by the Board of Directors of which the president is the chair. Some commentators mention that the power of the president in this system would be very strong since functions of monitoring and execution are not separated unlike American system in which these functions are clearly separated to secure monitoring the executive operation of the president by the board of trustees. With strong power presidents who are tend to exert arbitrary management might appear to have a detrimental effect on the university concerned.

At any rate the new system of national university corporations will start next April. For all persons within the national universities and all persons concerned with administration of higher education institutions in Japan groping their ways is suitable expression to describe their situation at present and the near future. What results will be produced by this system is, of course, yet to be seen.

## Ⅵ. Structural Reform Plan of Universities : The Toyama Plan

When discussions of the incorporation of national universities were going on, MEXT suddenly announced what it called 'The Structural Reform Plan of Universities' in June 2001. The plan was called 'Toyama Plan' which was named after then the Minister of Education and Science. It was reported the Prime Minister, Koizumi Junichiro, demanded that the Minister of Education and Science should announce a plan of structural reform in higher education in accordance with Koizumi's plan of general structural reform of Japanese economy and society. The fact that the plan was submitted to the Council of Economic and Fiscal Policy chaired by the Prime Minister indicated the nature of this plan.

Guideline for structural reform of universities(national universities) : As a part of making national, public and private universities more vital and internationally competitive

1. Reorganizing and Integrating national universities boldly : Revitalization by scrap and build

1) Reorganization and integration considering the situation of each institution and field

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- Downsizing and reorganization of colleges and faculties of teacher training including their relegation to municipal governmental competence
  - Integration of colleges(e.g. medical colleges) with other universities
  - Reorganization and integration of faculties and universities/colleges crossing borders of prefectures
- 2) Reducing significantly the number of national universities
2. Introducing managerial style of private companies into the national universities : Early transformation to the new 'national university corporations'
- 1) Recruiting external experts in boards of directors and administrative organizations of universities
  - 2) Making management of universities more flexible and strategic by clarification on managerial responsibilities
  - 3) Introduction of new personnel system based on merit and performance
  - 4) Separation or detachment of parts of functions of national universities including introduction of self-supporting accounting system which can be applied to affiliated schools or business schools etc
3. Introduction of the competitive principle through the third-party evaluation : Fostering Top 30 universities to attain the world class standards
    - 1) Introduction of third-party of evaluation system by involvement of experts and persons outside the university
      - Utilization of NIDA-UA
    - 2) Publishing results of evaluation to open them to students, private companies and granting organizations
    - 3) Differential financial allocation in accordance with results of evaluation
    - 4) Increasing competitive funding among national, public and private institutions<sup>9)</sup>
- The Toyama Plan was brief summary of policy of higher education which MEXT has been pursuing since the University Council Report of 1998. The most notable point of the plan was that it explicitly mentioned the idea of ranking. Of course there have been concepts the ranking of universities in Japan. But it was based on the degree of competition of entrance examinations or rankings created by newspapers or publishing companies basing on rather arbitrary criteria. Unlike those rankings the plan intended to create an

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9) MEXT(2001). *Daigaku (kokuritsu daigaku) no kouzou kaikaku no houshin(Guideline for Structural Reform of Universities(National Universities))*.

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'official ranking' of all the universities in Japan. This was received by many academics of national universities as the definite sign of competitive environment. Even universities formerly regarded as top ones, like seven former imperial universities, were told that they had to compete with other universities in equal basis. Thus academics of national universities had to realize that the competition era was there and they had to change their mindset for adapting it.

## VII. Program for Constructing Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century

As indicated in the term of 'Top 30', the original intention of MEXT was to make a ranking of universities which can be regarded as institutions of the world standard. But there was a dispute concerning the issue of deciding 'Top 30 institutions'. Since there is 'no objective' criteria for selecting top institutions MEXT tried to establish a committee to do this job by consulting four institutions related to evaluation and financial allocation. Those are the Japan Science Promotion Society, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation, the Japan University Accreditation Association, and the Promotion

and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private Schools of Japan. But the general attitudes of these institutions were cautious and reluctant in taking the initiative in discussions.<sup>10)</sup> Thus it was difficult for MEXT to establish objective criteria for selecting 'top 30' institutions. Facing the difficulty and criticism of the original plan, MEXT changed the title of the plan to 'Program for Constructing Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century' and clarified that the intention was not to rank institutions but to support construction of centers of research and education of the world class in Japanese universities. Thus applications for the program should be based not on the institution itself but graduate schools or research institutes with doctoral courses. This gave an impression that the institutions would not be ranked.

In the end nine fields were selected as units for application and selection : ① life sciences ; ② medical sciences ; ③ chemistry and material sciences ; ④ mathematics, physics and earth sciences ; ⑤ information, electricity and electron sciences ; ⑥ mechanical sciences, civil engineering ; ⑦ humanities ; ⑧ social sciences ; and ⑨ inter-discipline and new fields.

In arrangement of assessing applications at the Committee of Programs Construction Centers of Excellence consisted of about 30

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10) Yonezawa, A. "Making 'World-class Universities' : Japan's Experiment" (2003), *Higher Education Management and Policy*, Vol.15, No.2, p.18.

members and chaired by Dr. Leona Ezaki, a Nobelist, at the top. Under this committee, evaluation committees for each field and a comprehensive evaluation committee consisted of chairs of each committee were set up. According to the guideline of evaluation criteria for selecting applications were as follows :

### 1. Performance of Activities in strategic plans of the whole universities<sup>11)</sup> of Research and Education

- 1) Whether activities of research and education are excellent in reference to the world standard of the field concerned
- 2) Whether activities of research and education have necessary potentials to implement designed future plans, particularly plans of constructing centers of excellence
- 3) Whether activities of research and education have possibilities of becoming centers of excellence, if not the present state is not satisfactory

### 2. Future Plans and Plans for Constructing Centers of Excellence

- 1) Whether plans are explicitly designed

to construct centers of excellence of the world highest standard under strong leadership by the president

- 2) Whether concrete contents for constructing centers of excellence are aiming the world highest standard
- 3) Whether plans are solid, realistic and conducive to revitalize as centers
- 4) Whether younger researchers will be able to display their abilities independently in plans
- 5) Whether arrangements are designed in which graduate students will be able to grow as competent researchers by education through research
- 6) Whether original and epoch-making results are expected through pioneering distinctive academic fields
- 7) Whether plans are situated in strategic plans of the whole university.<sup>12)</sup>

The program started in FY2002. For FY2002 five fields, i.e., life sciences, chemistry and material sciences, information, electricity and electron sciences, humanities, and inter-discipline and new sciences were chosen for application and evaluation. For the second year, FY2003, the remaining four fields plus inter-discipline and new sciences

11) MEXT(2002), *21seiki COE purogramu shinsa youkou(shou)(Guideline of Evaluation of Program for Constructing Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century.*

12) MEXT(2002), *21seiki COE purogramu shinsa youkou(shou)(Guideline of Evaluation of Program for Constructing Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century).*

were chosen.

Although the program was not meant to make the ranking of universities, most prestigious universities, both national and private, took the program very seriously since the result would be a very clear indicator of the standard of research of each university. In those universities there were internal selective process in which the presidents and the executive offices exerted strong influence in selecting applications put forward by research units within the university.

For the first year 464 applications from 163 universities were made and 113 applications were approved. For the second year 611 applications were made and 133 applications were approved.

When the results of two years are put together, we could have a kind of league table of research activities of major Japanese universities<sup>13)</sup> : As shown in this table the ranking clearly reflects generally held view of the positions of universities in Japan. Seven former imperial universities were all included in the top 10. Keio and Waseda are only private universities. Thus we can see that “this ranking did not significantly change the image of university hierarchy from past.”<sup>14)</sup> But as far as seven former universities are concerned there are three groups with Tokyo and Kyoto are forming the top group, Kyoto and Nagoya are the second, and Kyushu and Hokkaido are the third. For Kyushu University this result was rather

Table 1. Number of approved applications for the COE program

Unversity	National/Private	Number in FY2002	Number in FY2003	Total
Tokyo	National	11	15	26
Kyoto	National	11	11	22
Osaka	National	7	7	14
Nagoya	National	7	6	13
Tohoku	National	5	7	12
Keio	Private	5	7	12
Hokkaido	National	4	6	10
TIT	National	4	5	9
Waseda	Private	5	4	9
Kyushu	National	4	4	8

13) Source : MEXT(2002, 2003), *21seiki COE puroguramu saitaku kyoten hojokin kouhugaku kettei ichiran(List of the Amount Granted in the Program for Construction of Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century)*.

14) Ibid., p.22.



disappointing since it put Kyushu University at the bottom of the top group.

The Program for Construction of Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century, as mentioned above, was not meant to create the ranking of universities, but the results were viewed by mass media and the public as an indicator of the ranking of Japanese universities, though the ranking was not a surprise but a confirmation of existing order. However for universities the result of the approval for the program is a kind of official ranking showing the standard of research of each university. They now have to realize fully that striving to get more approvals in the programs would become one of the most important tasks of the university in order to survive in the competitive environment.

## VIII. Conclusion

As described above higher education institutions, particularly national universities, in Japan are now entering a new era of evaluation and competition with emergence of such arrangements as third-party evaluation, incorporation of national universities and the Program for Construction of Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century. For many academics in Japanese higher education institutions the new competitive environment is not a familiar one, but whether we like it or not the environment surrounding us has definitely changed. In order to survive in this environment we have to adapt to it by changing our mindset for it. 대학  
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