

“Popular Higher Education” in Prewar Japan

Ikuo AMANO

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1. The Emergence of “Popular Higher Education”

During the 1860s, well known as a decade of transition from “the age of college to the age of university,” the American higher education system commenced a substantial development. Only a decade later, in the 1870s, Japan also launched her modern education system with no less attention given to higher education. For 130 years since then, the Japanese higher education system has developed to enroll more than 35% of the population at the age of 18. This percentage is comparable to their American counterparts.

In both of these two “matured” mass higher education systems: the Japanese and the United States, one finds common features as well as differences. These two systems, therefore, attract researchers to conduct comparative studies. One of the most outstanding contrasts that may be detected is the different weights being put on private and public institutions to provide higher education. Unlike other advanced countries, both Japan and the US have established a dual system of higher education. It is composed of two sectors: public and private. However, while 80% of students in the US are enrolled in public institutions, 80% of the Japanese counterparts study at some form of private school. This fact indicates that, to attain “mass” higher education, public and private institutions have played different roles in these two nations.

As Martin Trow points out, rapid expansion of higher education in the US was mainly achieved by the emergence of a new type of higher education institution, which differs from traditional European “universities.” In his article, “Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education,” written in 1973, Trow discuss how the U. S. attained her transition from elite to mass higher education much earlier than European countries. He argues that the importance of the establishment of the “land-grant college” system since the 1860’s and the integral role of public higher education in the U. S. were the major factors that led to the smooth transition. Trow wrote:

“These institutions, already democratic and comprehensive in conception and devoted to scholarship, vocational studies and public service, were far ahead of their time; they were, in fact institutions dedicated to mass higher education long before college and university

*Professor, University of Tokyo (Affiliated Researcher, R. I. H. E.)

enrollments reached anything like the proportions which characterize mass higher education. This important development, arising more out of the egalitarian values of the United States and the role of education in its political philosophy, greatly eased the transition from elite to mass higher education in that country” (Trow 1974, p. 75).

This innovative feature of the American land-grant college system is also echoed by Eric Ashby, an English biologist as well as a higher educationist. He regards the land-grant college system as a “recent mutation” of higher education. Ashby writes “(t)he American university derives its heredity from Europe(—); but the American environment has transformed it into a new species of institution.” (Ashby, 1967, p. 418). He also points out that “the legacy of the land grant idea” was “surely one of the very few major innovations in higher education since medieval times” (Ashby, 1971, p. 16). Such an innovative feature is characterized by its “responsiveness.” That is, the system was able to respond quickly and flexibly to changes in social demands for higher education which thus opened and expanded opportunities to people. Here I would like to call this type of higher education “popular higher education.” It is characterized by its openness and responsiveness.

Interestingly enough, Japan also succeeded in establishing popular higher education in the 1870's, but in a different form from its American counterpart. Contrary to the US, private schools in Japan took the equivalent role to American public institutions to smoothen the transition from elite to mass higher education. Although their American counterparts were and may still be elite institutions, how is it that Japanese private schools were able to play the role to launch popular higher education? To understand this, we must focus on the process of the establishment of modern higher education in Japan since the 1870's.

2. The Dual System: Public Sector

The two sectors of the Japanese higher education system, public and private, had quite different characteristics in the prewar period, especially before 1910. One may even see them as two separate systems in the provision of higher education. In the public sector, most institutions were national, government run institutions. They had a structure akin to a European, particularly, the German higher education model. The central part of the public sector was Imperial Universities. Incoming students to these universities were those who had completed 3 years of preparatory education in “Higher Schools (KOTO GAKKO).” Before entering into the Higher Schools, they must have finished 6 years of elementary education and 5 years of secondary education in middle schools. The Higher Schools provided a high level general education including intensive foreign language training. Until 1918, the Imperial Universities

Table 1 The Number of Institutions in Public and Private Sector

Year	The Public Sector		The Private Sector	
	University	College	University	College
1886	1	n.a.	—	n.a.
1890	1	8	—	(14)
1895	1	8	—	(44)
1900	2	11	—	(41)
1905	2	22	—	41
1910	3	29	—	50
1915	4	32	—	56
1920	8	34	8	67
1925	15	56	19	77
1930	22	60	24	102
1935	20	63	25	114
1940	21	71	26	122
1946	21	150	27	177

Source: Amano 1989

were the only official, that is legally accredited “university” in Japan. There were only four of this type of institution even in 1915 (Table 1).

Besides Imperial universities, the public sector included Colleges (SENMON GAKKO). They were single subject higher education institutions such as Colleges of Engineering, Agriculture, Commerce, or Medicine. These professional institutions resembled German Technische Hochschule. Unlike Imperial Universities, incoming students came directly from 5 year middle schools. These Colleges were established widely throughout different regions in Japan. As of 1915, there were 32 of these

Colleges. They widened higher education opportunities which otherwise would have been restricted only to elite Imperial Universities. These Colleges were short term higher education institutions. However, this does not mean that their quality was low. As in the case of selective Higher Schools, to enter these Colleges, students had to pass competitive entrance examinations and were given higher learning of high quality. After 1918, when the University Act was enacted, the Ministry of Education accredited some of these Colleges into universities. By 1940, the number of these Colleges that were promoted to universities reached 14. In the same year, there were a total of 71 public (national and provincial) Colleges left.

As described above, the public sector of higher education in the prewar period in Japan was composed of a few elite Imperial Universities, and a number of single subject Colleges. This system indicated a distinctive resemblance to their German counterpart with respect to their roles as well as the structure. The main purpose of the establishment of these public institutions was to train and supply government officers and professionals to carry out modernization policies under the national leadership. A good example for this is the case of Imperial Universities. The Imperial University Act of 1886 defined Imperial Universities as a response to “needs of the Nation.” One may easily understand what roles these national universities and Colleges were expected to play, by examining their compositions of departments. That is, on the one hand, there were Imperial Universities which consisted of departments of law, engineering, agriculture, medicine, natural sciences, and humanities; and on the other hand, there were the SENMON GAKKO or single subject Colleges which focused on provision of

Table 2 Occupational Areas of Graduates from Major Institutions (in 1900)

(%)

	The Public Sector			The Private Sector		
	University	College of Commerce	College of Engineering	Keio	Waseda	Meiji
Government	46.7	8.6	29.9	3.4	16.5	15.1
Professionals	8.7	0.6	—	4.4	12.8	13.2
Schools	24.2	12.1	9.7	7.9	7.7	0.2
Private Companies	16.9	73.0	49.5	35.3	11.5	3.5
Self-Employment	2.8	5.7	10.9	49.0	51.5	68.0
Other	0.7	—	—			
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Amano 1989.

technology, agriculture, medicine, and commerce. These public institutions actually responded to those expectations of the government. In fact, the majority of graduates from these public schools took jobs in public offices or public institutions such as schools, hospitals, or government run factories. In the case of Imperial Universities, in 1900, almost three quarters of their graduates became employees of the government's or its related workplace (Table 2.)

The Japanese government also rewarded students and graduates of those public institutions by granting favorable privileges to them. For instance, students of those schools were exempted from military service as long as they were in school; graduates were certified to become such professionals as medical doctors or secondary school teachers without taking national qualification examinations and so on. Severe selective entrance examinations for Higher Schools, Imperial Universities, and even for Colleges, also guaranteed a privileged elite status to those graduates in the future. Those who received diplomas from these public elite institutions occupied a central part of new elite groups in modernizing Japan. Public sector represented a typical "elite higher education" as Trow characterizes.

3. The Dual System: Private Sector

The private sector of Japanese higher education was set up at the same time when the government established and kept protecting public institutions, which were strong rivals to the former. A social backdrop for the establishment of the private sector was found increasingly in social demand especially for the learning of modern Western arts and sciences, which had been the case right after the outset of modernization. The rapidly increasing demand for higher learning could not be satisfied by the public sector alone. The government established public institutions with the purpose to train public officers, however, it also took a

“*laissez-faire*” policy for private schools. The government only expected them to fill the surplus demands which the public sector by itself could not fulfill. This policy allowed private schools to be established and developed with little interference or even control from the government. However, under this policy, it had actually forced private schools to compete with the public sector under unfavorable conditions. In this respect, the transition of the private sector to “popular higher education” was not a voluntary process. But it was one that was forced into competition with the public “elite higher education” institutions.

To understand various aspects of private institutions in Japan, it is important to see who established and ran them. In Japan, religious groups played only a minor role in this respect. Buddhist sects were only interested in training monks for their own sects, and Shintoists were not yet well organized as religious groups. Among Christian sects, protestant missionary groups from America established secondary and higher education institutes for propagation. However, they faced difficulties in expanding their educational institutions widely because there were only a scarce number of Christians in Japan after a long history of prohibition of Christianity. In this context, most private institutions were established by secular groups. For example, in 1940, there were 26 private universities with only 6 Buddhist universities and 3 Christian-run universities. These religious groups owned only small sized schools. Most large private universities were run by nonreligious groups. It was also the case of private Colleges, the number of which was 122 in 1940.

The most important groups of the founders of these secular private higher education institutes were intellectuals who had learned Western culture and disciplines. Like political leaders, they perceived higher education as an integral mechanism to modernize Japan. One may find two different groups of those intellectuals who established private schools. The first group were intellectuals who aimed at enlightening people, especially the middle class, to modernization. For three centuries before the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese dominating class was the SAMURAI (or warriors) class who occupied about 6% of the total population. Accordingly, the other parts of the middle class such as commercial and industrial bourgeoisie and landlords could not develop enough to create their own clear class consciousness. Neither were they bound as a status group with a common cultural bond. The goal of the intellectuals in this group, therefore, was to create middle class with clear class consciousness and cultural bindings.

The second group of intellectuals were composed of “technocrats.” They were lawyers, bureaucrats, or university professors. They found significance in establishing private institutes for training personnel to supplement the limited number in public institutions. When modernization had undergone a substantial stage, the Japanese society needed more medical doctors, lawyers, secondary school teachers, and other professionals. The public sector by itself could

not supply these increasing demands. To respond to these surplus demands, the government introduced professional qualification examination systems besides establishing Imperial Universities and national Colleges. In particular the government expected these examinations to provide professionals for non-governmental sector of society. The second group of founders of private schools aimed at providing preparatory education for these examinations. They thought that by establishing schools they would be able to contribute to the nation's modernization. Most of them graduated from Imperial Universities or from their predecessors, so that they shared strong alumni-ship as a group. As the first generation to learn Western culture and disciplines owing to the new Meiji government, they felt indebted to their nation. That is why they were eager to establish private schools to train people for national examinations.

As described above, the development of the private sector was led by these two types of institutions. In short, in terms of the quality of education, the leading part was the first type. They were the schools that purported to provide middle class culture. As far as quantity is concerned, the second type, that is, schools established for the preparation of national professional examinations, played an important role providing massive education. Then, soon after, from the second group, the third type emerged. One may call it "educational entrepreneurs' schools." This last group of schools were established for profit making. All three groups contributed to the dynamic development of the private sector in the Japanese higher education setting.

4. Strategies for Development

The most serious difficulty for the private sector encountered was the funding problem. Private schools could not count on financial support from the government. Neither could they expect enough donations from private companies or religious groups. The only source of financial support was therefore mainly from tuitions and fees paid by students. Indeed, some non-religious private schools, especially among the first type of institutions, were able to locate upper or upper middle class' support through their donations as tentative funds to purchase lands and buildings. But even such schools had to totally rely on students' tuitions for their running cost. Nonetheless, to compete with public schools, private schools could not set the tuitions higher than their rivals in the public sector which were well protected already. They found two solutions: one was to enroll as many students as possible; the other was to cut their running cost as much as they could. These two solutions led private schools to the following specific management styles:

First, to increase intakes, many private schools adopted the following four strategies: (1) They set their entrance requirements for applicants lower than those for the public sector.

Graduates from middle schools or their equivalents were exempted from taking entrance examinations. Even those without secondary education certificates could enter these schools if they passed the simple entrance examination. (2) Private schools also provided irregular courses, based on open admission policy. Unlike regular courses, anyone could take those irregular courses regardless of their eligibility or educational background. In many schools, the number of students who took irregular courses outnumbered those who enrolled in regular courses. (3) Both for regular and irregular courses, private schools opened either early morning or evening classes for part-time students, thereby allowing working students to attend. (4) Some private schools also provided off-campus courses by correspondence for students at a distance.

Private schools also attempted to economize their cost. They minimized investment in facilities and buildings. They also saved personnel cost, which was the largest part of running cost, as much as possible. Those economic factors further shaped characteristics of private schools as follows; (1) Private schools developed mainly in giving instructions in humanities and social sciences. For these fields of study, schools did not need expensive facilities. It was also possible to enroll more students than in the other fields. Private schools avoided severe competition with public schools in these areas as well (Table 3). (2) Private schools relied on part time lecturers to provide instructions. Most of those lecturers were either professors of Imperial Universities, national Colleges, or public officers. In this respect, ironically, the development of the private sector in fact depended largely on the public sector. (3) Most private schools were located in big cities. In large cities, private schools easily found a greater number of ambitious youth, their potential students, and part time lecturers. In fact, in 1905, out of 37 private Colleges, 28 were in Tokyo and 88% of students of private Colleges lived there.

As mentioned earlier, the private sector developed as a site of "popular higher education."

Table 3 Graduates of Different Subject Areas in the Public and Private Sectors

(%)

Year	1905		1915	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Humanities	9.8	26.0	6.2	24.1
Social Sciences	21.2	69.2	30.0	45.6
Natural Sciences and Engineering	33.3	2.2	39.0	12.0
Medical Sciences	35.7	2.6	24.8	18.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Amano 1989

It was not a natural shift. But private schools were forced to take on such a role. It was a result of their management styles to provide higher education in response to their historical background of establishment and development as described so far. At the early stage of modernization, Japan, especially in Tokyo, had a greater number of ambitious youth. They were highly motivated to learn either for cultivation through Western knowledge or

Table 4 The Compositions of Graduates by Types of Higher Education Institutions and Sectors (%)

Year	1895	1905	1915	1925	1935
Types					
Universities	11.2	15.3	17.8	32.1	32.3
Colleges	88.8	84.7	82.2	67.9	67.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sectors					
Public	37.4	52.7	61.3	48.3	35.3
Private	63.6	47.3	38.7	51.7	64.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Amano 1989

education institutions in both the public and the private sectors, one finds in 1895, 64% were from private. Even in 1905, 47% were still private graduates (Table 4). Thus, with an inexpensive and modest way of managing and providing education, the private sector of Japanese higher education played an important role in the diffusion of Western knowledge and technology from the beginning of modern Japan.

5. "Upward Mobility"

An important question about the private sector is what quality of education was provided as "popular higher education." From the 1870's, the private sector had been expanding. But their quality of education was not high enough to be called "university" or "college". They remained at "school" level as far as quality is concerned. However, I would like to point out that private schools kept making efforts to catch up with the public sector to reach the same level of quality and reputation. Their efforts prepared a base for their development. The surplus of revenue from tuition was invested as much as possible into achieving "excellence" as a standard of higher education. The government enacted the College Act in 1903, and then the University Act in 1918. In these acts, the government set a national standard of "excellence" of higher education. If private schools satisfied the standard, they were eligible to be accredited as private universities or colleges. Through this maneuver, the government encouraged private schools to improve their quality, with also no less intention to put private schools under their control. In 1903, out of 46 private schools, 28 were promoted and accredited as "private colleges." In 1932, 14 years after the enactment of the University Act, out of 59 private colleges 25 were accredited as universities.

In a course of "upward mobility" from school to college and university, private institutes,

for social upward mobility by means of education. The public sector absorbed only a limited number of youth who had enough educational qualification and finance. And it lay a path for them to mobilize toward established professions or public officers. In contrast, the private sector provided popular higher education for the rest of them. That was the only way for private schools to survive in competition with the public sector. Looking at the proportion of graduates from higher

however, did not lose their original characteristics of "popular higher education." With maintaining or even reinforcing this characteristic, private schools established and expanded into an elite part of higher education, too. They adopted or had to adopt this strategy for development. Most of the established private universities also ran private colleges or college courses, which provided night class courses. Out of 10 large private universities in 1935, there were 3 universities which had over 60% of all their students in the college section, and the number of universities with more than 40% of their students in college division was 8. Among these ten universities, 9 provided night courses. Without surplus revenue through tuition charges from a larger number of students in those courses, their university sections could not have survived and attained excellence of quality. Private universities were integrated higher education institutions with a combination of three types of institutes: first, university, second, preparatory course for university which provided general education like Higher Schools, and third, college. Thus, private universities were able to achieve equivalent excellence of higher education to public universities only by being "comprehensive" higher education institutions.

As already described, the private sector had the following structure: at the center there were "private universities" which were comprehensive higher education institutions, at the middle there were independent private colleges, and at the peripheral there were private proprietary schools which provided various kinds of instruction. As it moved toward the peripheral, the more "responsive" it became to changes generated from social demand, and the more open it became to people. This means that the private sector was eager to explore and incorporate new "clients" on the hand, and that it was (or it had to be) quite sensitive to the expansion of new types of occupations and to changes in demand for manpower. One may find such a specific characteristic of the private sector in its quick responsiveness to the increasing demand for white collar workers in private business. The public sector concentrated on training and providing public bureaucrats and professionals. Therefore, the private sector was able to play a central role in training personnel for private business with little pressure from competing with the public sector. In the earlier period, law and political science were the most important subjects in the private sector. But in the early 1910's, commercial education took their place. Teaching commerce at college cost little, too. In such a way, the private sector played an important role by providing an access for the old middle class to shift to the new middle class.

6. Needs for Comparative Studies

E. Ashby called the emergence of the land-grant-college system in America a "mutation." M. Trow also regarded land grant college as the "one major exception" in the history

Table 5 Higher Education Enrollments
in Every 10,000

Year	1900	1910	1920	1930	1960
U. S. A.	31.4	38.4	56.0	89.5	200.0
France	7.6	10.0	11.5	17.7	47.2
U. K	6.0	—	—	—	34.0
Germany	8.4	12.0	20.0	20.0	37.0
Sweden	7.2	9.5	13.7	17.6	49.2
Italy	8.4	9.1	17.1	11.4	39.2
Japan	5.6	9.7	14.7	28.6	76.1

Source: Ushioji 1973 (p. 235)

of higher education. However, if we speculate about the case of the emergence and development of Japanese private universities, we can conclude that it was not unique only to the United States in the late 19th century that a society developed a popular higher education system which was “devoted equally to scholarship, vocational studies and public service” (Trow 1974, p. 75). Unlike the American public sector, the Japanese private sector of higher education may not have been “democratic and comprehensive in conception” (Trow 1974, p. 75). But the private sector in Japan also succeeded in extensively expanding higher education opportunities for lower social strata, and in creating and enlarging the “new” middle class, most of whom were either self-employed professionals or “salaried businessmen.” In this respect, the private sector in Japan has also played a similar role to the American public sector. (Table 5)

In addition, such a dual structure of higher education, which consisted of the private and public sectors, gave the Japanese higher education system a dynamism for development, which was quite different from the cases of European countries (but perhaps similar to the U. S.). Institutions in the private sector competed with each other. They were also forced to compete with the public sector. They competed not only for “quantity”, or enrollments, but also for the excellence of “quality” that the “university” offered. Without taking this characteristic of competition among higher education institutions, especially between the public and the private sectors, into consideration, one may not be able to explain why Japan succeeded in industrialization so rapidly. Perhaps, it is also the case with the U. S. One may thus find that interesting themes for comparative studies between Japan and the U. S. are not only restricted to economic and political areas, but to education as well. It may also be interesting to extend such comparative studies to include other Asian countries like the NIES, or even to European countries. The theme of “popular higher education” is one of these interesting themes we can examine further.

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戦前期日本の「民衆高等教育」

天野郁夫*

「エリートからマスへ」は、よく知られたマーチン・トロウの高等教育発展段階説である。本稿は、そのエリートからマスへの早期の段階移行、いいかえれば高等教育の急速な量的拡大が、(1)伝統的・正統的な高等教育機関の類型であるヨーロッパ的な「大学」以外の高等教育機関の類型の創出によってはじめて可能であったこと、(2)ここで「民衆高等教育」(popular higher education)とよぶその新類型が、19世紀後半、アメリカでは「国有地交付大学」(land grant college) 日本では「私立大学」の形で成立したこと、(3)その「民衆高等教育」の開放的で「感応的」(responsive)な性格が、量的拡大を促進し「エリートからマスへ」の段階移行を容易にし加速化したことを明らかにしようとするものである。

*東京大学 教育学部教授 (大学教育研究センター客員研究員)