Embracing the Challenges of Upheaval in Japanese Higher Education Today

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Abstract
This paper begins by describing the current nature of change in Japan’s society and economy, and explains the ways these changes impact its higher education. This upheaval may be seen as a challenge to its viability. Yet, an alternative view is to envision this era of change as an opportunity for renewal of Japanese higher education. The primary purpose of this paper is to offer some proposals for how the government, university governance, and individual educators can assist their institutions to survive, and even thrive, in this new era in tertiary education in Japan. Plausible and practical steps are offered as recommendations in seven major areas for facing these challenges: 1) revitalize the mission of the Japanese university, 2) sustain the financial livelihood, 3) adopt global standards for degree-granting universities, 4) promote quality assurance through accreditation and improved assessments, 5) initiate leadership development, 6) structure IT policy and promote its integration, 7) begin internationalization. As such, our paper is meant to be a scholarly approach to answering the question of how Japanese higher education institutions can find strategic and practical ways to benefit by overcoming the challenges they face.

Key Words: Japanese higher education, policy changes, overcoming challenges, proposals, educational reform

Introduction
Some major and unsettling changes in Japanese society are currently ongoing and are having a large impact on many aspects of how the nation operates, and on its global interrelationships. Due in part to demographics, but also fueled by tremendous shifts in the financial imperatives, budget contingencies, and dramatic evolution in fiscal and
labor policies that occurred after the collapse of the economic "bubble" of the 1990s, the higher educational system in Japan is facing major hurdles (Goodman, 2009). There are challenges to face in terms of assuring quality of instruction, undergoing outside academic accreditation, meeting fiscal accountability, and maintaining its global status as a center of academic research for a world-class economic power. One of the last vestiges of Japan's infrastructure to have been bombarded by this tidal wave of change is its system of education. The reasons for that may not be so readily obvious. However, it has rapidly become evident to us what enormous effects such change may entail for higher education in Japan. As part of an ongoing research study on trends in higher education and the authors' personal expositions, the challenges confronting the higher education system in Japan are addressed in this paper. More importantly, both strategic and practical means for embracing these challenges of upheaval in Japanese higher education are offered.

This critical analysis paper is both a research report and an expository essay that intends to give the authors' opinions on how to face and overcome these challenges created by the changes in society and to the environment for higher education. In many cases, we provide background, facts and support for these ideas by research citations from educational literature, but the important recommendations herein stem also from our strongly felt beliefs, based on years of experience as former students and educators with international backgrounds in education in Japan and abroad. This paper further serves as a cross-cultural perspective on the current situation facing Japanese higher education. It is based on these writers' first-hand qualitative observations, and their own personal journeys as educational participants in Japan and abroad: as scholarly observers, faculty members, teacher trainers, a teacher supervisor for one, a university parent for the other; as student advisers, as researchers, and as critics of education. Moreover, this paper is meant to be a scholarly approach to answering the question of how Japanese higher educational institutions can address these changes, and how to find strategic and practical ways to overcome the challenges.

**Higher Education’s Loss of Navigation**

We begin by examining the nature of this upheaval. What are the reasons that Japan's higher education system is in flux? To what do we owe its loss of navigation, or the fact that is seemingly adrift in a sea of chaotic change? Because higher education in Japan is largely privately owned, yet receives extensive financial support and
regulation by the national government, it is currently facing some major upheavals. Owing to changes in demographic patterns concerning birthrate and life expectancy (Goodman, 2009), yet also amplified by the tremendous shifts in the financial constraints, budget contingencies, and the reforming of fiscal and labor policy that occurred after the collapse of the economic "bubble" of the 1990s (Eades, Goodman, and Hada, 2005), the educational system in Japan is facing major challenges in terms of assuring instructional quality through external accreditation, meeting fiscal accountability restraints, maintaining its global status as a world economic power and as a center of academic, scientific, and applied engineering research (Hani, 2002; Brooks, 2003; 2007; 2010a; 2011). All this change must incorporate several other important factors, such as the volatility of the labor force undergoing significant restructuring, the subsequent retooling and relearning of personnel, and the devolution and systemic restructuring of the higher education industry itself. Over 75% of universities are private, and thus, have to cope with the gradual depletion of the university-age student population in the face of nationwide under-funding of higher education (Shepherd, 2008; Aoki, 2012b). The effects of these epoch-changing movements on monetary policy, revenue limitations, and human management issues will have monumental consequences for Japan’s society. Therefore, we believe these factors will fundamentally alter the entire landscape of education, particularly that of higher education institutions in the not-too-distant future.

The secondary purpose of this paper is to describe the current state of change in Japan’s society and economy as it relates to the impact on higher education. In particular, the challenges to viability and also the resulting opportunities in Japanese higher education that are being created by these paradigmatic shifts will be examined. However, the primary purpose is to offer some proposals for how the government, university governance, individual educators, and both national and international professional educational organizations may support, assist themselves to survive, and even thrive in this new era in tertiary education in Japan. Making plausible and practical steps for facing these change conditions is not simply an intellectual exercise.

Mega-Complexity: Repercussions for Higher Education

While the traditional university in most every nation will inevitably undergo substantial, if not drastic, changes (Barnett, 2000; Barnett, 2003), the impetus for upheaval in higher education institutions in Japan is driven by demographic evolution of an aging society, by the constant inroads of new learning technology and information
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management systems, by massive restructuring in business and industrial sectors, by the increasingly harsher financial constraints of a revenue-strapped central government, by the changing demands on the public accountability of educational institutions by the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) and by the public at large (Global University Network for Innovation, 2009, p. 36-41; OECD, 2011). The university system has to cope as well with the growing entrepreneurial threats of educational alternatives, and by the expanded intellectual opportunities of the increasingly globalized economy, by the needs of a knowledge production focused workforce, and our global network connected societies whose economic interdependence has been recently shown to be both critical and not as stable as once assumed (Kezar and Eckel, 2011, p.350; Barnett, 2011, p.145-147). According to a number of analyses, globalization places new and specific responsibilities on our educational systems (Suárez-Orozco, et al, 2004). These involve developing cognitive skills, fostering intercultural skills and transnational competencies, and harnessing digital skills, which help to formulate identity in today’s globalized world (Süssmuth, 2007; Collins & Halverson, 2009, p.9-13).

An extensive and more formal analysis of these complex issues of the Japanese higher education (HE) system merits a complete book to adequately respond. One such well-documented book, published by Brian McVeigh (2002), examined in depth the historical, educational, philosophical, and social systems of Japanese higher education. In fact, he made an eloquent and persuasive argument why the reputed quality of Japanese higher education is essentially a myth. However, the authors of this paper offer a broader and different cross-cultural comparative perspective, based on years as educators in HE and international education in Japan, on the current factors affecting the nature and progress of change in the Japanese system of higher education. Our critical analysis here addresses the structural challenges impeding change and describes how strictly traditional instructional pedagogy, resistant to innovation and quality improvement, is limiting learners and organizational growth for stakeholders in Japan’s higher educational system. We do not think we are alone in advocating the need to “radically change the current mindset of [university] faculty and employees,” so says Mineo Nakajima, president of Akita International University, which boasts an innovative curriculum (as quoted in Aoki, 2012b) and university management structure. It is our belief that one central problem is the assumption that ‘teachers know best.’ Such a strongly held tenet gives them incredible autonomy in their own classrooms, yet there is no outside evaluation of what students are actually learning or accountability for what standards the instructor is holding the students or even for themselves. The
fact that so many content courses have only a single summative examination, i.e. the final test, could strongly indicate that many faculty members have either little energy, limited instructional experience, or a lack of inventiveness for insuring that students are really learning the material (Anderson, 1993). Courses seem to go through the motions and are conducted identically for decades in some subject areas (McVeigh, 2002, p.87). In some fifteen years as a full-time college instructor, one author of this paper has never had his class observed or his syllabi scrutinized by a fellow teacher or administrator as part of an organized method of teacher evaluation or organizational improvement. The impetus for self-improvement seems to be inextricably bound to that of the institutional will for getting better at what the university does: teaching and inspiring learning.

The aforementioned analysis also delineates human resource and management barriers that constrict growth that would allow coping with change. Finally, it investigates cultural precepts affecting the evolution of Japanese higher education. The ultimate intent is to outline principles that higher education systems both in Japan and elsewhere – as global institutions – should recognize in facing these challenges in order to not simply survive, but hopefully, thrive in this age of chaotic change.

What Ronald Barnett (2000, p.115) referred to as ‘supercomplexity’ in a knowledge-based society has every appearance of galloping into hyperdrive. He did not go far enough at the time in pinpointing the essence of the coming turmoil that he and others have predicted (Barnett, p.117). With the advent of a globalized, interdependent knowledge production economy spreading worldwide, an international political ecology characterized by chaos and instability with the new alignment of world power structures, new modes of increasingly smoldering conflict, and the recent global financial crisis which shook the world’s leading nations to the core, we have reached the Age of Mega-Complexity (Barnett, 2003; Brooks, et al, 2002). This new evolutionary wave of human macro-culture is furthered along by our increasingly sophisticated digital media communication, and its new forms of global synchronicity, enhanced by the proliferation of Web 2.0 applications across our networked societies, and by the exponential reframing of our knowledge paradigms caused by unabated scientific discoveries and technological innovations (Barnett, 2003). The questions of what new roles of intellectual authority do universities need to play, and in what new forms of institutional integrity can higher education lead us in taking our interdependent societies coherently and successfully toward the 22nd century are ones that need to be debated (Côté & Allahar, 2007, p. 97). Andy Hargreaves (2003, p.39) makes an effective
argument by listing several reasons in detail why a strong system of state education should not only be an integral part of a thriving and prosperous knowledge economy, but should also become vital in strengthening democracy because of the way it builds community and develops human character (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Chipman (1998) refers to this as "a fundamental shift in their core teaching business from knowledge induction to character formation." Hargreaves (2003, p. 41) goes on to insist that universities, especially as embodied in the teaching and research faculty members,

should not just be catalysts of the knowledge economy, they should also be essential counterpoints to it, building and preserving the public, communal democracy that parallels the knowledge society and is also imperiled by it.

Such discourse as just recounted finds very few forums for engagement in Japan. Fears, caused from the heat of the moment as the 'crisis' looms – agonizing over their own survival strategy and the financial bottom line – are conditions that seem to have dampened the drive to approach the problem holistically. It should be duly noted that, while most are partly funded by the state through tax revenues (Kaneko, 2011), the vast majority of HE institutions in Japan are privately owned and operated (Watanabe, 2011). Further, there exist some doubts about the relevance of what is learned in the higher education system to the students' working lives (Knight, 2012; Honda, 2008). It is our belief the lack of a sense of mutual mission among the private and public universities, and between the schools of higher education and their future employers, is a limiting and ultimately debilitating factor, preventing the sharing of strategies for coping with these changes.

**Barriers to Coping Effectively with Chaotic Change in the Japanese University**

When the first modern Japanese university came into existence in 1877, it was an institution created for the training of the nation's future elite (MEXT, 1980; Marshall, 1972). Tokyo University, as it stands today, though nominally a public university, remains the highly emulated and heralded pinnacle of Japan's higher education system (Lincoln, 2001). In a public address on the future of Japanese higher education given at the United Nations University in December 2002, Dr. Akito Arima, a former president of Tokyo University (Todai) and once Head of the Ministry of Education, explained that
only in the 1970s did the enrollment levels of high school students coming into public and private colleges exceed fifteen percent (Arima, 2003). He interpreted that to mean that, for a century Japan had been operating an elitist type of post-secondary education, one which could – at that time – adequately meet the mandates of its mission (Marshall, p.101-103). As one of many consequences, the general education program at most universities was very weak or non-existent. Attempting to explain why, Arima recounted that, in former times, the ‘elite’ students who wanted to enter top universities such as Todai had superior educational backgrounds as many of them came from affluent and powerful families. These elite students had very career-specific goals for their university studies, and did not necessarily need or want to be liberally educated (Arima, 2003; Yamasaki, 2010). However, when the ratio of high school graduates reached 25% enrollment in colleges and universities during the ‘90s and later, and now with a much higher percentage recently, things changed considerably. While well over 90 percent of the largely age-limited cohort of young people graduate from high school in Japan, until recently, the country had a smaller percentage (approximately 40%) of young people who entered college than those of other industrialized nations (Yamamoto, et al, 2000), although the percentage continues to rise (MEXT, 2011, p.3). An increase in college enrollments is occurring despite the steady drop in the 18-24 year-old populations throughout the country, which has already accounted for the demise of many institutions of higher learning (Shepherd, 2008; Eades, et al, 2005). There has been a virtual collapse of demand for junior colleges, while a system of community colleges had never existed in this country. Other liberal arts college and smaller campuses are now in jeopardy (Shepherd, 2008; Kaneko, 2011, pp. 134-136). The next decade will see a major culling of the number of HE institutions (Goodman, 2009). Competition for the remaining cohort of less-than-elite entrants is heating up (Aoki, 2012b). Already, there are major merger and acquisition moves being undertaken or in the works, but again MEXT holds the final say because it wants to prevent educational monopolies from being formed. The state government takes a large hand in regulating and even managing many aspects of the nation’s infrastructure, often doing so by proxy and coercion through threats for withdrawal of funding or decreasing the funding on which HE institutions and schools have become dependent (Li, 2010; Watanabe, 2011).

Clearly, the socialized and strongly regulated nature of Japan’s society has not been totally bad. In the recent past, it produced extraordinary results such as its single-payer national health care system and its rise to global economic prowess. However, when things undergo fundamental radical changes, a highly regulated, inflexible system

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cannot easily adjust itself and cope effectively in a timely manner. Much of the same might be said for the system of higher education in the country, while highly privatized, is also dependent on government funding. For private universities, which enroll about 70% of university students, approximately 11% of their operating expenses depend on subsidies from government sources (Newby, et al., 2009, p.40). Yet, it was reported in 2003 that 24.9% of the private universities and 34.8% of the junior colleges did not cover their operating costs with annual income (Yonezawa and Kim, 2006). Since tuition increases for private universities are, in effect, tied by MEXT to any approved increase in tuition at the national universities, the financial situation at many private universities looks grim (Kaneko, 2011, pp. 130-134).

Dr. Arima (2003) went on the elaborate that whereas, from a financial viability perspective, Japanese universities should have been cutting their enrollments by as much as 25% up through the current years because it had been well established that university-age populations were declining. In actual fact, universities have seen a steady increase in enrollments, and as previously mentioned, an accompanying decline in the once ‘elite’ college-bound student (Arima, 2003; Saito, 2011; Yamasaki, 2010). So today, there is a much greater need for thorough general education programs, which can also provide basic and remedial education that include the pre-requisite study and cognitive skills for the growing numbers of students admitted without them. In 2006, it was revealed by the news media in a series of scandalized admissions by secondary school districts across Japan that as many as one-eighth of high school student population had not completed the necessary credits required for graduation. They were excused from such mandatory classes as history and home economics, and in some cases were given ‘fake’ grades. The reason given was because the classes were thought to be ‘frill subjects’ since the schools are evaluated and receive contingent funding based on how many of their graduates have applied for and obtained entrance to universities, especially to colleges whose rankings are high on lists that are widely disseminated throughout the nation (“70 extra class hours for unqualified,” 2006).

Another startling fact gleaned from Dr. Arima’s speech is the revelation that, even though student enrollments in HE are increasing, the funding from public and private sources for Japanese higher education ranks among the lowest in developed world (1.02 in year 2000) (Arima, 2003; OECD, 2011). Only Turkey ranked lower for a country of similar size and comparable population; whereas, Korea, a rival neighbor, and the United States had nearly twice the percentage of funding at 2.51 and 2.29, respectively, according to OECD statistics (Arima, 2003; OECD, 2011, p. 106-112).
Currently, the average cost of tuition, fees, books, etc. in Japan is lower than that of the United States, Korea and the UK, whereas the Japanese cost of living, in general, is considerably higher than those countries (Paton, 2011). Consequently, the actual proportion of educational costs would be expected to be much higher in Japan. So it appears that there is a ceiling on tuition increases. At the same time, government funding for education based on percentage of GDP for Japan was one of the lowest of all developed nations (OECD, 2011; “Education spending lowest”, 2011). Further, scholarships and grants for tuition are extremely rare in Japan, whereas the United States government sets aside the equivalent of about 1 trillion yen for scholarships ("Long-term costs of education reform." 2006). Japan designates a large fund solely for loans to qualified students.

For a decade now, pundits have decried the continuing drop in academic skills and requisite preparation among the newly admitted college freshmen (Moriguchi, 2002; Nishimura, 2006; Matsutani, 2012). Some blame the high schools for having concentrated on entrance exam preparation to the detriment of teaching citizenship, or an appreciation for and literacy in both Japanese language and information technology (Otaka, 2011). English remains virtually the most important subject needed for college admission, yet there are doubts about how well such entrance examinations are designed and how valid they are at measuring ability and potential for success in college (Poole, 2003; Dierkes, 2012). The typical high school’s emphasis on rote learning and acquisition of advanced computational techniques, much of which is reinforced by widespread participation in supplemental schooling, otherwise known as cram schools or juku, according to Dierkes (as quoted in The Economist, “Japan’s cramming schools”, 2011). The so-called college preparatory curricula have not been shown to help students learn critical thinking, the ability to process knowledge analytically, how to discuss issues, or to reflect and summarize their ideas in written compositions (Hashizume, 1999). Yet, not much has been done to beef up academic support programs, alter entrance requirements, improve the goals of high school curriculum, or to coordinate matriculation requirements between high schools and the colleges. In our years of observations, remedial instruction was not heard of until a few years ago. We can find few Japanese college course catalogs that list the pre-requisites for a particular freshmen course.

The challenges that Japanese HE institutions face, stemming from the decline in birth rates, from the rapid aging of the Japanese population, and from the collapse of the stupendous economic bubble that occurred two decades ago, are formidable (Hani,
2002). There are long lists of structural barriers, institutional barriers, instructional pedagogy problems, and human resource management policies that impede the necessary discussion and actions needed to face and find solutions to the challenges created by the onslaught of change. The authors of this paper, and others have been speaking and writing of these barriers, and how they might be dismantled for a decade (Brooks, et al, 2002; Brooks, 2003; 2007; 2010a; 2011; McVeigh, 2002). The challenges for viability are real. According to statistics collected in a survey by Shigaku Kyosai (2011), thirty-nine percent of the 572 private universities who responded (596 in total) reported that they failed to meet their minimum enrollment quotas in fiscal 2011 (Aoki, 2012b). An OECD review of Japan’s higher education system in 2009 included an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses (Newby, et al, 2009), but its recommendations were based on data collected mainly before 2003, although many are still relevant.

Strategies to evolve, survive, and thrive in this mega-complex environment

The important core message of the above descriptive analysis of the state of educational flux in Japan institutions of higher education is the hope that such will serve to generate concrete discussion, collaborative action plans, and inevitably achieve the level of understanding and wisdom needed to collectively take steps for helping Japan’s higher educational system not only survive, but also thrive in the new millennium. While some explicit actions may be deduced by the nature of these observations about Japan’s HE system, the readers should realize that the Japanese HE system cannot simply be made into an imitation of any other nation’s. Instead, the leadership and stakeholders alike, particularly of Japan’s central governing body of educational policy, along with each individual university’s governing body, and the majority of its dedicated and interested faculty members, must collaboratively fashion a path toward institutional growth and change without fear of risk or failure. We believe they must maintain the central purpose of the university: to enhance student learning and the opportunities to develop human potential through the discovery of, production of, management of, and distribution of knowledge in order to obtain the wisdom that its effective use can bring to society.

Many of the same areas that Dr. Arima recommended (found below) for immediate improvement during his pivotal speech in 2002 have still not been adequately addressed or have only been touched upon at the surface level by MEXT
and at the local university level. Therefore, it is appropriate to once again bring his recommendations forward and make a call for some observable progress in meeting these seven goals:

- First, the financial basis of universities needs to be strengthened.
- Second, unique characteristics should be developed in terms of the goals, organization and policies of a university. It should be made clear which targets to aim for, especially in the case of research-oriented universities, high-level technical education-oriented universities and intermediate technical education-oriented universities.
- Third, it should be decided how to handle the issue of general education. The faculty of general education should be reconstructed considerably, especially in the case of research-oriented universities and high-level technical education-oriented universities.
- Fourth, the autonomy of the university and the leadership of the board of regents need to be guaranteed.
- Fifth, the degree of cooperation among industry, academia and administration needs to be strengthened.
- Sixth, external evaluations, i.e. accreditation, need to be encouraged.
- And seventh, the size of the foreign teaching staff should seriously be enlarged in order to become truly international (Arima, 2003).

More recently, Takamitsu Sawa, president of Shiga University and formerly a professor of economics at Kyoto University, addressed his own critical analysis of five similar issues presented a recent meeting of the Government Revitalization Unit’s (GRU) stance on reform of the Japanese university system (Sawa, 2012). The issues are: 1) Is the quality of Japan’s university education deteriorating by global standards even as total revenues and expenditures for Japanese universities increase? 2) Are the number of universities and that of university teachers and students on the rise despite a continuing fall in the number of children nationwide? 3) How should the nation cope with the deterioration of students’ scholastic abilities and a rise in the number of debt-ridden universities when there are insufficient numbers of students to fill quotas? 4) Do universities have clear visions for educating students with the future in mind? 5) Is a gap widening between what is taught and what is learned in the real world, and are universities thus failing to meet the need of society? President Sawa was able to draft a few salient conclusions concerning the level and distribution of research funding, the
role of graduate schools, and through his warning against sacrificing students’ intellectual capabilities by servitude to business and industry whose only goal is to produce students with vocational expertise. However, his article’s tone reflects the highly fractious nature any real deliberation on how to improve higher education entails, one that pits three sectors against each other: the education ministry officials who are vested in showing that the ‘situation has improved’, the aging professors in power who blame the Ministry for education’s woes, and the cohort of entrepreneurial-minded faculty who support some kind of overly specific change.

Our own analysis of the opportunities afforded in the current crisis of upheaval for Japanese higher education can be outlined in seven major recommendations. Our recommendations should, in principle, be implemented as a whole, comprehensive program since most of them are interrelated. Each of these areas will be discussed in the subsequent sections, referred to as goals 1 through 7.

1. Revitalize the mission of the Japanese university
2. Sustain the financial livelihood
3. Adopt global standards for degree-granting universities
4. Promote quality assurance through accreditation and improved assessments
5. Initiate leadership development
6. Structure IT policy and promote its integration
7. Begin internationalization

**Revitalize the mission of the Japanese university: Goal 1**

First and most importantly, we believe that there needs to be a fundamental clarification of the purpose and mission of Japanese university, and at the same time, a revitalization of the purpose and mission of secondary schools. High school education in Japan has come to represent simply an ancillary step in the chain of preparation leading to entrance into university (King, 2005). As the result, the unique value of a high school education has been watered down (Eades et al, 2005; Fukuzawa and Letendre, 2000). One main reason is the dominant importance that the university entrance examination (McVeigh, 2006, p.166; Yoneyama, 1999) has assumed in the high school's curriculum. English is the major subject required for most all university entrance examinations. However, J.D. Brown, a noted professor of applied English and a language examination specialist, argues that the real purpose of university entrance exams is not testing the English ability of Japanese students, but it “is to show that the students are dedicated to making a great effort” (cited in Leonard, 1998, p.26).
Japan seems to be a nation whose investment in human capital needs some form of collateral or at least institutional proof, which McVeigh refers to as “examocracy” (McVeigh, 2006, pp.163-185). That collateral is usually provided through some type of certification or license. As a consequence, it is highly unlikely that the insistence on formal certification or shikaku would be changed easily because, as we believe, it results from a highly ingrained sense of self-modesty (Yoshida, Kojo & Kaku, 1982). Therefore, we strongly recommend that a national high school achievement test for all students completing secondary education be planned and implemented nationwide within the next ten years (Yoshida, 2009). For decades now, the purpose of secondary education has fallen under the assumed purpose of preparing students to enter highly competitive universities (Yoshida, 2010a). The role of secondary education has become subservient to meeting the requirements for college entrance (Brown & Yamashita, 1995; Gates, 1995; Poole, 2003). But as the number of college-bound young people continues to dwindle, it would greatly advantage the nation to re-emphasize the value of a quality secondary education (Yoshida, 2010b). If a national achievement test existed for high school graduates, then actual student achievement on such a test could be added into the overall picture of university candidates. Clearly, care would need to be taken to insure that high schools are not just teaching to another high stakes examination (Hursh, 2008). The process of developing this secondary education achievement test would demand the participation of many stakeholders in education and the society at large, which would help ensure that a broad-based discussion occurs for what the purpose and value of a secondary education is. Thus, we believe its creation would have repercussions for establishing new guidelines for redefining the mission and purpose of the university.

The content and curricular goals of secondary education could be restructured to include exactly those things found lacking in the single subject-oriented curricula at the majority of universities. A major paradigm shift from a content-driven curriculum to a process-driven, inquiry-focused one could be pursued. Calls for linking research and teaching via inquiry-based learning curricula would benefit students through direct involvement in research as participants and not as simply an audience (Healey, 2005, p.69). As a result, attempts to connect the knowledge within disciplines and for both teachers and students to know how to make independent and informed decisions would foster critical thinking, problem solving and an interdisciplinary focus that require new forms of assessment (Kaufman et al, 2008, p. 185). Simultaneously, Japanese universities should take measures to realign or develop their curricula in accordance with their own
mission statement and purpose. According to Yuki Honda, author of *Twisted Society* and a professor at Tokyo University, “There’s a general consensus that there’s no connection between school and finding a job” (Knight, 2012). Therefore, some major restructuring of the job recruitment and hiring system would also be needed at the same time (Honda, 2008). In addition, internationalization of universities, which is addressed later in this paper, would also serve to deal with clarifying and solidifying the mission of each university (Honda as quoted in Aoki, 2012b).

**Sustain their financial livelihood: Goal 2**

Due to an array of factors such as demographics, decreasing government funding, periods of slow economic growth, and competition among institutions, financial management in Japanese universities have been inevitably placed under tremendous pressure. Shattock maintains that the financial stability of an institution will greatly affect the university’s ‘core businesses’ of teaching and research (Shattock, 2010, p.51). The availability of funds can help sustain quality programs or even launch new ones that may help attract potential students or new faculty. Conversely, financial instability will negatively affect academic work, faculty and staff morale, and the maintenance or development of campus facilities.

With the steady decline of government subsidiaries available for Japanese institutions over the past decade, we can anticipate that this trend will continue in the future, creating the need for many universities to locate other means of income besides tuition from its undergraduate and graduate students to survive (日本私立学校振興・共済事業団, 2012). Researchers such as Clark and Shattock suggest that an institution’s ability to be self-reliant and to make decisions in the face of change stem from financial stability that is built upon a diversified funding base as well as sound managerial decisions. (Clark, 2004, p. 174-175; Shattock, 2010, p. 52-59). Building upon Clark and Shattock’s suggestions, the following are some other possible sources for income:

- Support from large corporations or businesses.
- University endowment income.
- University fund-raising from alumni and willing supporters.
- Support from philanthropic foundations for student scholarships.
- Royalty income from patented and licensed inventions and intellectual property.
- Earned income from utilizing campus facilities for commercial usage.
- Making efforts to create or expand a continuing education program at an institution, thereby increasing enrollment in this category.
Not all of these strategies and options are uniformly available to Japanese universities due to factors such as location, campus size and types of facilities, faculty and staff numbers, and types of degree programs that are offered. Nonetheless, universities should face the challenge of diversifying their means of income. Simultaneously, improving the task of managing their finances more competently will become as important as ever in the near future.

Shattock (2010) outlines several other key elements that are important to maintaining financial stability. He asserts that budgetary planning, monitoring, and strategy are crucial and should be consistent with the mission of the university. University administrators should be continuously thinking about how to get the maximum value out of the resources available in order to achieve the university’s goals and purpose. Shattock also conveys another important aspect necessary for financial stability: it is “[a]n understanding of finance and a respect for its disciplines needs to run throughout the institution” (2010, p.53). He encourages an environment where financial literacy is extensively circulated and where administrators and faculty members can have financial discussions openly with the finance office to help make policy decisions. Fostering this type of environment would be highly beneficial in the Japanese university context, where policy decisions are sometimes made behind closed doors, or by faculty members who may not have a sufficient understanding of finance or capital development.

Another suggestion is that universities should financially anticipate and prepare for both the expected and unexpected. For example, universities should make an effort to effectively manage their estate in the long term, which is a continual cost, and anticipate risks such as having to comply with carbon footprint legislation in the future. Appropriate contingency funds for such developments should be retained. The effective management of long-term debt can be cited as another example. If an institution has borrowed capital medium to long term, it needs to keep in mind that interest rates that are low currently, may be quite different in the future. The administration needs to
plan accordingly and be ready to deal with changes in the financial environment. (Shattock, 2010, p.74-75)

**Adopt global standards for degree-granting universities: Goal 3**

As Japanese universities face the task of competing both domestically and internationally, we believe many universities need to realize they must make changes to the logistics of their degree programs and quickly adopt standards that are on par with the rest of the world. Professor Morohoshi, a specialist in higher education administration, identifies the need for Japanese universities to adopt the grade point average (GPA) system for awarding grades and credits (Morohoshi, 2008). In the current Japanese system where 優 (Yu - Outstanding, 100-80%), 良 (Ryo - Good, 79-70%), 可 (Ka - Satisfactory, 69-60 %), 不可 (Fuka—Unsatisfactory, Below 60 %) is utilized to grade students, there is a twenty-one percent span within the ‘Yu’ category, thus making it difficult to distinguish the significance of the difference between a 98% and a 81%, for example. Utilizing the GPA system would expand the range of grades and also help standardize them so that they can be interpreted uniformly by both domestic and foreign universities, by the general public, and by students themselves (Morohoshi, 2008) for employment purposes, for example.

Using the GPA system could potentially serve as a catalyst to improve the instructional and learning environment of universities as well. As teachers, we hear too often stories of students who are “just happy to pass” and receive a ‘Ka’ or don’t mind if they fail a course because they have enough credits to advance to the next year or graduate from the institution (McVeigh, 2002, p.181). By adopting a cumulative GPA, it puts the onus on the students to choose their courses carefully because failing a course would affect their GPA and would appear on their transcript. Simultaneously, students would have to take the course seriously and work towards a grade based on the evaluation criteria of the course (Burgess, 2011), which would have an affect on students’ motivation to achieve if their GPA were released to their prospective employers. This, in turn, means it would be the instructor’s responsibility to make course objectives and standards of how students are evaluated clear. Concurrently, instructors would be required to focus more on what they teach each class and how they teach their course. Another area in which Japanese institutions need to improve is in the logistics of its degree programs—through standardization and by creating flexibility. We, and others (Nakajima as cited in Aoki, 2012b) recommend that universities introduce a standard numbering format to classify its courses based on
difficulty or content. If a course is more fundamental or an introduction to a field, it should be assigned for example, 101. If a course is more advanced or specialized, or has a pre-requisite, a higher number such as 201 or 301 should be assigned to it. This type of system allows students to be able to recognize the difficulty of the course, and also realize which set of courses is required for the class they desire. Moreover, this could help them become more aware of their overall university career and possibly, their own learning process as well. Simultaneously, this type of system would assist the instructor to make informed decisions about the course in terms of objectives, content, difficulty, and instructional methods. Another advantage would be that third parties, such as companies or other academic institutions, could complete the interpretation of university transcripts uniformly.

An additional recommendation would be to allow more flexibility in the ways students earn credits for degree programs, both prior to and during enrollment. Credit by examination for acquired knowledge, and for experience from employment and even volunteer work and internships are common practices in many nations. Adopting such credit approval programs is gaining traction in Japan (“Intern at Disney, Get Credits”, 2011). Usually when a student enters a Japanese university, the new entrant is required to enroll in a specific department, indeed declaring a major prior to enrolling. Once the student is admitted that department, he or she must take courses that are only within the framework of that department, and end up graduating from it regardless of his or her level of interest in and commitment to that field. Some universities may allow the flexibility to receive a number of credits towards graduation from courses that are in other departments, or to delay the declaration of one’s major field of study until later. What if a student were to become interested in another academic field? Would the student be able to take courses for credit beyond departmental limitations? Would the student be able to transfer departments without applying the following year as a first year student? Would the student be able to declare a double major from separate departments? At many Japanese institutions, the answer would not be “Yes” to the last three questions. Nonetheless, more Japanese universities should take steps within their degree programs to create fluidity between different departments. Rather than preventing students from taking courses which could expand their potential, due to strong departmental identities and internal divisions, they should be allowed and encouraged to learn from “university-wide” courses that are available to all students regardless of which department the student is in (Morohoshi 2008, p.111-116). Consequently, we believe class groupings, placement, credit transfer or substitutions,
and scheduling need more flexibility in order to reap the benefits.

We conclude that more Japanese institutions need to create flexibility within their programs in how their students are awarded credits, and when and how they can matriculate and graduate. In terms of credits, we recommend that students should be allowed to receive credit through means outside of the regular classroom, such as competency exams, internships, experiential learning, and individualized learning modules with an advisor or instructor. If Japanese higher education is going to attain global standards, it must also consider changing matriculation and graduation regulations, including transfer of earned credits in order to more effectively meets the needs of college graduate in today’s world (Honda, 2008; Aoki, 2012b). As the University of Tokyo and other institutions consider shifting enrollment to the fall, all Japanese institutions should also consider this, and contemplate proposals such as allowing students to graduate in three years or permitting gifted students who have not reached the age of 18 to take university courses for credits or even matriculate early (“Talented students may get a chance”, 1998). As the demographics shift, we also believe that efforts to include academic, professional certification and career-related programs for older adult and students re-entering college should be undertaken more seriously and routinely.

Promote quality assurance through accreditation and improved assessments: Goal 4

In 2001, the Council for Regulatory Reform proposed the introduction of a continuous accreditation system by third-party organizations, and by the end of 2007, thirty-six percent of the total number of universities had applied for accreditation evaluation (Yamamoto, 2009, p.118). The number of accredited Japanese universities today remains low because of the resource-intensive nature of the accreditation process (Yamamoto, p.118). Universities and colleges in Japan historically have been socialized to the lack of formal external evaluation and may continue to view it as a threat to their autonomy (Yamamoto, p.114). In order to achieve higher levels of efficacy in their accreditation efforts, two immediate strategies are suggested in the general recommendations of Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI, 2009 p.155-8). First, increase the involvement of all university stakeholders in the process of obtaining accreditation, particularly in the self-assessment component. Secondly, make use of ‘peers’ to act as external reviewers or inspectors as part of the accreditation process at least once in seven years.

Some general recommendations about improving the types and roles of
assessment in higher education were offered by Black and William (2008) because effective use of assessment can enhance learning, foster learner development, and increase institutional accountability.

- Superficial rote learning and assessment based on factual recall is insufficient to determine higher order thinking skills.
- Teachers need to review and reflect on the nature and types of assessments they use, and should share these with colleagues.
- Assessment types and the feedback teachers give students should emphasize learning instead of emphasizing grades.
- Teachers should emphasize personal achievement and student academic performance instead of overemphasizing competition.
- Current assessments that are overly reliant on summative assessment tend to reinforce perceptions of failure in the less able students. (Adapted from Black & William, 2008 in Butt, 2010).

Graham Butt (2010, p. 123-127) has championed the use of formative assessment, as well as supporting the development of students’ abilities to self-assess and to visualize the next stages of their own learning in terms of what they need to do to perform better. He says we can greatly assist students by not simply giving tests, but by making our tests and other assessment measures integral to their learning. It is important to be clear about what the course objectives are, how they will be measured, and communicate what good and acceptable performances look like (Butt, p. 131). One strategy that could be adopted is the use of a volunteer program of action research among colleagues into the learning and teaching practices in their own classrooms. Whatever his or her own content specialty, instructors can share common goals in this type of activity known as action research because it offers ways to investigate one’s professional teaching experience. Teacher action research can help link instructional theory and the analysis of actual teaching practice (Light & Cox, 2001, p. 223), in view of becoming a more reflective professional educator.

**Initiate leadership development: Goal 5**

One theme heard frequently nowadays, as well as during the last several decades, is the need for leadership in both the Japanese public and private sectors (Matsutani, et al, 2008; Fukukawa, 2009; Ogoura, 2011; Kitazume, 2011; Maruko, 2011). It is also an often-repeated theme of the foreign media as they reflect on the seeming inaction and
indecision of Japan's political leadership after last year's devastating tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster that resulted from the huge March 11 earthquake in northeastern Japan. Nikkei Shimbun, The Japan Times, NHK, BBC, LA Times, among many others, have all posted articles or aired programs lamenting Japan's lack of leadership in these times of multiple national and international crises – both physical and financial.

Despite calls for Japanese leaders to emerge and for the development of leadership, we note that two critical elements have yet to be adequately defined. Japan’s own system of human management and organizational leadership should stem from the needs and the fabric of its society; however, there does not yet exist a common language for defining leadership in Japan (Ohtaki, 2011). In fact, the word for leadership in Japanese, リーダーシップ, is borrowed directly from English. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) refer to the need for a common language of leadership and management practices as a fundamental step. As yet, the core of this common language has yet to be formulated and widely dispersed in Japan. The reason for this, we believe, is perhaps because the idea of developing ‘leadership’ is fundamentally a recent and perhaps westernized notion. Moreover, good leadership stems from a theory of human management whose aim is “to help people understand and share expectations in their environments so that they can gradually learn to supervise their own behavior and become responsible, self-motivated individuals” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, p. 447). To a large degree, it can be argued that Japanese people are highly responsible and motivated to achieve the aims of the organization to which they belong. Where then does the perception of a lack of Japanese leadership draw upon as its source? This seeming paradox needs further investigation.

Daniel Okimoto, professor emeritus of political science at Stanford University, has shed light on the reasons for the seeming lack of leadership situation in Japan, what he refers to as a “grave leadership deficit”. He advocates strengthening of Japan's overall policy-making infrastructure (Okimoto, 2011). As if to echo his response, we have observed that there has been a slow but steady increase in the level of activities supporting leadership development at Japanese think tanks, research institutes, university-based centers, non-governmental organizations, and policy forums organized by the mass media. One more important understanding that should be considered in any analysis of leadership development is the nature of leadership itself and how it is achieved. Bush (2011, p.192) admonishes us to remember, “there is no single perspective [on management and leadership] capable of presenting a total framework for our
understanding of educational institutions.” He detailed six management models that represent conceptually distinct approaches to the management of educational institutions. Likewise, he outlined ten leadership models, which illustrate diverse approaches to educational leadership (Bush, p. 199).

Aspects of several models and multiple perspectives are present in different proportions with each institution, and also with each nation (Bush, 2011, p. 204). Enderud (1980) developed an integrative model, incorporating several core components of the various management models. Our contention is that Japanese leadership style is one that needs to be further synthesized and may proceed through different models while progressing through various phases. Like all forms of leadership, Japanese leadership cannot be viewed simply through the lens of one magnifying glass, but must be approached with a fresh set of eyes and with the full awareness that the ‘multiplicity of competing models means that no single theory is sufficient to guide practice” (Bush, p. 210). Therefore, we recommend that a multidimensional framework be used to identify and analyze Japanese leadership in views of seeking ways to develop it in the educational community, and also in the public sector as well.

Structure IT policy and promote its integration: Goal 6

Gregoire, et al. (1996) have warned that technology in itself is not a panacea and that without skilled application by teachers its benefits could quickly fade. The critical element is the way in which new technology is incorporated into instructional patterns, which, in turn, is dependent on the impact that technology has on the personal theories and teaching practices of the faculty who are deploying the new technology into their classrooms. Many advocates have argued that for teachers to be successful constructing new roles for themselves, they need to “open up these theories to the scrutiny by coming together in discourse communities, where various types of knowledge and expertise are shared” about how technology is used, and how it succeeds or fails (John & Wheeler, 2008, p.118). The notion of a community of practice, comprised of learning professionals engaged in a shared experience, has not been given sufficient attention and effort in many university campuses (Wenger, 1998). It is our contention that much can be gained by allowing faculty enough time to frame their own discourse in gradually adopting technology, and by giving them support and recognition for finding IT solutions.

The wider use of technology, both in teaching and in the daily activities of professionals in the career fields we are preparing our students to enter, creates a new
and diverse environment, one that is not easy to work in alone. Institutions must recognize this struggle and look for strategies to best support teachers in adopting IT into instruction (Bach, et al, 2007, p.130). Peer mentoring, instructional support centers, professional development seminars and training, and also strategic and financial support will be of invaluable assistance in helping faculty exploit new technology for their teaching (Peters, 2000, p.12-14). Communities of practice for e-learning and effective use of IT in classroom instruction should be encouraged and supported inside the university, between institutions, and within educational research consortia (Collins & Halverson, 2009, p.128-131). Case studies should be developed from within the institution of successful and innovative uses of e-learning. Rewards, including points on teacher evaluations, should be allocated for teachers who develop innovative e-learning materials and methods (Mason and Rennie, 2008, p. 150). It is obvious that long-held teacher beliefs about assessment and established educational methods must be reshaped in order to incorporate the benefits of e-learning. However, the power of social networks on learning at school, politics and even global societies has already been strongly experienced. Elliott (2007) has suggested ways in which the issues of authenticity and ownership of the content can be assured, and goes on to include an analysis of the applicability of wide range of Web 2.0 tools for various types of assessment. Barrett (2006) has examined e-portfolios as an integrated IT approach for use as a method of assessment of the processes of acquiring knowledge and achievement in learning. We strongly advise a renewal of commitment to developing new and more effective IT integration and for developing varied assessment strategies because we believe the two are closely interrelated.

However, one wonders if this strong recommendation will be enough to instigate change in regard to implementing new learning technology into higher education. A similar fear was voiced by Bates and Sangra (2011, pp. 205-6), who are quoted below:

We are skeptical that our recommendations regarding the support and training of instructors and administrators will ever be implemented, because it runs against the grain of organizational culture of postsecondary educational institutions, and in particular that of research universities. Because the stakes are so high, and because of the resistance to change resulting from the prevailing organization culture, it may require direct intervention by the government to bring out such systemic change.
Although the Ministry of Education has been reluctant to speak out in support of such measures, its financial support has aided many colleges. However, this generosity may be shortchanged if it fails to stress, enforce, and likewise, support the human face of effective implementation of IT into higher education institutions through the mandate of and the funding of training.

**Begin internationalization in earnest: Goal 7**

It is difficult to locate a university today, particularly the major ones in Europe, Asia and North America that does not in some way speak positively of its mission to meet the need for increased international integration with the global community. For example, Kyoto University “welcomes students all over the world who aspire to learn and to foster their interest in taking an active part in international society.” In a message from Tokyo University’s recent president, Hiroshi Komiyama states that his university strives to create “an institution that contributes to the benefit of all human society” (Rhoads & Szelenyi, 2011, p. 21). There are some signs that measures are being implemented to bring about some degree of internationalization to Japanese higher education. In the past few decades, as international university rankings or league tables have become a global phenomenon, a university’s global standing in comparison to other nations’ institutions is now regarded as another important instrument of accountability, added to those of scholarly self-regulation and external quality assurance (King, 2009, p.136-7). Japan has continued to respond to governmental and private university efforts in the quest for improving its overall rank in these international standings; sometimes with good results, and at other times, with mixed or negative results (Sawa, 2010; Okada, 2007). Yet, we contend that a comprehensive strategy for internationalizing Japanese higher education has yet to be fully envisioned, and progress toward this mandate has only made small steps.

Recruiting more foreign students and internationalizing the faculty and staff at Japanese universities could serve as an important step toward this goal. It was recently pointed out that only 1.9 percent of the undergraduate students at Tokyo University were non-Japanese as of May 2011. While at Harvard University, the proportion of undergraduate students was ten percent in 2009, and at Seoul University in 2010, six percent of the undergraduate students came from outside South Korea (Aoki, 2012b). Similarly, the percentage of foreign faculty members at Tokyo University stood at 2.3 percent as of May 2011, compared to 20 percent and 14 percent at Oxford and MIT, respectively (Aoki, 2012b).
At the current levels reported, the Global 30 Project has succeeded in helping several top universities in Japan to attract a small, but growing, cohort of international graduate students to new international Master’s degree programs. Though the number of foreign students that Japanese universities hope to have enrolled is 300,000 by the year 2020, it more likely that 50,000 students is a more achievable number (Burgess, 2010). The secondary aim of Global 30 Project is to stem the decline in Japanese studying abroad, aiming to raise the number to 10,000 from the approximately 4,000 students enrolled in foreign universities now (Aoki, 2010). Concurrently, there are also improved prospects of foreign graduates finding jobs in Japan once they have completed their degrees (Kitazume, 2011; Aoki, 2012a).

We would like to present some recommendations for strategies for obtaining more foreign students studying at Japanese universities, and also for ensuring a successful learning and teaching experience for those involved. First, the entire aspect of a student’s life must be considered in making Japan an attractive place to study and to do research. Money alone will not suffice – although it may serve initially to focus attention on what Japan has to offer. Care should be given to how the foreign students will fit into the organizational culture and how they can satisfy their self-actualization goals. It should be recognized that they will need adjustment time and support in learning to cope with Japanese culture. Recognition of the special cross-cultural communication needs should be addressed when a Japanese instructor teaches a classroom of foreign students from diverse cultures. It is equally true in the reverse situation (Brooks, 2010b). Both the faculty members and the students will benefit from training in intercultural communication competence, and from actual planned and monitored activities that provide opportunities for interaction between the locals and the international students (Eisenchlas & Trevaskes, 2007, p.182). As for recruitment of foreign students, we recommend that Japanese universities, along with some Japanese companies which have operations based in a foreign country, should set up partnership programs for recruiting potential international students to attend their degree and certification programs in Japan by offering them incentives such as scholarships, grants-in-aid, work-study positions, internships for these international programs, and the opportunity to seek employment here later on.

We also strongly recommend that a long-range feasibility study be conducted within the next three to five years and, if deemed achievable, a strategic plan should be undertaken concerning the possibility of creating an international division for health sciences at this university. In view of Japanese society’s needs to address an ageing
population (Yamazaki, 2009; Lam, 2009), it is conceivable and also advantageous in terms of concrete measures for internationalization that the university invests in the training of foreign students. Some or all of these foreign students would arrive with either nursing, rehabilitative therapy, and geriatric care licenses of some type from their own countries, but they would need further training in these fields, as well as Japanese language, healthcare policies and procedures, and in cultural adaptation in order to work effectively inside Japanese society in these fields. Such a program would likely be more successful if conducted with the cooperation of hospitals and healthcare companies, and in collaboration with a partner school that possesses a Japanese language program and intercultural training specialists. Some modifications in the strict Japanese language and licensing requirements for medical personnel coming from outside the country would be needed (Tabuchi, 2012). We believe it is a bold recommendation, but should be evaluated seriously.

Conclusion

The next ten to fifteen years forebode a reshaping of the educational landscape that few college professors may be willing to envision. There are few university administrators who are brave enough to discuss these challenges, and not many university regents who have the power or capacity to combat this apparent apathy or aversion to risk. However, like Palmer and Zajonc (2010, p. 16), we have attempted to set out a strategy for renewing the higher education’s future, not by creating change from the top down, but by employing a conversational strategy – a focused and disciplined engagement in important discourse. This reasoned conversation should serve as a compass to help guide us all, as individual teachers and the greater university communities, to navigate the difficult shoals as we ride the waves of challenge toward a brighter future for higher education in Japan.
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激変する日本の高等教育：
難局を乗り越えるための7つの改革事案

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現在、多くの日本の大学は社会、そして経済の激変によりその生存能力が問われている時代となっている。本稿はまずどのような要因が日本の高等教育の危機を助長しているのかを分析し、そしてこのような状況の中でも大学が存続し続けるのみならず、それ以上に成功するための提案をする。この困難な時期を悲観的に捉えるのではなく、逆に大学教育を改革する機会として解釈するべきである。本稿の目的は政府、大学経営陣、個々の教育者としてどの様な改革を進めるべきかを提言し、改革に向けての実用的な手段を示すことである。具体的に改革を行うべき事案は以下の通りである：1）大学のミッションを明確化し、それに新たな意味をもたせる、2）安定した経営を目標とし、新たな財源確保をめざす、3）世界と比べて遅れている日本の大学が現在活用している成績評価方法、カリキュラム編成、単位認定制度などを見直す、4）新たな認証制度や評価方法により教育の質と内容の保障を推進する、5）改革の実現に向けてのリーダーシップ能力の養成とリーダーとなる人材の発掘を促す、6）IT政策を構築し大学の教育目的を実現するために活用する、7）国際化に向けて留学生の受け入れ態勢や制度の強化をしていく。日本の高等教育機関がいかにこの難局を乗り切るかは改革へ向けての確実な戦略と先見性にかかってくる。

キーワード：日本の高等教育、政策転換、難題の克服、問題の解決方法、教育改革