

Missions of the Japanese National University Corporations in the 21st Century: Content Analysis of Mission Statements

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Abstract

In 2004, Japanese national universities became national university corporations (NUCs). Many scholars have discussed the NUCs as Japan's alignment with neo-liberalism in higher education. Under the new system, these NUCs have stronger autonomy in governing their institutions, while they remain under pressure to serve the country's goals as government agencies. The present study examined the mission statements of 86 NUCs to explore their visions and roles. The findings based on content analysis revealed the NUCs' strong commitment to improving education and research. A few select NUCs place stronger emphasis on research while others focus on education. These NUCs express a commitment to society and their regional communities—some more strongly than others. These NUCs recognize the importance of general and advanced specialized education. The paper discusses these findings in reference to the discourse of neo-liberalism in higher education and the unique Japanese contexts shaping these NUCs' missions.

Keywords: Japanese university corporations; higher educational reform,; neo-liberalism; mission statements, content analysis

1. Introduction

In 2004, the Japanese national universities became national university corporations (NUCs). Incorporation of national universities was the most significant higher-education reform in over a century and set Japan's higher education on a completely new track for the 21st century (Goodman, 2005). A series of higher-education reform initiatives in Japan began in the 1980s (Doyon, 2001) at a time when neo-liberalism was taking root in higher education worldwide. Deliberations related to earlier reform initiatives and the incorporation of the national universities are considered as Japan's alignment with neo-liberalism (Oba, 2005; Kitagawa & Oba, 2010; Kaneko, 2009). Neo-liberalism stands on the premise that the efficiency, productivity, and quality of organizations are best achieved through deregulation and encouraging autonomy, entrepreneurship, and competition. The language of neo-liberalism abounds in the discourse of Japan's higher education reform. "A Vision of Universities in the Twenty-First Century" published in 1998 suggested a reorganization of the national universities through deregulation (*jiryūka*), individualization (*koseika*), diversification (*tayōka*), and *kōdoka* (upgraded sophistication) (Breaden, 2013). The 2003 National University Law that laid the foundations of the NUCs is infused with the language of neo-liberalism. Its preamble reads: "In a *competitive* environment, developing universities full of vitality and *uniqueness*" (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2003 emphasis added). The law introduced a private sector management style and instituted the mechanisms of accountability, competitive funding, and diversification. Under the new system, the NUCs have more autonomy and freedom of governance than before; however, as publicly funded government agencies, the national universities remain under pressure to serve the nation's agenda, particularly with respect to economic interests (Kitagawa, 2009). In 2011, all NUCs submitted drafts of their goals and strategic plans covering the six years until 2017 to MEXT. Included in the submissions were mission statements articulating the NUCs' visions as higher-education institutions and identifying their future directions. Several past studies have discussed the incorporation of the Japanese national universities with respect to government policy and organizational restructuring aligned with neo-liberalism in higher education (e.g., Hawkins & Furuto, 2008; Kitagawa,

2009; Oba, 2005). The present study examined the NUCs' responses and reactions to the reform, specifically their visions, roles, and identities as institutions of higher education under the new system. The present study employed an empirical approach. Data was drawn from the mission statements published in 2011 by 86 Japanese NUCs and was analyzed using content-analysis methods. The mission statements embody the institutions' central goals, objectives, values, ideals, and orientation. They address the character of the organization and its reason for being, including what it does, where it is headed, what its priorities are, its values and beliefs, as well as what distinguishes it from other similar organizations (William, 2008). Given the distinct historical backgrounds of pre-war and post-war national universities, these were examined separately for possible differences in their missions.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, the paper reviews the history of the reforms of Japanese national university by highlighting three major reforms from the inception of a modern university system to the present time. Second, the paper describes the method of study and explains the rationale for its use. Third, the paper presents the findings and then discusses the major findings in reference to the discourse of neo-liberalism as well as some unique Japanese social contexts. Finally, the paper concludes with some concerns about higher education being increasingly dictated by the ideology of neo-liberalism.

2. History of Reforms Related to Japanese National Universities

The history of Japanese higher education dates from the 19th century. There have been three major reforms since then to the present time, including the most recent reform in 2004.

2.1 Reform in the Nineteenth Century

The first major reform took place in the *Meiji* era (1868–1912). In 1868, Japan lifted an edict of seclusion and opened its doors to the world after two centuries of seclusion. It was an era marked by a series of political and social reforms collectively referred as *Meiji* Restoration (*Meiji Ishin*). There was a widespread movement of Civilization and Enlightenment (*Bunmeikaika*), which advocated experimenting with Western ideas, scientific technology, and even lifestyles (Saito, 2007). The first national university, Tokyo University, was established in 1877 and later renamed Tokyo Imperial University. By 1937, six more imperial universities were established throughout Japan (Okada, 2005).

The Imperial University Ordinance (*Teikoku Daigaku Rei*) of 1886 declared the primacy the state's needs in teaching, fundamental research, and arts and science (MEXT, 1981). The missions of the imperial universities reflected the national interests of Imperial Japan with an emphasis on industrialization and militarization (*fukoku kyohei*). The universities were understood as the place to impart the knowledge and skills necessary for the growth of the national economy and the strengthening of military power (Arimoto, 1999; Saito, 2007). The imperial universities produced many government officials, legal experts, scientists, and engineers with missions to develop and protect the national welfare and prosperity (Bartholomew, 1978). In this era, the government also looked to the national universities to shape the national identity. The imperial universities became institutionalized conduits to promote a particular nationalism characterized by authoritarianism and indoctrination in the years leading up to World War II and during the war. Today, the seven former imperial universities are called the Seven National Universities (*Kokuritsu Nana Dai*, pre-war national universities hereafter) and hold the most prestigious and elite status among all Japanese universities.

2.2 Reforms after World War II

The second major higher-education reform took place immediately after World War II.

After the war, the government set out to establish at least one comprehensive national university in each prefecture. This was done as part of the democratization process to make higher education accessible to more of the population (Saito, 2007). The imperial universities became national universities and by 1949 there were 70 national universities (Kasahara, 2008). The national universities established after World War II are called Newly Established National Universities (*Shinsei Kokuritsu Daigaku*, post-war national universities hereafter). The missions of the post-war national universities included producing educators, promoting general education, and strengthening career education in order to prepare the following generations of young people to rebuild the country and again catch up with the West in science, technology, and education with the added mission of advancing the nation's diplomatic and economic interests in the international arena (Amano, 2002; Lincicome, 1999).

By the 1960s, postwar recovery and accelerating economic growth (the *Izanagi* economic boom) put increased

demands on higher education (Okada, 2005). Public and private universities came to play a role in absorbing a large college-bound population. Amano (1999) claims that the early 1970s was the end of the Japanese university as an “elite escalator” and the beginning of the “mass staircase.” The universities in this period were alluded to as factories producing workers under the careful control and supervision of the central government, much like the quality control system in the manufacturing industries (Saito & Imai, 2004). The national universities and now the NUCs are the pinnacle of the Japanese higher education system, the place where the majority of the country’s elite are educated and the bulk of scholarship in the country is produced (Breaden, 2013). Thus, the national universities continued to play an important role in generating the elites in Japanese society (Cummings, 1990; Kitamura, 1979; Pemple, 1978). Today, there are 86 NUCs around the country.

2.3 The Most Recent Reform in the 21st Century

The most recent reform of the NUCs in 2004 consisted of deregulating the national universities and transforming them into corporations. The law specifically introduced five measures of reform: (1) incorporation of the national universities as autonomous entities, (2) introduction of a private sector management system, (3) participation of outside experts in university management, (4) flexible staff management, and (5) establishment of an institutional accountability system (MEXT, 2003). Under this new system, the government continues to oversee the NUCs’ intellectual activities through a competitive allocation of funds. The reform awarded NUCs stronger autonomy in the governance and operation of their institutions. At the same time, the NUCs no longer have same financial security that they long enjoyed. With the government controlling the distribution of limited funds, they face steep competition for resources to maintain their existence.

Today’s economy is driven by new discoveries and innovations, particularly in the fields of science and technology. This knowledge-based economy has transformed the universities into “knowledge factories,” knowledge into a “commodity” to sell, and agencies and industries into “consumers” to be satisfied (Sauntson & Morrish, 2011a). Like many countries under the influence of neo-liberalism, the Japanese NUCs have become the grounds for the national economic agenda (Ayers, 2005; Levidow, 2002).

Economic crises are keenly felt in Japan as the country is still experiencing the lasting effects of the collapse of the 1990s bubble economy, a prolonged recession thereafter, and a mounting national deficit. The government demands that the NUCs actively contribute to the recovery and growth of the national economy (Goodman, 20005; Oba, 2007; Tabata, 2005), and incorporation of the national universities is a measure to improve the country’s economic future.

The present study examines how national universities are responding to this reform. What are their visions as higher-education institutions under the new system? How do they construe their identities and roles? In what direction are they headed? This study attempts to answer these questions. In the past, the reform of Japanese higher-education has been mainly discussed in reference to educational policy and organizational restructuring driven by neo-liberalism in higher education. Few studies have examined the NUCs’ reactions to the reform, particularly their construction of identities, roles, and missions under the new system.

3. Method

The mission statements of the 86 NUCs were downloaded from the MEXT website in December 2011. The mission statements were written in Japanese. To examine possible differences in underlying themes of these mission statements, the data was analyzed as two separate sets of data, one comprising the mission statements of the pre-war national universities and the other those of the post-war national universities. The data was analyzed using content analysis to generate word-frequency lists and co-occurrence network maps. Content analysis is particularly useful for analyzing large volumes of printed texts such as newspaper articles, government documents, and open-ended survey responses (Krippendorff, 2004; Sebastiani, 2002). For large volumes of text, various computer software programs capable of content analysis are available (Lewins & Silver, 2007). The present study used *KH-coder*, which is capable of analyzing Japanese text. To enhance the completeness of data analysis and interpretation, two levels of content analysis were performed: word-frequency analysis and co-occurrence network map analysis. Word frequency is the first and most basic way of identifying themes. It is based on the assumption that frequently occurring words are more likely to provide important clues to the major themes of the text than are words occurring less frequently (Ryan, 2003). Subsequently, co-occurrence network analysis provides insights into the semantic environment of high-frequency words by determining the likelihood that two or more of the words co-occur. A co-occurrence network thus reveals information not readily evident by word-

frequency analysis alone (Doerfel & Barnett, 1999; Morrish & Sauntson, 2011b). It identifies a group of words creating a homogeneous sub-group that represents concepts underlying word associations. It is an exploratory data analysis method that organizes data with no preconceived notion of what clusters may arise.

In the present study, the KH-Coder generated word frequency lists and co-occurrence network maps. Word frequency was arranged in the order of high to low. Higher-frequency words or *key words* (KWs) reveal general themes of the mission statement. To minimize data overload, the researchers set the KH-Coder to extract 50 words for each analysis. Co-occurrence network maps were presented in the form of maps with circles representing KWs extracted from the mission statements and lines connecting the circles. This facilitates a visual examination of the relationship of one KW to the others and thereby interprets each and all KWs within the broader context of the mission statements. The interrelationship of words is indicated by proximity on the diagram, and strength of association is represented by the thickness of the lines connecting the words: the closer the words, the more likely the words co-occur, and the thicker the line between the words, the stronger the association between those words. The co-occurrence network map also reveals critical themes of the mission statements. The location of a circle indicates the degrees of importance awarded to KWs. Circles near the center of a map and with greater numbers of lines linked to other circles are interpreted as critical information.

4. Findings

This section summarizes the results of data analysis by types of analysis performed. Each finding will be discussed in detail in the following section.

4.1 Word Frequency

The total number of words (in Japanese) extracted from the data was 31,089, consisting of 2,266 distinct lexemes. The top 50 most frequently used words (i.e., KWs) were translated into Japanese by the two authors, both bilingual in Japanese and English.

Table 1 shows the 50 KWs for the pre-war and post-war national universities in order from high to low frequency. The two major themes of the Japanese NUCs are *Education* and *Research*. However, a difference in importance ranking is observed between the two groups. The pre-war national universities cite *Research* (66 times) more frequently than *Education* (57 times), while the latter cite *Education* (565 times) more frequently than *Research* (546 times). This shows a stronger orientation of pre-war national universities toward *Research*, whereas the post-war national universities lean more toward *Education*.

Included in the 10 most frequently cited themes in the two groups of the Japanese NUCs are *Society*, *Region*, and *International*, indicating the NUCs' attempts to connect their missions with the greater society outside the universities. Words such as *Promotion* and *Contribution* also appear among the 10 most frequently cited words in both groups, suggesting a desire of the NUCs to position themselves as part of the regional and international communities. *World* and *International* appear as strong themes of both pre-war and post-war national universities, 4th and 7th, respectively, and for the post-war national universities 11th and 6th, respectively. These rankings, together with those for *Society* and *Region*, indicate that the pre-war national universities' focus is more on the world outside the country, while the post-war national universities focus more on the regional communities in the domestic arena.

Table 1. Top 50 words most frequently used in the mission statements (Pre-war national universities)

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
Research	66	Theme	9
Education	57	To open	9
Society	36	Activity	9
World	33	Advanced	9
University	23	Result	9
Contribution	18	Partnership	9
International	16	Student	8
Region	16	Academics	8
Promotion	15	Center	8
Basic	14	To carry out	8
Human capital	13	Mission	8

Creativity	13	Proactive	8
Goal	13	Rich	8
Specialized area of study	12	Role	8
General education	12	To be based on	7
Progress	12	Guidance	7
To hold	11	Freedom	7
Humanity	11	Human beings	7
Specialization	11	Spirit	7
To aim for	11	Harmony	7
Growth	11	To perform	6
Wide	10	Academic programs	6
Standard	10	Continuance	6
Ideal	10	University charter	6
Science	9	High	6

Another notable finding is the place of *General Education* in the Japanese NUCs' mission statements. *General Education* is among the 50 most frequently cited words. The pre-war national universities appear to place a stronger emphasis on *General Education* than do the post-war national universities as seen in their rankings of 15th and 36th, respectively. For the pre-war national universities, *Specialized Area of Study* is ranked 14th together with *General Education*, indicating an equal emphasis awarded to both, with *Science* being mentioned as an example of *Specialized Area of Study*. For the post-war national universities, while *General Education* is among the 50 most frequently cited words, additional specific areas of study relating to *Technology* (26th), *Teacher* (32nd), and *Medical* (35th), in addition to *Science* (21st), are frequently mentioned. The words *Practical* (27th) and *Occupation* (47th) are among top 50 most frequently appearing themes, whereas these words do not appear in the pre-war national universities' mission statements. This may indicate that the post-war national universities prioritize practical knowledge and skills.

Table 2. Top 50 words most frequently used in the mission statements (Post-war national universities)

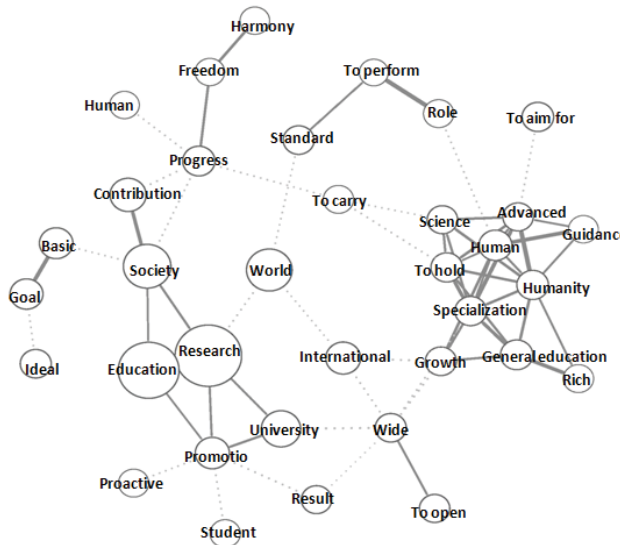
Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
Education	565	Technology	76
Research	546	Practical	75
Society	412	Creativity	75
Region	251	My university	75
University	246	To carry out	71
International	157	Knowledge	70
Promotion	167	Teacher	67
Contribution	162	Humanity	67
Goal	144	Culture	67
Specialization	142	Medical	64
World	137	General education	64
Human capital	136	Student	63
Growth	131	Ability	63
Preparation	122	Environment	61
Advanced	117	Discipline	61
Partnership	112	Academic programs	60
Progress	102	High	59
Center	92	Realization	56
Result	92	Mission	55
To aim for	88	To plan	55
Science	85	Enrichment	52
Basic	85	Occupation	52
Theme	83	Proactive	51
Rich	82	Ideal	51
Activity	77	Foundation	49

4.2 Co-occurrence Network Map

Figures 1 and 2 show the respective co-occurrence network maps for the prewar and post-war national universities. In

these maps, KWs are shown as circles. The relative size of each circle shows the degree of importance awarded to the associated KW (i.e., the larger a circle, the more important the KW). Circles representing KWs are connected by lines to create a number of clusters. The number of circles constituting a cluster suggests the degree of importance given to a concept expressed: More circles indicate the greater importance of the concept conveyed by the associated KWs. For the pre-war national universities, the most important KWs indicated by the two largest circles are *Research* and *Education*, which is consistent with the word frequency list. The largest cluster consists of the KWs *Research*, *Education*, *Society*, *Contribution*, *Promotion*, and *University*—all indicating the institutional commitments to *Research* and *Education*. Both *Research* and *Education* are directly connected to *Society*. Again, the results are consistent with those suggested by the word frequency list. The second largest cluster consists of KWs related to both *Specialization* (*Science* and *Advanced*) and *General Education* (*Humanity*, *Rich*, *Growth*, and *Guidance*). *Human Capital* is another KW within this cluster and it is directly connected to *Science* and *Humanity*. The word frequency list reveals the pre-war national universities' commitment to both *General Education* and *Specialized Area of Study*. The co-occurrence network map further suggests that both types of education lay the foundations for the development of *Human Capital*.

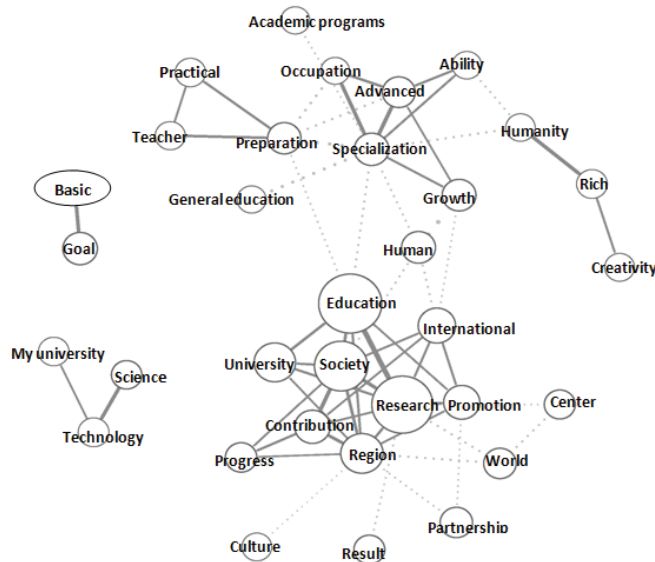
Figure 1. Co-occurrence network map for the pre-war national universities



For the post-war national universities, again the two largest circles are *Education* and *Research* as indicated by the word frequency list. Several clusters are observed in the co-occurrence network map. One cluster, larger than the rest, consists of the KWs *Education* and *Research* connected to *Region*, *Contribution*, *Promotion*, and *Progress*. One KW observed in this cluster of the post-war universities, but not in the pre-war national universities, is *International*, which is directly connected to *Research* and *Society* in the post-war national universities. This may suggest that the post-war national universities' outlook for their research interests is tied to the international community. This is not clear in the word frequency list. The co-occurrence network map of the post-war universities reveals four other distinct clusters: (1) *Specialization*, *Advanced*, *Occupation*, *Ability* and *Growth*; (2) *Science*, *Technology*, and (My) *University*; (3) *Teacher*, *Preparation*, and *Practical*; and (4) *Humanity*, *Rich*, and *Creativity*. Suggested here are post-war national universities' visions of education directed toward four areas of study. In order of importance as indicated by the circles and clusters, these are advanced and specialized studies related to occupation, teacher education, studies of the humanities, and science and technology. These findings are largely supported by the word-frequency list in that the post-war national universities like the pre-war national universities support both general education and specialized areas of studies. However, one thing that is not clear from the word-frequency list, but is captured in the co-occurrence network map, is the post-war national universities' particular commitment to teacher education. Also, it is clear in the co-occurrence network map that the study of science and technology is an outlier from the other goals of the post-war national universities. These universities' commitment to regional societies may be characterized by a focus on professional development

directly related to skills development. At the same time, their commitment to *Research* linked to *International* remains a high priority as shown in the first cluster described earlier.

Figure 2. Co-occurrence network map for the post-war national universities



In summary, both the pre- and post-war national universities posit *Research* and *Education* as their central missions. All Japanese NUCs are trying to connect to the regional and international communities mainly through *Research*. *Education* is more closely connected to *Society* and *Region*. Both the pre- and post-war national universities embrace the importance of *General Education*. For the pre-war national universities, *General Education* and *Advanced* and *Specialized Area of Study* are the foundation of the development of *Human Capital*, while for the post-war national universities, *Human Capital* is more closely defined by *Specialized Area of Study* than by *General Education*. A big difference between the pre- and post-war national universities is in their attitude toward professional, practical skill-oriented training. The post-war national universities tend to focus more on education that yields skills and knowledge immediately applicable to *Society* and *Region*. Closer observation reveals that *General Education*, although one of the words most frequently mentioned by the post-war national universities, is at the periphery of the co-occurrence network map. *Science* and *Technology* are outliers for the post-war national universities, indicating these are peripheral ideas of their mission statements.

5. Discussion

The three major findings of the present study are the Japanese NUCs' affirmation of their roles as centers for excellence in education and research, active contributors to the development of society and regional communities, and the places for developing human capital by providing a broad general-education background along with in-depth knowledge of advanced, specialized studies.

5.1 Center for Excellence in Education and Research

Two activities of universities are research and education. The Japanese NUCs' mission statements reveal a strong commitment to both. The difference in emphasis between the pre- and post-war national universities may be a sign of diversification necessitated by the reform. The pre-war national universities are moving in the direction of research universities, while the post-war national universities are moving in the direction of teaching institutions. Historically, the pre-war national universities were strong in scientific and technical fields of study and thus have an advantage over the

post-war national universities. The pre-war national universities have more expertise and experience with the kind of knowledge demanded by today's economy. In fact, the pattern of distribution of research grants made available by COE 21 in 2002 and Global COE in 2004 shows that pre-war national universities consistently rank among the top grant awardees (Kitagawa, 2009). More recently, in 2007, the government's push for establishing stronger research bases led to the concept of a World Top-Level Research Center (WTL), and five research bases were selected to receive support from the government for the next 10 to 15 years (Kitagawa, 2009). Four of the five universities chosen were four pre-war national universities. The post-war national universities have little prospect for obtaining government research funds; they have stepped back from research and oriented themselves as teaching institutions closely connected to the communities and industries in their regions.

5.2 Link to the Regional Communities

Both the pre- and post-war national universities express a commitment to their regional communities in their mission statements. However, the post-war national universities appear to be more actively seeking regional ties than the pre-war national universities. Roles recognized by the post-war national universities in their mission statements include those as providers of education and training closely related to the type of jobs and professions that the regional communities may demand. The emergence of health/medical training, as well as teacher training, in the post-war national universities' mission statements is not surprising. The demand for these fields is enormous in Japan today. A growing elderly population (*koreika*) has increased the number of the vulnerable elderly, and a dwindling population of young people (*shōshika*) who traditionally cared for their elderly parents has created a need for health-care workers. Teacher education was once suspended as the population of children dwindled; it is now again called for as Japan expects an exodus of teachers who reach retirement age (Saito, 2007). The present study shows that the post-war national universities are well aware of these social phenomena and dealing with them by contributing their knowledge and expertise to their communities.

Reaching out to their regions and possibly to the industries therein may be another example of the diversification prompted by the reform. In the past, industries and universities had antagonistic relations due to the universities' failure to meet the industries' demand for the type of research and quality of the education (Amano, 1999). The law establishing the NUCs encourages diversification and entrepreneurialism. Hawkins and Furuta (2008) observe that the national universities are increasingly seeking more external funds through partnerships with the private sector. A somewhat disadvantageous position of the post-war national universities for obtaining government funds in competition with the pre-war national universities may be forcing the former to venture out to venues previously actively explored. With the government funds flowing almost entirely to pre-war national universities, opportunities for the post-war national universities to secure research funds seem rather slim. Their thrust to establish links to the regional industries may be a natural response to such a dire situation.

There has been always a subtle division of labor between the pre- and post-war national universities. The pre-war national universities were for the country as a whole, and the post-war national universities were primarily for their regions (Saito, 2007). While the pre-war national universities may have a stronger national orientation, many regional universities may have a smaller, more local focus. The NUCs in non-metropolitan areas increasingly view contributing to regional development as central to their core institutional missions (Kitagawa, 2009). The reform may have strengthened the traditional division of labor between the two cohorts of the NUCs.

Finally, internationalization (*kokusaika*) is taking place at all levels of education in Japan. Not surprisingly, the Japanese NUCs' mission statements address the importance of international communities. The movement toward internationalization is not new to Japan. It happened at the time of Civilization and Enlightenment in the first two decades of the *Meiji* era and again at the end of World War II. Each movement had an urgency of a different nature—the modernization and democratization of Japan. This time, internationalization has even stronger urgency. The global economy and the manifestation of the neo-liberalism ideology at the world level pushes Japan to compete with other countries. The Japanese NUCs now have to compete internationally. They can no longer remain as prestige-driven universities in a familiar domestic arena. In particular, strong competition from neighboring Asian countries threatens Japan's competitive position in the global economy. The driving force of earlier internationalization movements was a crisis of catching up with the West. Today, it is a crisis of competing with the rest of the world.

5.3 Place of General Education

The advance of neo-liberalism in higher education has raised serious concerns about the place of general education in higher education. The pre-war national universities adopted a German university system, the Humboldtian model (Kaneko, 2009; Itoh, 2002). This model understood the university as the home of intellectuals engaged in advancing knowledge through the integration of education and research. Despite strong government surveillance, the Japanese national universities, both pre- and post-war, were rather unfettered by government control in the actual practice of education and research (Breaden, 2013). However, in the era of economy-driven education, the direction and types of education and research are steered and manipulated by outside stakeholders, including the government and industry, with little choice left for universities. With the government's push for strong research bases with an emphasis on science and technology, many worry about the place of general education in higher education.

However, the findings of the present study suggest a commitment by the Japanese NUCs to general education. In 1990s, the country's preoccupation with science and technology resulted in a decline of general education in Japan. However, it was soon reinstated when society realized the need to cultivate an understanding and respect for humanity with the rise of social problems such as bullying (*ijime*), truancy (*tōkōkyōhi*), and acute shut-ins (*hikikomori*). Higher education also noticed a lack of knowledge and exposure to these studies among students entering the universities (General Education Research Group, 2002). The development of human capital at the Japanese NUCs entails both broad general education and in-depth advanced studies. The tradition of general education also appears strong in China, which is currently undergoing a higher-education reform. China's research universities approach reform with the combined efforts to broaden the knowledge base and build in-depth knowledge. In the Chinese model, a broad general education is the foundation of strong specialized education and the universities' curriculum connects the arts and the sciences, the classical and the modern, and combines the Chinese and the Western (Jinghuan, 2011). Altbach (1989) observes two features shared by higher-education systems in Asian countries—the adaptation of the basic academic model and indigenization of the universities as part of the development process. China and Japan are example of such countries. Japanese cultural borrowing and adaptation began as early as the 7th century. At that time, Japan imported from China Confucianism, philosophy, law, architecture, and the Chinese writing system and adapted them to become the foundations of Japanese cultural life today. The influence of Confucianism, which focuses on education, self-cultivation, and self-perfection, continues at all levels of education in Japan today. The place of general education in the Japanese NUCs looks secure in the future.

6. Conclusion

The national universities were established first and foremost to serve the nation's needs. Under the new system, the Japanese NUCs show a renewed commitment to improved education and research. Their commitments to society and regional communities, professional education, and research will bring much-needed vitality and hope to a society long enduring fiscal stagnation. Provenzo (2008) defines educational reform as intended or enacted attempts to correct identified problems and that such reforms have been framed by declarations of crisis, with rhetoric of urgency and visions of hope with inspirational themes to guide principled action. The establishment of the Japanese National University Corporations (NUCs) may have been an answer to the long-standing calls for reform by concerned scholars, politicians, and citizens. However, it is also true that there are concerns about the negative ramifications of the reform guided by neo-liberalism. Some (Kitagawa & Oba, 2010; Oba, 2005) observe that the current reform has created a gap between the "haves" and "have nots" among the Japanese NUCs, reinforcing the existing hierarchy of the Japanese higher-education system. They conclude in their study that the government's efforts to establish a select few NUCs as world-class research bases have increased the advantageous position of the former imperial universities and have raised their status as elite universities even more than before.

The reform has raised the fundamental question of what universities are for. Smith (2012) argues that while the universities face the challenge of an economic rationale, we should resist talking about higher education only in the language of economics. As the universities' success is measured by their economic contributions to the country and their survival increasingly becomes dependent on the consumerism of their stakeholders, intellectual autonomy may be compromised in the process. The government guides higher education to produce outcomes consistent with government priorities, which potentially will narrow the range of what can be said, thought, and taught. The ultimate consequence of such a practice is the weakening of the intellectuals and pedagogically limited knowledge (Iwasaki, 2009; Kitagawa, 2009; Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009). The utilitarian approach to education dismisses the type of education that enables

the pursuit of knowledge for personal goals and the universal goods. Education is not only innovation and discovery but also reflection and contemplation that will nurture critical thinking, creativity, and imagination.

As noted by Rhee (2007), while the current higher education reform follows global trends, it takes form in individual countries' unique national and local contexts. The reform of the Japanese national universities seems to embrace the traditional value of a whole-person education that combines the development of mind, knowledge, and skills. As all the Japanese NUCs, particularly the post-war national universities, move toward diversification, some NUCs may distinguish themselves as unique liberal arts universities. Literature, philosophy, music, and the arts seem to be becoming less relevant and less valued in today's society. Education has the important function of transmitting the great contributions of the humanity in the past for the future generations to appreciate and nurture. Ball (2012) reflects on the current academia and laments that imposed productivity is causing a battle in the knowledge war and despair rather than excellence in academia. This sentiment may be easily dismissed as the nostalgic self-delusion of academia with their own professional and individual interests, who resist change. Probably more than before, it is important not to forget "conviction about, and sense of responsibility to maintain the power of knowledge to liberate individual and collectivity" (Kelsey quoted in Ball 2012: 26).

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