Amano Ikuo is a major figure, indeed one might say, the major figure in the development of the sociology of higher education in Japan. In addition to his own numerous publications, a legion of graduate students who studied under Amano have in turn produced a substantial body of work on higher education both Japanese and foreign.

This book is a translation of Kyôiku to senbatsu no shakaishi (The Social History of Education and Selection) Tokyo, Daiichi hôki, 1982 with a preface by Ronald Dore and a postscript that first appeared as an article entitled “Education in a More Affluent Japan” in Assessment in Education 4:1 (1997). Roughly one-quarter of the main text is devoted to an overview of the historical development of higher education and selection in Europe, essentially France, Germany and Great Britain. The remainder of the text deals primarily with Japan with some references to the differences between Japan and the European cases taken up in the first four chapters. With the exception of the short postscript, the material on Japan is essentially a historical narrative of the development of higher education and selection in Japan from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1930s.

While the section on Japan is rich in terms of analysis and data, even with the added postscript the most recent material is nearly two decades out of date. While the basic structure of higher education and selection in Japan has substantial continuity with the structure described in this book, there have also been great changes. The number of eighteen-year olds in the Japanese population peaked in 1992. Today there are roughly 40 percent fewer young people in the prime college age cohort. (Japanese colleges have very few mature students.) At the same time, there has been a major expansion in the number of colleges and the places on offer with the result that many colleges have de facto open admission and even if they accept every applicant without regard to academic ability they cannot achieve their enrollment targets. This has resulted in a bifurcation of higher education in Japan between a small number of institutions that have rigorous entrance requirements and a much larger number that will take almost anyone. A generation ago, even institutions well down in the pecking order had competition rates such
that those who passed the entrance examinations had to have basic numeracy and literacy. That is no longer the case. While Amano has in fact written on these developments elsewhere and to a degree anticipates them in this book, there is some danger that a non-specialist reader would assume that the institutional structure and selection system in Japan are still the same as described in this book.

As Amano himself notes (xiv), “[T]he theoretical framework and concepts which I used in the book may be outdated in some parts.” Although not explicitly stated by Amano, one of the outdated components can be taken as the emphasis on “late development” in Ronald Dore’s *The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification and Development*, Berkeley (University of California Press, 1976). When Amano wrote his original work in 1982, he was clearly influenced by Dore and Japanese higher education and selection seemed to be well-explained by “late development.” But, as both Dore and Amano note in this volume, albeit only in passing, “academic credentialism” has emerged in both the United States and Britain producing patterns in both countries that had previously only been associated with Japan. Articles in *The New York Times* describe “boot camps” for preschool children to prepare them for “entrance examinations” to elite educational tracks that begin with kindergarten or even earlier. Parental angst as presented in this context in *The New York Times* could just as well be that of the stereotypical *kyōiku mama* (education mother) of Japan in the seventies and eighties. College rankings, test preparation cram courses, and a whole range of services in the US aimed at high school students and their parents who seek entrance to “highly selective institutions,” especially the “top twenty” point to a concern with “academic credentialism” rivaling anything to be found in Japan. Similarly, “league tables” ranking secondary schools on their ability to produce graduates who gain admission to OxBridge or the Russell Group of top universities are now a prominent element in UK middle class life such that they are said to influence residential house prices. A high ranked state school will attract into its geographical catchment area middle class families seeking an education that will put their children into elite universities without the expense of independent (aka public) schools.

While there is much material in this book for the reader interested in the historical development of higher education and selection in Japan, it is unfortunate that the substantial changes in Japan, the US, and the UK from the 1990s onward are not directly addressed in a substantive way. While developments would seem to largely negate “late development” as a primary explanation for “academic credentialism,” they seem to support “convergence theory” albeit not as this was presented in the 1960s when it was expected that as countries modernized they would become more like the US. At least in terms of higher education, Japan, the US, and the UK are much closer today than they were in the 1960s. All seem to be converging on an emphasis on a bifurcated pattern of higher education—highly selective ultra elite institutions replicating class privilege and generic “higher” education that does little to promote social mobility to say nothing of actually giving a higher level education.

Except for an occasional overly colloquial expression, the translation is well done and the production clean if somewhat Spartan. It can only be hoped that Trans Pacific Press brings out a second volume derived from the many writings of Professor Amano, one that reflects his detailed knowledge of the contemporary situation as well as the historical development of higher education and selection in Japan.