The ‘Big Bang’ in Japanese Higher Education
The 2004 Reforms and the Dynamics of Change

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Preface

(Bachnik). We believe that the result is the most comprehensive and balanced survey of the field currently available in English, as well as the most up-to-date.

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1 W(h)ether the Japanese University?
An Introduction to the 2004 Higher Education Reforms in Japan

Roger Goodman

On 1 April 2004, Japanese higher education underwent the kind of ‘big bang’ reform experienced by many other sectors of Japanese society during the previous decade. The reforms – which the US Chronicle of Higher Education (12 March 2004) described as ‘the biggest higher-education reforms in more than 100 years’ – aimed to set Japanese tertiary education on a completely new track for the twenty-first century. The chapters in this book set out to explain the background to many of the individual elements of the reform and show how the higher education system in Japan found itself in a situation where it needed them. As a means of introduction, this chapter will discuss the nature of the reforms themselves, why they have been considered necessary and how they will (or will not) affect the way that people think about daigaku (universities) in Japan.

The 2004 reforms

Most of the public attention on the reforms in Japanese higher education has been focussed on the fact that from 1 April 2004 Japan’s national universities (which account for less than 20 percent of the students in higher education but 80 percent of the national budget) were turned into independent agencies (dokuritsu gyōsei hōjin) and that their staff were no longer national civil servants (kokka kōmin) guaranteed jobs for life. At the same time, as Hatakenaka Sachi explains in her chapter in this volume, the power of the heads of these national universities was greatly strengthened. No longer do they need to get permission from the Ministry of Education for every little decision, but they will have the power to hire and fire, set their own budgets, review their academic programmes and even adjust the pay of individual staff.
Management boards of these new corporations now include external members, thereby reducing the power of the professors’ meetings (kyōiku keiretsu) to appoint their own choices as presidents. In English, these new corporations are dubbed ‘Independent Administrative Institutions’ (IACs) (see Yonezawa 1998: 21–2) and a clear recognition is made of the debt for this model to the reforms which took place in the UK higher education sector in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher.¹

What are the expected benefits, from the government’s perspective, of such a reform process? Most immediately, according to a strong advocate of the plan, Atoda Naosumi, are the financial savings. Atoda (1997) estimates that this would be in the region of 1 trillion yen a year if public universities – which have twice as many staff (academic and support) per student – were brought into line with private university staffing levels and fees were increased (three times in liberal arts; five times in science subjects) so bring them also in line with those of private institutions.

The reassignment of the 125,000 employees in national universities to the private sector would certainly also, as some critics of the plan point out, help the government in its drive to decrease the number of state employees by around 25 percent over a decade-long period starting from the mid-1990s (see Mulvey 2000).²

It would, however, be a mistake (a mistake indeed that many British universities made in the 1980s in the face of the reforms introduced by Margaret Thatcher) to dismiss the reforms being introduced into Japan in 2004 as merely about cuts in national budgets. The reforms are also ideologically based. As Royama (1999: 22) puts it, what is taking place is nothing less than a ‘big bang’, where market forces are expected to determine the future of both individual institutions and the sector as a whole. This ideological basis for the reforms can be seen more clearly when one looks at the other reforms which are being implemented alongside the ‘incorporation’ of the national universities, some of which are also discussed in her chapter by Hatakakana.

From 1 April 2004, for example, the first two for-profit universities – Tokyo Legal Mind and Digital Hollywood – opened in Japan under a policy allowing for such institutions to be established in so-called ‘Special Districts for Structural Reform’. Though small in nature (and with their academic programmes hotly criticised by more traditional universities), these institutions are perhaps the best exemplars of the new marketisation process that the government wants to see introduced into Japan’s higher education system and which, as we shall see below, has already begun to appear in parts of its private sector as universities fight over a decreasing pool of students.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (currently officially abbreviated in English as MEXT) is continuing to develop a policy of making its funding increasingly based on competition. As described by Jerry Eades in his chapter, in 2002 and 2003, the Ministry ran for the first time national competitions for universities to bid for funds as research-based Centres of Excellence (COE) and teaching-based Centres of Learning (COL). The funding, especially in the latter of these, was relatively large-scale and much was made of the institutions which did and did not succeed in the competitions, leading to serious discussion about ‘winning’ (kachi-gumi) and ‘losing’ (make-gumi) institutions and the possibility of the development of new hierarchies based on how universities fare in these competitions, just as the Research Assessment Exercise and Teaching Quality Assessments introduced in the UK in the 1980s led to new ways of ranking universities there (see Nakai 2002; Yomiuri Shim bun Osaka Honsha, ed. 2001)

The development of a rigorous assessment system is another of the major planks of the 2004 reforms. Until recently, it has been very hard not only to open new higher education institutions, but indeed even new faculties and departments as each have had to be rigorously vetted and controlled by the Ministry, a process which often delayed progress for many months or even years. Once set up, however, new institutions, faculties and departments were then subject to only the most cursory of subsequent evaluations, either internal or external. The new reforms are designed to reduce the difficulty in obtaining the external accreditation needed for the establishment of new departments and courses (and to some extent new institutions) and replace it with much tougher ex-post-facto assessments. All national universities, for example, have been required to produce six-year plans and targets against which their performance will be judged and on the basis of which their subsequent funding will be determined. Third-party evaluation agencies, accredited by the Ministry, have been set up in order to undertake evaluation of institutions’ teaching and research, though the exact nature of these assessments is still to be determined. (Here, too, it is planned that market forces will be allowed to prevail, with
a steady decline (31.2 percent) in numbers to around 1,410,000 in 2004. Due to the rapidly decreasing birth-rate in Japan since the late 1980s, there is no third baby boom on the horizon and the number of eighteen-year-olds will continue to decline to 1,183,000 in 2012 (an overall decrease of 42.3 percent over twenty years).

It might seem surprising, therefore, that during the period 1992–2004, the number of four-year universities actually increased by an even faster rate than the decrease in the eighteen-year-old population. In 1992 there were 98 national, 41 public and 384 private four-year universities in Japan; in April 2004, there were 86 national, 77 public and 545 private four-year institutions, an overall increase of 31.9 percent.

There are a number of explanations for this otherwise rather counter-intuitive situation. One is the fact that there has been a very rapid increase in the proportion of eighteen-year-olds going to four-year universities during the past decade. Between 1992 to 2002 – despite the drop in the total number of those leaving senior high school (and in Japan only about 4 percent of the age group do not complete senior high school, even though it is non-compulsory education) – the actual number going to university actually increased by 21.9 percent as the rate of advancement to universities of this group went up from around 37 percent in 1992 to just under 49 percent in 2002.

At the same time, many of Japan’s two-year universities (tanki daigaku) converted into four-year institutions. In 1992, with 541 institutions (88 percent of them private), tanki daigaku constituted over 44 percent of all of Japan’s university institutions and catered for nearly 23 percent of all university students (around 92 percent of their in-take being female); by 2004 they catered for only 9.6 percent of all university students, as more and more women entered higher status four-year institutions. In order to survive financially, close to fifty junior colleges converted to four-year universities (and many others were absorbed into their attached four-year institutions) during the decade after 1992.

Despite the rapidly rising university enrolment rate in the 1990s, however, not only many of the two-year universities, but also many of the four-year universities increasingly found their financial situation becoming more difficult. As predicted in the late 1980s by the doyen of higher education studies in Japan, Amano Ikuo (1997: 138–39), the decade also saw an increasing diversification between universities – a process which the current reforms are designed to
speed up. According to a detailed study carried out by the huge Mainichi newspaper group (and published in the weekly magazine Sunday Mainichi over a number of weeks at the end of 2003), one can begin to see a clear bifurcation of the situation of Japanese universities based around the hensachi mark (the average score of their entrants) from 1992. Those which at that time had an average hensachi of 55 or over have maintained, and in many cases increased, their competition-for-places rate and the average score of their entrants; those which had an average of under 55 in 1992 have seen both plummet. Many universities which enjoyed a huge number of applicants in the early 1990s have seen that number dwindle by as much as 90 percent so that now they no longer attract even enough to fill the places they have available, a situation widely known as teiten ware. As many as 30 percent of all universities now find themselves with some faculties in that situation and many of these (especially in private universities where fees account for over 80 percent of total income) are facing the possibility of financial collapse. A whole slate of books have appeared in recent years which reflect this situation such as Furusawa’s Daigaku Survival (University Survival); Satō’s Daigaku no Iinkārō Sensyaku (Universities’ Strategies for Survival); and Yomiuri Newspaper Group’s Tsukeru Daigaku; Tsuharenai Daigaku (Universities which will Collapse; Universities which will not Collapse).

The growing perception of the need for reform

The changing demography of Japan explains in large part the current reforms. Sometime between 2004 and 2009 according to differing estimates (Doyon 2001: 445; Royama 1999: 22), the places available in higher education institutions will be the same as the number of applicants, an era which is already dubbed in Japanese as senmyō jidai. One interesting indication of this is the rapid increase in the number of students who enter university directly from high school and the concomitant decline in the number who need to spend a year at cram schools as what are popularly known as rōnin (the term formally used for samurai retainers without masters), before they can enter their university of choice. This does not mean, of course, as some have intimated (Obara 1998), that competition to get into university will disappear altogether; this will, as we have seen with the polarisation effect, probably become even more intense in the case of those still seeking entry to the top universities.

If the current demographic change explains the immediate pressure for reform, it is important to recognise that there has for a long time been the widespread perception (both inside and outside Japan) that the higher education system has not been serving either national or individual needs as it should. In international terms, it has been seen as uncompetitive. As Jane Bachnik writes in her chapter, according to the 2001 World Competitiveness Yearbook issued by the International Institute for Management Development and widely reported in the Japanese press, Japan ranked last among the 49 economies surveyed with regard to university education meeting the needs of the economy (Japan Times 26 December 2001). It has become a commonplace to describe universities as a kind of moratorium between the horrendous rigours of school ‘examination hell preparation’ which precede it and the rigours of the company life which follow it (see, for example, Tsuda 1993). They have, as Brian McVeigh in his chapter suggests, long been ‘difficult to enter but easy to graduate from’ (hairinrikui, deyasu). Some critics have even argued that Japan’s economic growth was achieved despite its institutions of higher education. Edwin Reischauer (1983: 178), for example, a former Harvard professor and US ambassador to Japan often criticised for his overly positive view of all things Japanese, expressed such a view in the early 1980s: ‘Higher education remains one of the major problem areas in contemporary Japanese society... That Japan continues to operate as well as it does despite the problems of higher education seems at first surprising’. This view was echoed by John Zeugner (1984), in an oft-cited article based on his four years as a visiting professor at four Japanese universities in the same period. After describing the general poor quality of the physical conditions of many Japanese national and public universities, Zeugner went on to criticise them more generally on a number of other points that can be summarized under three main headings:

1. lack of adherence to class attendance by both professors and teachers;10
2. lack of seriousness about teaching and grading compounded by day-time ‘moonlighting’ (kakemochi) activities of the academic staff;11
3. intense internal factionalism.12
Many other commentators over the past two decades have appeared to support Zeugner in his views (see for example Clark 2002; Fuji 1997; Kitamura 2002; Kasaka et al. 2003; McVeigh 2002; Shimbori 1981; Shimahara 1984; Schooland 1990). Even though as Eades notes in the final chapter of this book, the top Japanese universities do not perform that badly in comparison with other non-Anglophone countries in international rankings based on research, these kinds of commentaries are still widespread.

While the apparent inefficiencies in the higher education system were tolerated during the decades of economic growth of the 1970s and 1980s, there is little doubt that the prolonged recession in Japan since the start of the 1990s has played a major role in the development of the belief that the system needs to be more productive in relation to the Japanese economy. As the economy has become increasingly deregulated in order to stimulate economic recovery, the belief has hardened that the university sector also needs to be made accountable for its contribution to economic development, as happened in the US and the UK under Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s (see Miyoshi 2000, for a bitter critique of this view of higher education in the US and Japan).13

In order to understand how higher education in Japan came to be seen as such an anachronism in a society whose education system has generally been perceived as both geared to meeting national needs and also highly efficient in training young people for the work place, it is necessary to have an understanding of some of the key underlying features of Japanese education, in general, and higher education, in particular. The sociologist of education, William Cummings, has set out some of the key comparative features of a number of education systems, which can provide a useful framework for such a discussion. In his comparative study of the ‘educational models’ of Prussia, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan and Russia, Cummings (1999, 2003) identifies for each a period of genesis an ideal type of product of the system, a representative school, the scope of education, and a distinctive theory of learning and teaching as well as distinctive modes of administration, administrative style and sources of finance. In Cummings’ model, the period of genesis in the case of Japan is identified as the early Meiji period, when it was recognised that a modern education system was needed to drive the very rapid industrialisation that was Japan’s only hope of avoiding colonisation. As is well documented (Dore 1984), Japan already had a relatively well-developed education system in the pre-Meiji period but this was rapidly expanded under Meiji state direction. The system was designed, as Cummings points out, to create citizens who were prepared to work for the good of the state as a whole and not in the narrow interests of region, class, gender or themselves. Particular emphasis was placed on primary school education and the training of the population in literacy and numeracy. Effort was – and, until the most recent reform debates, has remained – the key to success; hardship was seen as integral to the learning process. The teacher passed on information either to whole classes (or classes divided into groups) and this information was tested assiduously to ensure that it had been absorbed. The basis of the education system was made to look meritocratic to ensure that all those in it felt that they had an equal chance of success. As Dore (1982) memorably put it: ‘One has to think of education in Japan as an enormously elaborated, very expensive testing system with some educational spin-offs, rather than as the other way around’. In order to make the system appear meritocratic, the curriculum has been the same in all schools (public and private); multiple-choice examinations have been favoured over essays; and even school buildings have tended to be built to the same (generally very functional) style.

As Okada Akito points out in his chapter, once it was decided that a modern education system was needed to serve the interests of the Meiji state, it was developed very quickly. The speed of development in the field of education as a whole in Japan is especially impressive in comparison with England (excluding Scotland which has been a separate case) and the United States. Japan started its modern education system in 1872 and had full enrolment at primary level by 1900, four years before the UK made a legal commitment to compulsory education (Cummings 1999: 433). At the tertiary level, in 1960, when around 7.5 percent of the eighteen-to-twenty age group were attending institutions of higher learning in England, the comparable figure in Japan was 9.5 percent and in the US it was already 37.2 percent (Azumi 1969: 24–5).14 By 1980, 90 percent of all eighteen-year-olds were graduating from senior high school in Japan, compared with 74 percent in the US, while in England less than one-third of the population beyond the age of 16 was staying on in the non-compulsory education system (see James and Benjamin 1988: 55). At the higher educational levels, by 1980, 38 percent of all eighteen-year-olds in Japan were entering junior college or four year universities (Wray 1999: 2),
while in the UK the comparable figure was around 13 percent (Smith 1998: fig. 4). By the end of the 1990s, the proportion of students going on to tertiary education in the UK had grown to around 35 percent with a commitment to reach 50 percent by 2010. However, Japan was already considered to be close to what many educationalists believe constitutes full enrolment at this level of the education system, with 50 percent at university and a further 25 percent at tertiary-level vocational schools.

While, by OECD standards, the total state expenditure on social and welfare programmes has always been relatively modest in Japan, a much higher proportion of it has been spent on education. State investment in education in Western Europe, for example, in the post-war period has generally been around 10 percent of total government expenditure while, in Japan, it has been closer to 33 percent. The fact, though, that total government expenditure in Western Europe has been around 45 percent of GDP compared with only 10 percent in Japan means that the absolute sums spent per child have not been radically different (Cummins 1997: 280–2). However, in Japan the focus of this spending has been on primary education. Beyond the primary level, the state concentrates its resources on national priorities (which it will heavily subsidise) but otherwise it will allow the private sector (which in Japan provides around 75 percent of both secondary and tertiary education) to fill the gap between demand and supply. As a result of this emphasis on primary education, the proportion of state educational spending on higher education in Japan is only about one-third of the OECD average (Postiglione 1997: xvii).‌

The search for new markets

Many of the chapters in this volume focus on the search by universities for new markets to maintain their student numbers as they attempt to diversify away from what has been their traditional entran: the eighteen- or nineteen-year-old Japanese student who has entered either directly from high school or, a year later, after a period at a full-time cram school or yobiko.‌

Hada Yumiko, for example, examines in her chapter the development of graduate education. Only about 8 percent of Japanese students currently go on to graduate education, as opposed to 13 percent in the UK and 16 percent in the US (Mainichi Shim bun 1 June 2001). One report from the early 1990s put Japan as second among industrialised nations in the percentage of its college-age youth going to university and last in the proportion going on to graduate school (Daily Yomiuri 19 Feb. 1991). In part, this has been thought to be due to the reluctance of Japanese employers to hire those they feel already so qualified that they will be difficult to train in their own company way of doing things (Urata 1996: 189–90). Ogawa (1999) explains that graduate education in Japan has generally been seen only as a training ground for those who want to go on to be academics and that there has been little use of it for gaining professional and other non-academic skills. The Dearing Committee (Dearing Report 1997: 55) was told that the Japanese Ministry of Education planned to increase the number of graduate students by 33 percent between 1995 and 2000, mainly in science and technology. In part this reflected the fact that, as Teichler (1997: 286–7; 293) points out, major Japanese production companies changed their recruitment policies in the early 1990s in favour of increasing science and engineering graduates from Master’s programmes, which largely explains the doubling in the number of graduate students from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. While the number of undergraduate students in engineering and the natural sciences going on to graduate courses rose to almost one-quarter and one-third respectively by the mid-1990s, in the social sciences it remained around 3 percent, perhaps because graduate study was still not seen as having employment value other than for those who wanted to be academics.

As Hada points out, however, there has been a substantial growth in the last few years in professional schools. As previously mentioned, almost 70 universities opened Law Schools on 1 April 2004, as part of the process of radically reforming the training and increasing the number of lawyers in Japan. At the same time, there has been the development of MBA (Master of Business Administration) and MOT (Management of Technology) courses (see Yamada 2002). These schools are having the effect of bringing shakujin gakkosei (mature students) into universities. Most of these students, however, are taking courses in the evening and at weekends so that they can combine them with their jobs; there is not much practice of students taking career development breaks and there is even less of housewives coming back to university once their children are old enough to go to school. Housewives were a huge new market for universities and community colleges in the US in the 1970s when they were facing the same drop in eighteen-year-olds as currently faced in Japan (Kelly
that employers, who had hitherto been suspicious of overseas qualifications, would be more responsive to them when hiring. At the same time, there were students who applied to go overseas in order to escape the ‘examination hell’, as they saw it, of competitive entrance into Japanese universities.

John Mock describes the rise and fall of a parallel development in Japanese higher education which arose from the internationalisation (kōkusai) rhetoric of 1980s Japan. At their peak, there were over forty Japanese campuses of American universities catering for a perceived demand for an American-style university education based in Japan. Mock describes how and why they gradually disappeared due to limited funding, poor management, and an over-estimation of their marketability. Ironically, their insistence on sticking to American ways of doing things (such as refusing to either promote or to graduate students automatically or to allow alcohol on their campuses), which they had thought was their competitive advantage, was also possibly part of their undoing. Ultimately, though, they were fighting after 1992 for a diminishing pool of students and, as that pool contracted and other institutions began to offer their own international experience in terms of overseas exchange programmes, they simply could not compete.

If neither mature nor ryūgaku students offer an immediate means of bringing more income into most universities, then what other means are available? There are three revenue-generating offices which one finds on many US and most UK university campuses which are just beginning to appear in Japan: research offices, conference offices and continuing education offices. Encouraging universities to undertake joint research projects with industry (sangaku kyōdō kenyū) has been one of the driving forces behind the current reform movement. As is well known, a far higher proportion of Japanese Research and Development has been done in companies than in university laboratories and Japanese companies have generally favoured overseas rather than Japanese universities to do research for them. Spin-off companies, however, have recently been set up in a number of universities. Crucially, however, this is expected, at least in short-term, only to be a source of significant income for a small number of the larger, mostly national, universities with strong medical, engineering and natural science departments. The fact that very few private universities invested in these areas — because they were so expensive — now
means they are unable to reap the benefits of closer university-industry relations.24

Another possible source of income for universities is to make better use of their physical facilities. Many of the older universities have campuses in prime sites in the middle of urban areas and many of the newer ones have superbly developed, designed and equipped facilities. Most universities, however, are still only utilized during the day and in term time. Recently, however, university administrators have been waking up to the revenue-generating possibility of utilizing their campuses during the evenings, Sundays and vacations. Similarly – and sometimes in conjunction with the above – some institutions are beginning to develop programmes of lectures and classes for members of the public, though here they face strong competition from the courses which have been available for many areas at local cultural centres throughout Japan. If neither using their facilities nor their teaching personnel to generate money has yet to yield major returns, these new programmes are indicative of the trend in Japanese universities, both public and private, to begin to diversify their income streams which, until recently, have relied almost entirely on student fees (for entrance exams, entrance, tuition and other fees) and (central or local) government subsidies.

If new markets and new forms of income-generating projects have, as yet, impinged only slightly on the experience of most who work in tertiary education in Japan, there has been a much greater emphasis over the past decade on reforming what exactly universities offer to their students, in response to the sorts of student demands outlined by Marina Lee-Cunin in her chapter. Students are beginning to be seen, as in the US and in the UK, as consumers.

As Gregory Poole discusses in his chapter, during the 1990s, virtually all universities undertook some form of curriculum reform. Previously, under the guise of academic freedom and a belief in the specialist nature of academic work, the teaching of academics had been left almost completely up to individuals. They designed their own syllabi, taught their own courses, set exams for their own students and marked their students’ papers, all without external evaluation or reference to colleagues. The result was that, while some teaching was excellent, much of it was described as routine and unimaginative and, just as seriously, there was no co-ordination between courses within and across departments. A vicious circle developed as students became disillusioned and stopped attending classes; meanwhile, professors decried the lack of student commitment, yet still continued to graduate them on the basis that this was the university’s duty after it had accepted them (see Usami 2001, for a good description of this process). As jobs became more difficult to obtain during the 1990s, students became more selective about what they studied, and not just where (Yano 1997), and more demanding about what they got for their fees. Moreover, as Kitamura (1997: 148) put it, Japanese tertiary education was seeing the development of a buyer’s market where ‘students will be “courted customers” rather than “supplicants” for admission’ (see also Kimimoto’s chapter in this volume).

Institutions of higher education were under increasing pressure to respond to these new demands (Arimoto 1997: 205). Many students indeed dropped out of university altogether or attended vocational schools alongside or after university in order to make themselves more attractive to employers. In response to these trends, universities instituted FD (Faculty Development) programmes to try and get their academic staff to think about their teaching (see Inoshita 2002).

It is not easy to gauge the success of university FD programmes. According to Ebara (1998a), Japanese professors think of themselves as researchers in the German mould, rather than teachers in the Latin American mould, or as both researchers and teachers in the Anglo-American mould. While it has always been difficult to get a full-time post in a Japanese university, once obtained it has offered both a very high level of security and, by global standards for academics, a very good salary. There has been little incentive, therefore, to reform teaching practices, which have been unchanged for many decades. In order to bypass such resistance, some universities have introduced new courses, often taught by new teachers, though generally on the same campus, which have a more practical element to them than those taught by their established professors. For example, students studying English may be able to take courses designed for passing TOEFL taught by teachers from a local language school, while those majoring in economics can take courses to prepare them for accountancy exams taught by teachers from a local vocational school (senmongakkō). Such universities see the need to offer practical training which will improve their students’ chances of employment, as employment rates (shichoku
University management

Many universities, both public and private, have found the process of introducing discussion about reform – let alone implementing reforms themselves – during the last decade extremely difficult. Put simply, there are two basic management styles in Japanese universities (see Nihon Shiritu Daigaku Rennmei, ed. 1986, 1999; Oe 2003). One, generally known as the kyōjukai shihai (control by the professors’ council) model has persisted in all national, public and many private universities. The other, known as either the gakuchō-shihai (control by the president) or rikijikai-shihai (control by a management committee or university council) model, have until recently been found only in private institutions (Ehara 1998b), though by the end of the 1990s, the Ministry was arguing for stronger top-down management in national universities as well. Both management styles, as Ushioji (2002) points out, have problems for the reform of higher education institutions.

As Yamamoto Shinichi explains in his chapter, in the kyōjukai shihai model, while financial decisions are made by the school board, all academic decisions rest with the professors’ councils of each faculty. As a result, the kyōjukai have tended to have huge powers of veto over decisions which have financial implications for the institution as a whole, without being responsible for the financial effects of those decisions. Indeed, since the kyōjukai has generally operated on the basis that it will only make a decision when a consensus has been reached (and for reasons that Hatakenaka Sachi explains, it has often been very difficult to form that consensus), it has frequently been a negative and reactive rather than a positive and proactive force in the institutional decision-making process.

The gakuchō-shihai or the rikijikai-shihai models are most commonly found in the newer private universities, many of which are part of family-run educational conglomerations (dōzokaku-keitai gakkō hōrin), which have been passed on from parent to child (or adopted child) over two or three generations. Here, power over both academic and financial matters rests in the hands of individuals or a board made up of their close associates. In some cases these individual are respected academics in their own right, fully involved in the day-to-day running of the university, and able to balance the academic and financial aspects of their decisions. In many cases, however, decisions are made by individuals and boards who are far removed from the issues about which they decide. As a result, staff often feel not only disempowered but also that decisions are arbitrary, something which those who work in such institutions say can lead to the development of a culture of fear and mistrust. There is no doubt, however, that, with this model, decisions can be implemented much more quickly, and hence the Ministry has recently advocated strengthening the power of the heads of national universities so as to help them speed up their reform processes.

From an Anglo-American perspective, as Hatakenaka Sachi in her chapter in this volume points out, what is conspicuous about the Japanese model is the almost complete lack of academics with management and financial experience. These ‘hybrids’, as she calls them, are responsible for most management decisions in UK and US research universities and have allowed the widespread development of decentralized management where individual departments (or even smaller units) have responsibility for both the academic and the financial management of their own affairs.

Where will the reforms lead?

As the state relinquishes some of its hold on universities and allows them to set their own agendas, it has not withdrawn from the higher education sector altogether. Instead, its role has changed from one of control to one of supervision. It is here that the universities in Japan are beginning to learn yet another new language, one which universities in the UK and US have been learning for the past 15 years and which Strathern (2000) calls that of the ‘audit culture’. As Shore and Wright (1999) outline, audit practices in education are associated with a whole cluster of new terms including ‘performance’, ‘quality assurance’, ‘accreditation’, ‘accountability’, ‘transparency’, ‘efficiency’, ‘value for money’, ‘benchmarks’, ‘good practice’ and ‘external verification’. This ‘audit culture’ is powerful, they believe, because it promotes itself as ‘emancipatory’ in giving autonomy to institutions to run themselves and because the actual audits (in teaching and research at least) are generally carried out by peers
in other institutions so that the profession, in effect, polices itself on behalf of the state. Form, they suggest, is often more important than content and it is a system which punishes rather than encourages those who are seen to be failing. Academics find themselves between two cultures: ‘Between two conflicting notions of the professional self: the old idea of the independent scholar and inspiring teacher and the new model of the auditable, competitive performer’ (Shore and Wright 1999: 569). The new forms of assessment and evaluation being introduced into Japanese higher education will bring with them this new audit culture (see Kiyonari 2003: 77–83). It is not individuals within institutions that will no longer be able to act in isolation, as hitherto, but also institutions themselves. In some ways, as Ichikawa (2003) argues, the deregulation of universities is actually leading to universities being less autonomous and more subservient to state political and economic demands.

To understand their full significance, the reforms taking place in Japanese higher education sector need to be linked to those in other areas of the education system. For example, from April 2002, major new teaching guidelines were introduced into Japanese schools. These guidelines included the reduction of the school curriculum by around 30 percent and the implementation, for the first time, of a five-day school week. New, so-called ‘integrated learning classes’ without textbooks were introduced in the curriculum which was intended to encourage students to develop their own interests and think for themselves as part of what was termed ‘yutori kyōiku’ (relaxed education). At the core of the reforms was an emphasis on developing children’s interest in learning for its own sake.

These reforms in the school system have met with considerable resistance from teachers, parents, the mass media and politicians and led to a rash of books – described by Earl Kimmonth in his chapter – decrying and forecasting the lowering of educational standards. The reforms of tertiary education in Japan, on the other hand, have generally been met with favour by parents, students, journalists and the media. They have also, as Yamamoto Shinichi explains, met with surprisingly little opposition from those working in universities. This is because, as we have seen, government reforms to increase the efficiency of the university sector are going in the same direction as reforms which are already taking place for demographic and economic reasons.

Some commentators, however, are nervous that the overall outcome of the educational reform process in Japan will be an increasing differentiation of student outcomes by social class. Social class is an immensely complicated issue in Japan and sociological data on it is both somewhat limited and frequently contradictory. All researchers though seem to agree, however, that at private universities and the top national universities, there has always been a direct correlation between economic background and educational success. Amano (1998) is among those who think that the current reforms are likely to lead to less rather than more social mobility in Japan. If so, it will exacerbate what leading sociologists of Japanese education such as Kariya Takehiko (see Kariya and Ronenblum 2003) and Tachibana Toshiaki (1998) have already identified as a growing division, not only in the educational experience, but also in the educational outcomes of different groups of children. As they point out, the development of such divisions becoming increasingly visibly related to the financial resources of individual families undermines what some see as the principle of meritocracy (i.e. that anyone can succeed if they try hard enough) – even though others see this principle as no more than a myth. This will, in turn, lead to disillusionment and lack of incentive among those stuck at the bottom of the system. Further, these problems are likely to be exacerbated in times of continuing recession. In 2002, official rates of youth unemployment stood at around ten per cent or twice the national average. Increasingly, labour economists such as Genda Yuji (2000) and others have been arguing that the new phenomenon of furitaa (young workers who quit their jobs regularly to spend what they have earned before returning to seek another short-term, often temporary and part-time job rather than a life-time employment opportunity) are not so much exemplars of a new generation of individualistic Japanese with a new work ethic (sometime dubbed ‘parasite singles’ because they are happy to live rent-free off their parents) as victims of a labour market which cannot fully accommodate them.

Life-time and secure full-time jobs are increasingly becoming limited to those who graduate from certain institutions. Entry to those institutions will continue to be via the extremely competitive entrance examination system (described by Robert Aspinal in his chapter in this volume) and such entry is becoming more closely related to family income and investment. At the same time, entry to lower level universities is becoming increasingly easy, as such
Institutions scramble for any student willing to pay their fees. As Aspinall points out, already over 30 percent of entrants to such low-level universities are exempted from taking any exam at all and can enter through a recommendation system (suisen nyūshū) which was established originally, as Earl Kimmonth explains, to help students with a wider range of talents enter university without having to go through the normal rigours of the ‘examination hell’ system. Ironically, therefore, some of those reforms which were introduced in order to allow students more time to explore their own interests – in the belief that this might reduce some of the social problems, such as juvenile delinquency, which have been identified as being related to the excessive pressures of the curriculum in Japanese schools – might simply lead to an increase in students who can no longer see the point of working hard either in school (because educational success is so clearly linked to class background) or in university (see Saito 2000, for an example of this argument). There are some indications of these trends, as drop-out rates in university begin to soar (see Yoshimoto 2003) and student behaviour becomes increasingly disruptive (see Shimada 2002, as an example of a new series of books written for university teachers on how to deal with disruptive university students).

The chapters in this volume

The chapters that follow elaborate and expand upon many of the points which have been made above. Okada Akito sets the current reform debates in Japan in the context of the historical development of the whole education system in Japan since the Meiji period at the end of the nineteenth century, while Hatakenaka Sachi describes the historical context for the recent incorporation of national universities, highlighting the lack of a role for ‘hybrid’ academic administrators in defining this reform agenda.

Brian McVeigh sets the reforms in the context of the role in Japanese society of the Ministry of Education and its bureaucrats, who until very recently have kept tight control over all aspects of the system, in the belief that education was for the nation rather than for the individual. He and many others suspect that, despite protestations to the contrary, the Ministry will continue to maintain that control. Yamamoto Shinichi, himself a former Ministry official, offers a fascinating insight into how Ministry of Education officials themselves see their role and the current educational reforms. Earl Kimmonth sets the reforms more clearly than I have been able to do above within the context of Japan’s changing demography and the financial pressures that this has brought to bear on Japanese private universities. Marina Lee-Cumin shows how the emergence of the student as a consumer, rather than passive recipient of education, is becoming a major factor in the reform process.

Patricia Walker looks in detail at the ‘internationalisation’ of Japanese higher education, both in terms of foreign students coming to Japan and Japanese students going overseas for their higher education. John Mock complements her chapter with an account of the rise and fall of the foreign university campuses which were established in Japan in considerable numbers in the 1980s to give Japanese students a foreign university experience without needing to leave the country.

Robert Aspinall examines the university entrance examination system, which commentators have long seen as the key to reforming the whole education system in Japan since it is around these exams that the system is so clearly focused (see, Zeng 1995). Hada Yumiko examines the expansion of graduate education in Japan which, as we have seen, has been the largest new source of students in the university system over the past decade. Gregory Poole gives a detailed case study of how one relatively low-level private university is introducing reforms in its teaching and management in order to maintain its financial viability. Jane Bachnik discusses how and why the information technology revolution, which has affected so many other sectors in Japan, could – but as yet, has not – make a major impact on the tertiary education sector. Her chapter begs the question of whether the factors that impeded the implementation of technology will also impede broader university reforms, especially the establishment of the ‘independent administrative institutions’. Finally, Jerry Eades, one of the few foreigners to sit on one of Japan’s recent “Centers of Excellence” selection and review committees, explains how the research environment in Japanese universities is being reformed by the Ministry to make it both more effective and internationally competitive.

Together, we believe that the chapters in this volume constitute the most detailed account in English of the current reforms of higher education in Japan. It is clear, however, that we are all describing a situation which is very much in flux. Much will
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depend, for example, on what happens when the national universities face their first external evaluation after six years of the new system in 2010 and how private universities deal with the continuing decline in the number of eighteen-year-olds in the population. Collectively, therefore, we wait to see what will happen as the reform process unfolds during the next few years.

Notes

1 In his well-known typology of higher education systems, Geiger (1986) places Japan in a category with 'mass private sectors' along with the Philippines and the United States. The comparison with the United States, however, is somewhat misleading, since while in Japan 80 percent of undergraduates are enrolled in private universities, in the US, 80 percent are enrolled in public ones (Asanuma 2002: 110). Levy's (1986) less well-known analysis — which places the Japanese system in a category where private education has more than 50 percent but less than 100 percent of total enrolments, and where the private sector relies mainly on private finance and the public sector on public finance — is probably more useful in finding close comparisons with the system in Japan. Levy includes the Philippines along with India and Brazil in this list, but South Korea could also be added (see Weidman and Park 2000).

2 Since April 2004, public universities have also had the choice whether they become independent organisations (as the national universities) or remain under the control of local governments. While only one public institution, Akita International University, which has risen out of the ashes of the Minnesota State University-Akita, the rise and fall of which is graphically documented by John Mock in his chapter in this volume — opened on 1 April 2004 as an independent entity (Asahi Shinbun 25 Mar. 2004), local governments with several public universities, such as Kobe, Yokohama and Osaka, have begun to rationalise the administration and teaching of these institutions as a means of reducing their burden on local tax payers. Efforts by the Mayor of Tokyo to introduce similar reforms in Tokyo have met stiff opposition, particularly from professors at Tokyo Metropolitan University.

3 The IAs will incorporate plenty of unconventional systems that have not appeared in any existing public organizations. Sometimes they could be compared to 'Agencies' in the United Kingdom. The Agencies were an insightful reference for the making of the IAs, for example, in light of the separation of the planning and drafting function from the implementation function, the introduction of transparent, autonomous, and flexible operations and so forth. (Central Government statement on Transparent Government, 30 June 2001). This statement and a collection of articles in English by Japanese academics putting the case against making national universities into independent corporations can be found at http://fci.math.ac.hokudai.ac.jp/gh/e-index.html (see also the articles in Zenkoku Daigaku Kōtō-Kyōiku Shoukuin Kumiai, ed. 2001.) While the national universities represent less than 10 percent of all Japan's institutions of tertiary education, the fact that they have always been seen including most of its most elite institutions has markedly increased the depth of national debate about the kōjinka process. See, for example, an editorial in favour of the process in the influential Yomiuri newspaper (Yomiuri Shinbun 30 September 2001.)

4 This explains, for example, why in 1998 the senates of both Tokyo and Kyoto University initially rejected a plan for turning their national universities into quasi-autonomous administrative corporations after years of complaining about government interference in their affairs (see Hironwari 2000).

5 The beginning of this deregulation process can be seen with the reform in 1991 of the Standards for the Establishment of Universities Act, which gave universities both more control over, and responsibility for, matters such as curriculum reform, self-evaluation and the introduction of non-tenure, staff, currently accounting for around 2 percent of all academic staff, mainly in medical schools (Yamada 2001: 277).

6 The complex recruitment and transfer of staff between universities, which surrounded the establishment of the 68 Law Schools, was perhaps the first example of market forces entering both the public and private higher education system.

7 It is interesting to note, in this context, that junior colleges (tanki dai-gaku) were initially established only on a provisional basis in 1950 — because not all institutions which wanted to upgrade to universities in the post-war system were considered to be of a high enough standard — and they were only accepted as a permanent feature of the education system in 1965 (Teichler 1997: 278). Not long after, in 1969, as Cummings (1976: 68) recounts, several junior colleges went bankrupt at the level of debt in all private institutions increased severely, precipitating the student revo to which marked universities in Japan during the early 1970s. There is so doubt, therefore, that the junior college sector in Japan, which caters almost exclusively to female students, provided a useful 'buffer zone' during the development of higher education in the post-war period, but that role is fast disappearing as the supply of places across the sector as a whole begins to equal demand.

8 In 2000, 28 percent of Japan's 474 private four-year universities and 38 percent of its 533 private two-year colleges failed to reach their enrolment capacities (Japan Times 31 January 2001). This was the peak number of junior colleges unable to fill their enrolment capacities. By 2004, the percentage had dropped back to 41 percent as the total number of junior colleges fell to 400, many being absorbed into, or transformed into, four-year universities. The number of four-year universities unable to fill their enrolments however increased slightly to 29.1 percent as the total number of such institutions continued to grow to 533 (Asahi Shinbun 4 August 2004). This was clearly a major threat to their economic viability, particularly since, until recently, a department became ineligible for government subsidies if it fell to under 50 percent capacity. In 2000 this rule was relaxed as long as the institution as a whole in which the department was situated was more than

9 This means of course that not only institutions of higher education, but also those cram schools (jyobōkō), which prepare students for taking entrance examinations, have been reporting financial problems. Some jyobōkō indeed are reported to be taking students who they believe will get into top universities without charge so that they can use their success in attracting other students to enrol. For a brief outline of the effects of the reform process, changing demographics and economic conditions on the supplementary school system in Japan (known as juku and jyobōkō), see Russett (1997).

10 Zeugner's account is very much limited to the fields of social sciences and humanities where he taught. As Teislner (1997: 282-3) points out, 'The number of hours spent on study varies in Japan more strongly by field of study than it does, for example, in the U.S. or in Germany'. Even in the 1980s, there was little evidence to suggest, for example, that students in the medical, scientific and engineering fields worked any less hard than their counterparts in other industrial sectors.

11 According to a large-scale survey by Morgan (1999: 17-8), 69 percent of full professors and 49 percent of associate professors teach on a regular basis at other institutions as well as on their own.

12 Nakane (1973), for example, has argued that while all areas of Japanese society are characterised by factionalism, this is particularly the case in Japanese universities. Factionalism occurs both between and within universities. Between universities, the phenomenon of galakusho (school faction) has long been considered an issue affecting recruitment throughout the bureaucracy and in industry where many ministries and companies have tended to employ graduates only from certain designated universities (shidenkō) in the knowledge that these new entrants will be tied into obligation networks to their seniors (senpukai) who graduated from the same alma mater. Certain galakusho channels are legendary: for example, Tokyo University has provided 10 post-war Japanese prime ministers, and 50-60 percent of Japan's current elite bureaucrats (Asaizumi, 15 May 1998). The Council of Higher Education on the over-dominance of Tokyo University in Japanese society, presents figures to show that around 30 percent of the 800 directors in the various Mitsubishi companies came from the same university. Universities are also particularly prone to appoint to faculty positions their own graduates: 95.8 percent, 93.5 percent and 87.1 percent of Tokyo University's Engineering, Law and Liberal Arts Schools respectively all graduated from those same departments and similar patterns can be found at other top national and private universities such as Kyoto, Osaka, Keio and Waseda (Urata 1996: 185-6). Within universities, factionalism has often been related to the kōda (or chair's) system - whereby individual professors control all the funding for, and prospects of, the research group - and the need for individuals within those groups therefore sometimes to put loyalty to their group before wider issues of intellectual (and occasionally moral) 'right' and 'wrong' (see Kelly and Adachi 1993 for a good description of how galakusho operates in a university context).

13 As Kim (2004) points out, the same trend can be seen developing in higher education sectors throughout East and South-East Asia following the East Asian economic crisis of 1997. Across the region, governments have abandoned the model of the state-centred higher education system in favour of the Anglo-American model of the 'entrepreneurial research university', a stronger emphasis on market mechanisms in university governance and the introduction of market-led competition.

14 According to Nagai (1971: 3), already by the late 1960s, only the US, USSR and India had more students than Japan (in absolute terms) going to universities.

15 Some of the figures here need to be used with caution in that different countries define higher education differently. For example, when the UK Dearing Committee (1997: Appendix 5: 49) reported on Japan, it gave two figures: 62 percent of the 18-year-old cohort going 'to some form of post-secondary education' and the official figure of 44 percent, since the Japanese government 'tends to refer to the universities and junior colleges as higher education provision'. The 18 percent difference was made up largely by those studying at full-time vocational schools (seikōgaikō), which in some other systems would have been defined as universities.

16 The public spending on higher education as a proportion of GDP in 1998 was 0.4 percent in Japan, 1.3 percent in the United States, 1.1 percent in the UK and 1.1 percent in Germany (Akas: 2002: 76).

17 For an example of some of the new marketing theory which is beginning to be discussed in Japanese higher education circles, see Imai (2001).

18 The Dearing Committee was a wide-ranging review of higher education in the UK, undertaken in the mid-1990s, including surveys of comparable systems in other countries. It published its lengthy report in 1997.

19 The future of these law schools, however, does not lie in their own hands, but will rely heavily on how many graduates go on to pass the notoriously difficult bar examinations to become fully-qualified lawyers. Many fear that with the Japanese Bar Association (Nichibunrenren) currently settling the figure at around 34 percent of graduates (as opposed to the 75 percent originally proposed by the Ministry of Education), many of these new schools will founder and, indeed, applications for entry in 2005 were around 30 percent lower than those of the year before. Others, however, predict that the Bar Association will be forced to increase its quota as demand for lawyers in Japan increases (see Arakaki 2004).

20 There does not seem to yet be an official definition of a mature student in Japan. Universities which operate special entrance categories for shakujin gaikai seem to have developed their own definitions, most of which include the idea that the candidate either currently is, or in the past has been, in full-time paid employment while not receiving full-time education. The fact that definitions vary, however, is a good indication of how undeveloped this market remains. The market for part-time students has similarly remained almost untouched in Japan despite Ministry of Education guidelines in 1991 that allowed universities to accept such students. Some argue, semi-jokingly,
that because so many students already do so many hours of part-time paid work (arubaito, from the German word, Arbeits) while on course, they are already de facto part-time students!

21 One university in Tokyos set up classrooms in Tokyo and taught some of its ryugakusei in them via video-links so that they could combine their studies with doing part-time jobs in the capital where such jobs are much easier to come by than in the countryside.

22 The vulnerability of this market, and in particular its over-reliance on students from China, was clearly demonstrated in March 2004 when the Japanese immigration authorities refused to give student visas to a substantial proportion of students from China who had been offered places for the academic year that was about to begin. This was the wake of a series of highly publicised crimes committed by Chinese ryugakusei during the previous year.

23 Government funding for overseas students in Japan is still categorised as part of its overseas development aid (Tsunara 2003).

24 At the undergraduate level, students in the natural sciences, engineering and medical sciences make up 55 percent of all undergraduates at national universities, but only 23 percent in private ones. At the postgraduate level, the difference is even larger: postgraduates in these fields constitute 24.9 percent of all postgraduates at national universities, but only 2.8 percent at private universities. The total number of researchers in natural sciences and engineering at the ninety or so national universities is 10 percent more than in the over four hundred private universities combined, as is the expenditure on research (Asano 2002: 111). As East points out in the final chapter of this volume, this is reflected in their success in the recent Center of Excellence program.

25 The best example of this change in the perception of how higher education institutions should be ranked can be seen in the growing status of nenmangakou, which supply employment-oriented education, over the past decade (see, Osako, et al. 2004).

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