

*“Universitas, knowldege without limits”*

**The creation and development of the universities  
in Japan under Western influence  
from Meiji Restoration (1868) to the present,  
and their role in Japanese society today**

Creación y desarrollo de las universidades en Japón bajo influencia occidental,  
desde la Restauración Meiji (1868) hasta el presente y su papel en la sociedad japonesa actual

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Observation: In this paper, all the names will follow their original form: the Western names will be written in the order ‘*name/family name*’, while Japanese names will keep the order ‘*family name/name*’. The transcription of Japanese words and names will follow the Hepburn system of Romanization<sup>1</sup>. For citations from reference works in languages other than English, an unofficial English translation will be used in the main text, accompanied by the respective references in the footnotes.

## INTRODUCTION

Japan is known for having one of the highest education rates in the world. In fact, according to statistics from the Japanese Ministry of Education, 76.2% of the 18 year-old population is enrolled in an institution of higher education, a percentage even higher than Western countries like England (63.1%), United States (48.9%) and Germany (38.4%)<sup>2</sup>. However, does this high percentage bring any collateral effects? What consequences does it have on society in general or on the academic level of the universities themselves?

The idea of this paper is to discuss the role of universities in Japanese society today, after giving a historical sketch: The concept the Japanese government had when creating institutions of higher learning under Western influence at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their establishment and later development. Was the initial concept of ‘University’ in Japan similar to the original concept the first European universities had? What can be said of the process of transplantation of ‘University’ to the Japanese reality? And a final question: how do students in Japan see the ‘University’ today?

In order to explain the creation of the first universities during the Meiji period (1868-1912), is important to understand -at least in general lines- the educational system until then. This paper will be divided in three parts:

(1) The first part contains a brief overview of the Japanese educational system until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its development during the Edo period (16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century), and the overall reforms that came as a consequence of the Western-style modernization of Japan after the Meiji Restoration (1868). It covers a period of time from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

(2) The second part explains the establishment of the so-called Imperial Universities as well as the creation of numerous private universities at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their development during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the educational reforms that ensued after the unconditional surrender that ended the Second World War in 1945. It covers the period that goes from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

(3) In the third and central part of this paper we will discuss the results obtained from a survey conducted among 120 university students about their own student life and about the role universities have in Japanese society today.

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<sup>1</sup> Hepburn system (*hebon-shiki*) is the most common system for transcription of Japanese words using the Latin alphabet. It was developed by James Curtis Hepburn (1815-1911), a doctor and Presbyterian missionary who was also partly responsible for a Japanese-English dictionary. Cfr. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Japan* (Britannica Japan, 2007. Digital edition)

<sup>2</sup> These statistics include Universities (undergraduate course only), Junior Colleges (normally a two-year course), Colleges of Technology and Specialized Training Colleges, and refers only to the 18 year-old population.

For more details see the chapter “*Trends in Entry Rates to Higher Education*” in “*Japan’s Education at a Glance 2006*”, p.11 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2006)

## 1. Education in Japan until the Meiji Restoration (1868)

### 1.1. The educational system from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century

The first schools in Japan date back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the 'Taiho Code' (*Taiho Ritsuryo*) established a few schools teaching basically the Confucian philosophy imported from China. Yet during the Japanese Medieval Age (centuries 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>) the educational system was centered not on such public institutions, but almost exclusively on the educational facilities attached to the innumerable Buddhist temples scattered around the country.

In 1603, with his ascension as the new Shogun<sup>3</sup>, Tokugawa Ieyasu initiated the so-called Edo period (1603-1868), also known as Tokugawa Shogunate. Through radical anti-foreign policies such as the suppression of Christianity and the expulsion of European traders from Japan, Ieyasu and his successors led the country into a 'National Isolation Policy' (*Sakoku*), virtually closing off the country politically, economically, socially and even culturally until the end of the Edo period. However, it was during this period that the educational system in Japan started flourishing: schools were created in each feudal domain (*Han-ko*) for upper-class samurai children, as well as various private schools (*Terakoya*) aimed at commoners. This efficient system raised the literacy rate in Japan to more than 50% towards the end of the Edo period, a quite high percentage if compared to European countries at that time<sup>4</sup>. However, until the Meiji Restoration (1868), education in Japan was tailored to the practical needs of government, basic literacy or religious education, and there were no institutions of higher education corresponding to European universities.

### 1.2. Social and political changes brought by the Meiji Restoration (1868)

Towards the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate, as a consequence of increasing pressure -also through military threat- from Western countries to have Japanese ports opened to foreign traders, in 1854 the Edo Government established the first treaty with a Western country, the United States, followed by other similar treaties with England, Russia, Holland, France and others. Within a few years Japan saw itself immersed in a frenetic rush to modernize along Western modes of practice. In part it was an attempt to raise the country to the same level of these Western powers, and to redress the unfair economic treaties that were once tied with them, when the Japanese experience in international affairs was still elementary. Reforms soon reached all spheres of society, including political organization: the restoration of the Emperor's authority, the reform of many governmental institutions, the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution etc<sup>5</sup>.

In the area of education, since the beginning of the reform movement, the leaders of the new Government had already realized how indispensable an extensive system of popular education was for a modern state. During the first decades of the Meiji period, young students were carefully chosen from the whole country according to their capabilities and sent to different Western countries for study and training programs in different fields. Japan "*intended to learn from each Western country that in which it particularly excelled. For example, ... [Japan] sent students to England to study the navy and merchant marine, to Germany for the army and medicine, to France for local government and law, and to the United States for business methods*"<sup>6</sup>. As the Historian and former American Ambassador to Japan, Edwin O. Reischauer, points out, the Meiji Government was looking for "*a literate working and military force, a broad group of technicians, and a small elite of leaders*"<sup>7</sup>. In this context, since the beginning education was one of the priorities of the new Government and Japan soon realized the important role universities could have in the modernization of the country.

<sup>3</sup> "Shoguns were in theory military dictators whose regimes dominated the Japanese polity for most of Japanese history between 1192 and 1867. Their regimes were known as BAKUFU or 'tent governments', a term commonly translated as SHOGUNATE. (...) Formally each shogun was appointed by the emperor and was responsible for keeping the peace of the realm". For more details see: *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan VII*, p.160 (Kodansha, 1983)

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. KUSAHARA KATSUhide, *Nihon no daigaku seido - Rekishi to Tenbo*, p.29 (Kobundo, 2008)

<sup>5</sup> For more details on the Meiji Constitution and the political changes of this period see: GEORGE E. UYEHARA, *The political development of Japan, 1867-1909* (Irish University Press, 1972)

<sup>6</sup> EDWIN O. REISCHAUER, *JAPAN: The Story of a Nation*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, p.106 (McGraw Hill, 1990)

<sup>7</sup> Idem, p.108

## 2. The creation of the first Universities

### 2.1. The Imperial Universities

In 1877, with the merger of two professional schools (*Tokyo Kaisei Gakko* and *Tokyo Igakko*) *Tokyo University* was born as the first public university in Japan. A few years later, Mori Arinori -the first Minister of Education of the country-, impressed by the educational system of the Western countries he had visited (especially England), carefully revised the Japanese educational system and in 1886 promulgated the 'Imperial Universities Law' (*Teikoku Daigaku Rei*), changing *Tokyo University's* name to *Imperial University* and increasing the number of its faculties to five: Law, Medicine, Engineering, Letters and Sciences<sup>8</sup>.

At the beginning the *Imperial University* was more likely an instrument the new Government had to raise the country's future leaders. As professor Kusahara writes, at that time "*Tokyo University should be evaluated as an institution of the Ministry of Education whose aims were solely the assimilation of Western modern knowledge and the preparation of scholars trained for positions of leadership*"<sup>9</sup>.

At that time, German influence on the Meiji Government leaders was strong. The Meiji Constitution, for example, is said to be largely inspired by German schools, and Ito Hirobumi -the first Prime Minister- was a well-known admirer of that country. As in government, the German model also loomed large in the concept of university in Japan: a university created by the State, to satisfy the necessities of the State<sup>10</sup>.

In 1897, a second *Imperial University* was also set up in Kyoto, and the former *Imperial University* (of Tokyo) was renamed *Tokyo Imperial University*. During the following forty years, Imperial Universities were also established in Tohoku, Kyushu, Hokkaido, Keijo (former name for Seoul, the capital of the present South Korea), Taipei (the capital of Taiwan), Osaka and Nagoya<sup>11</sup>.

### 2.2. The Private Universities

However, besides the Imperial Universities created by the Meiji Government itself, several private institutions were also established, some of them with educational levels even higher than the public universities at that time. Although it was not called a university at the beginning -usage of the word "university" was strictly regulated, used only for public schools-, *Keio University* was created in 1868, even before *Tokyo University*. Its founder was Fukuzawa Yukichi<sup>12</sup>, one of the greatest popularizers of Western culture in Japan at that time.

But it was mainly from the decade of 1870 that several schools related to Buddhist or Christian institutions were opened throughout the country, a great number of them established by North American missionaries. Some of these schools had specialized fields such as foreign languages, medicine or politics, and after the 1918's new decree these private schools were raised to the rank of private universities, and many other public universities were created, following the Imperial Universities. Most of these first private schools still remain among the most prestigious educational institutions of the country today.

### 2.3. The Second World War

From 1945 to 1952, as a consequence of Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allies and as stated in the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945, the "*General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers*" (GHQ) was installed in Tokyo and General MacArthur was designated its Supreme Commander (SCAP). During this period of occupation several political and social reforms were carried out in Japan, indirectly guided by the United States. Among the new changes, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1946 the Emperor himself declared his "human condition" -abandoning the pre-war idea of "divine condition of the Emperor"-, a new Constitution was promulgated, emphasizing democracy, pacifism, and

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. SEKI MASAO, *Nihon no daigaku kyoiku: Rekishi, Genjo, Tenbo*, p.33 (Tamakawa Daigaku, 1988)

<sup>9</sup> Translated from KUSAHARA KATSUHIDE, *Nihon no daigaku seido - Rekishi to Tenbo*, p.33 (Kobundo, 2008)

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. TERASAKI MASAO, *Daigaku kyoiku no sozo: Rekishi, Shisutemu, Karikyuramu*, p.165-166 (Toshindo, 1999)

<sup>11</sup> Until 1945, Taiwan (since 1895) and the peninsula of Korea (since 1910) were Japanese territories.

<sup>12</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) visited the West as a member of official missions sent by the Bakufu Government in 1861 and 1862. His most famous pro-West book "*Seiyo Jijo*" (Conditions of the Occident) became a best seller. Cfr. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Japan* (Britannica Japan, 2007. Digital edition)

permanent renunciation of war and of any kind of land, sea or air forces. As expected, the main aim of GHQ to “demilitarize” and “democratize” Japanese society also affected its educational system.

Attending to a request of the GHQ, in 1946 the Secretary of Education of New York State led a 27-member educational mission to Japan and their counsels greatly influenced the reforms of the Japanese system. During the next few years, all the universities (national, public and private) adopted the four-year curriculum, female schools were officially recognized as universities, and as a whole the number of universities suddenly started increasing. At the end of the war there were 48 universities in the whole country, but by 1949 this number increased to 180 (70 national, 18 public and 92 private schools)<sup>13</sup>. In 2008 the number of universities in Japan was 756 (87 national, 89 public, 580 private)<sup>14</sup>. However, as expected, this “*sudden jump in the number of universities [during the first decade after the war] and the great increase in students attending the higher levels of education (...) resulted in a substantial lowering of university standards*”<sup>15</sup>.

Besides the change in number and curriculum of the universities, a substantial change in concept also occurred. At least in theory, the reforms’ main aim was to “*strengthen respect for the individual*”<sup>16</sup>. “*As before the war, the universities no longer aimed to ‘answer the necessities of the State’, but their purposes were now individual character-building and the improvement of each one’s capacities*”<sup>17</sup>. However, the situation of the Japanese universities today does contain signs that perhaps the reform was not entirely successful.

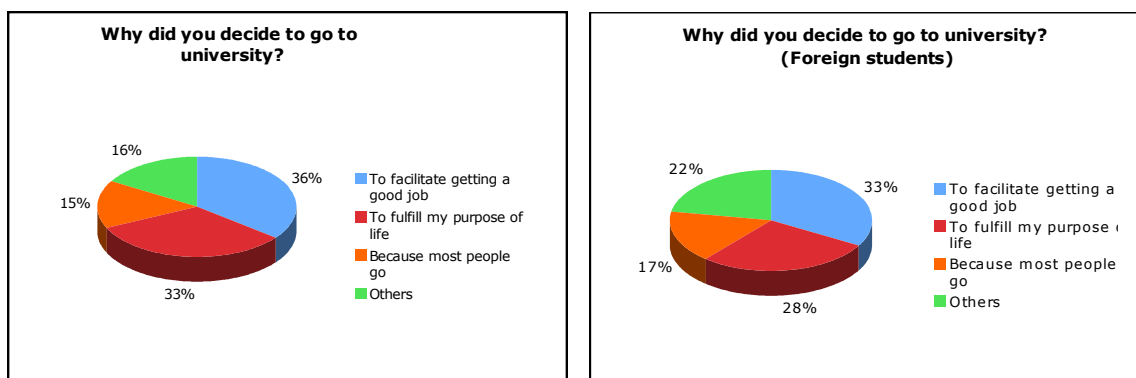
### 3. Universities in Japan today

#### 3.1. Survey’s outline

In order to discover how students in Japan understand the role universities play in their society and to gain insight on student life, a survey of 105 students from 20 different Japanese universities (3 national, 2 public and 15 private, from 12 cities) was conducted during the first three months of 2009. In addition, 15 students from 9 foreign countries studying in Japanese universities were interviewed for a comparative study. All the 120 are undergraduate students.

First of all, comparing Japanese students and foreign students’ answers there are many common points. To the question “*As a whole are you satisfied with your university life?*”, almost one-third of them answered negatively (29% of the Japanese and 27% of the foreigners), and their three major reasons were “*low level classes*”, “*not demanding teachers*” and “*few friends at the university*”.

To the question “*Why did you decide to go to university*” (see graphs below), the main reason was “*because it facilitates getting a good job*” (36% of the Japanese and 33% of the foreigners).



<sup>13</sup> Cfr. KUSAHARA KATSUHIDE, *Nihon no daigaku seido - Rekishi to Tenbo*, p.78 (Kobundo, 2008)

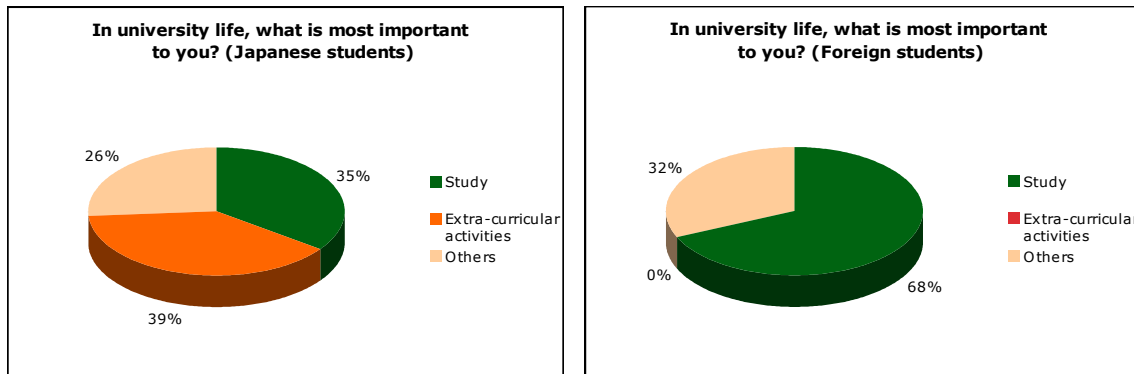
<sup>14</sup> Cfr. *Survey about Universities in Japan* (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008): [http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/toukei/001/08010901/002/001/001.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/001/08010901/002/001/001.htm) (homepage viewed on 14/03/2009)

<sup>15</sup> EDWIN O. REISCHAUER, *JAPAN: The Story of a Nation*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, p.196 (McGraw Hill, 1990)

<sup>16</sup> Idem, p.198

<sup>17</sup> Translated from KUSAHARA KATSUHIDE, *Nihon no daigaku seido - Rekishi to Tenbo*, p.78 (Kobundo, 2008)

However, there was a big difference between Japanese and foreign students' answers to the question "In university life, what is most important to you?" (see graphs below). More than one-third of the Japanese students (39%) chose the option "extra-curricular activities"<sup>18</sup>, while no foreign student chose this<sup>19</sup>.



### 3.2. About the results

Through the survey's results, it is easy to guess that most of the students (both Japanese and foreigners) have the same pragmatic reason to go to the university: their future job. In fact, 23% of the Japanese and 13% of the foreigners declared the wish to give up the university without graduating, if they could get the job they wanted without having a diploma. Perhaps the pragmatic vision that started dominating Japanese universities since the beginning of the century still influences students nowadays. For example, a student of Communication from a university in Tokyo commented: "in my opinion, university life is a 'socially recognized period of hesitation', before the complete entry into the society".

Also remarkable is the low percentage of students that consider study as the most important thing for them in their university life. In part, it does not necessarily mean that Japanese students today do not understand the importance of studying, because many students see in the university years the last chance to do things (travels, sports, part-time jobs, etc.) that will be impossible to do after starting working at one of the demanding Japanese companies. However, some students also pointed to the university system as one of the reasons for this low percentage. A student of Letters from Kobe declared: "maybe Japanese universities are not a place of learning or to acquire knowledge anymore: it is becoming just a place to prove your social status". A student of Humanities from Kyoto complemented this saying that "Japanese universities encourage 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students to start job-hunting programs, so at least half of our university life is already focused on our future career and not on study".

<sup>18</sup> "Extra-curricular activities" refers to the 'clubs' and 'circles', existent in all Japanese schools and universities. Basically, they are student organizations that gather students with a common hobby (sports, musical instruments, foreign languages etc.), and they can be officially recognized by the university or not. The time dedicated to the practices and meetings vary according to the group, but it is not rare to have meetings everyday.

<sup>19</sup> Yet, it is important to note that the percentage for the foreign students may not correspond to the reality of their countries because usually students studying abroad -in this case, Japan- are expected to have study as the central activity in their student life.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps during the process of development of universities in Japan there were two important moments where a serious degradation occurred. As we have seen in this paper, with the creation of the first universities the Meiji Government had the formation of future leaders as a priority, understanding it as a way to modernize the country. At the beginning, people like Nitobe Inazo<sup>20</sup>, Niishima Jo<sup>21</sup>, Iwashita Soichi<sup>22</sup>, born in the second half of the 19th century, well formed in Japanese tradition and culture, also assimilated the best of Western culture and society. Through study abroad programs or through foreign teachers they got in contact with Western philosophy, ethics and culture. However, when the next generation of Japanese teachers took charge of teaching at the newborn universities, they redrew -perhaps unconsciously- the university in a pragmatic way: for the new teachers, the university was a place to teach what was necessary for the country at that precise moment, instead of a place concerned with the individual, to cultivate the person in general<sup>23</sup>.

The university as a way to satisfy the demands of the country or society is understandable and even necessary, but it is neither the first nor the main reason for the existence of universities. As professor Pedro Morandé Court recalls, today *“the [university’s] axis is not the experience of searching for the truth anymore, but rather it is to satisfy social demands, which can be valid, but if everything becomes a satisfaction of social demands, the university converts itself into an industry, and therefore whom you study with or how is not important. Then the experience of the meaning of truth doesn’t matter, only the acquisition of techniques, capabilities, things that the society defines as useful”*<sup>24</sup>. Since the beginning of the Japanese universities -the Imperial Universities-, this pragmatic vision of understanding the university seems to have been penetrating Japanese society: to serve the immediate necessities of the country was the first and main objective of their creation. There, the first moment of degradation of the university’s original concept started, immediately after its beginning. This transplanted concept of ‘University’ was far from reaching the one John H. Newman sketched, a university where the students *“learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. (...) He profits by an intellectual tradition, which is independent of particular teachers, which guides him in his choice of subjects, and duly interprets for him those which he chooses. He apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called Liberal”*<sup>25</sup>.

Soon, the first generations of graduates from the universities realized that the simple fact of having graduated from a university was already a unique advantage and that it was enough to achieve the leading positions of society. Gradually, the educational background - in other words, the diploma- became even more important than the acquisition of knowledge itself, and became the main reason for entering the university. This influence of this reductive vision can be seen in Japanese universities even today, as the survey results and comments prove.

<sup>20</sup> Nitobe Inazo (1862-1933), educator and writer, was the second generation of students graduated from *Sapporo Nogakko* (the present *Hokkaido University*). By influence of one of his teachers, Dr. William Clark, Nitobe became Christian. After spending some years in United States, he helped in the establishment of several universities in Japan, worked as a teacher and dean in some of them, and also served at the League of Nations. His most famous book is *“Bushido, the Spirit of Japan”*, originally written in English, now an internationally known best seller. Cfr. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Japan* (Britannica Japan, 2007. Digital edition)

<sup>21</sup> Niishima Jo (1843-1890), educator and Christian missionary. After studying in the United States and Europe, in 1875 he founded *Doshisha Eigakko* (the present *Doshisha University*) and in 1877 *Doshisha Joshi Gakko* (the present *Doshisha Women’s College of Liberal Arts*), both in Kyoto. Cfr. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Japan* (Britannica Japan, 2007. Digital edition)

<sup>22</sup> Iwashita Soichi (1889-1940), philosopher and priest, studied Philosophy at *Tokyo University* and was one of the pioneers in the introduction of Thomism in Japan. In 1925 became a Catholic priest and also worked as the director of a hospital in Shizuoka. He is also known for his works about Medieval Philosophy and Christian doctrine. Cfr. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Japan* (Britannica Japan, 2007. Digital edition)

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. KUSAHARA KATSUhide, *Nihon no daigaku seido - Rekishi to Tenbo*, p.276 (Kobundo, 2008)

<sup>24</sup> Translated from an interview with PEDRO MORANDÉ COURT (Original in Spanish, *“Un nuevo humanismo en el contexto de la actual industrialización de las universidades y de la pérdida de la tradición sapiencial”*, ZENIT 15/03/2009)

<sup>25</sup> JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *The Idea of a University*, Discourse V, n.1 (Yale University Press, 1996)

After the Second World War, the reforms in the educational system had a double consequence. First, they tried to correct the tendency of reducing the university to a factory of bureaucrats, and started aiming at a good education centered on the individual, in the formation of each person. On the other hand, however, they may have stressed exaggeratedly the importance of changing society, repudiating indirectly all the good points Japanese culture, tradition and values have, interpreted then as old-fashioned pre-War ideas. As professor Kusahara writes, “*under the name of ‘democratization’, a big mistake was committed: denying all the history prior to the war meant also the renunciation of the history, tradition and the classic spirit [of Japan]*”<sup>26</sup>. Here, the second degradation moment started, this time in the Japanese culture itself; traditional good values of the Japanese people started losing their meaning: if in the first period the Japanese people had in mind the country’s welfare and did the best they could for the bettering of society, they now started crossing to the opposite side, and placed their own career as the main goal.

In fact, as the survey confirmed, nowadays the main purpose for entering the university seems to be the future job, in part because most Japanese companies give more importance to the university’s name than the candidate’s capabilities, character or studies. Also, the universities themselves emphasize the necessity of looking for a job since the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in such a strong way that most of the students immerse themselves in it, instead of giving priority to their studies. In this way, universities become just one more unavoidable step between the basic education and life in society, without a special reason for existing other than being just a “*socially recognized period of hesitation*”, as one of the surveyed students declared.

In Japanese universities, but also in other countries, it is indispensable to rethink the role universities have in society, starting perhaps from the curriculum, aims and academic structure. It is difficult to describe how should be an ‘ideal university’, mainly because all of us -still students- have a limited experience in the academic world. However, after considering the difficulties the Japanese universities experienced during their development in the last century, we recall three especially noticeable points in which the universities in Japan -and consequently, society- should improve.

(1) Today there is a strong emphasis on immediate results, instead of giving students priority and time to the development of the capacity of thinking and searching for the truth. The present Japanese universities fit in the model Newman criticized as being an education “*confined to some particular and narrow end*”, where “*‘useful’ and ‘utility’ becomes their watchword*”<sup>27</sup>; but it is necessary to revive the concept of university that “*brings them [the students] to face these problems and to resolve them in the best possible way*”<sup>28</sup>, a university centered in the “*responsibility toward the truth*”<sup>29</sup>. In fact, the present system has a tendency to make students do the minimum expected, without demanding from them an active involvement. It is necessary to broaden the students’ horizons, so they can realize that life has a purpose that transcends a stable professional life.

(2) In addition, an improvement in the quality and contents of study is indispensable. The profound study in a specialized field is important but is far from being enough: the study of humanities, philosophy, literature, history, etc., and the cooperation and contact with other cultures are necessary ingredients for a global understanding of the human being and therefore for the improvement of society. This would also remind youth about values that are unfashionable today, like altruism and solidarity, and the transformation of one’s own professional work “*as a service to society as a whole*”<sup>30</sup>; a concrete way to contribute to the bettering of society.

(3) Lastly, as we have seen, Japan has a long tradition of importing knowledge from foreign countries and adapting it to its own needs in an admirable way. However, it is indispensable for the Japanese people to learn from the West in the right way: look to the

<sup>26</sup> Translated from KUSAHARA KATSUhide, *Nihon no daigaku seido - Rekishi to Tenbo*, p.277 (Kobundo, 2008)

<sup>27</sup> JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *The Idea of a University*, Discourse VII, n.2 (Yale University Press, 1996)

<sup>28</sup> JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *Conversations*, n.74 (Scepter Publications, 2003)

<sup>29</sup> Translated from: JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to the participants of a meeting of university students at Guadalupe* (15/02/1979), n.3, *Juan Pablo II a los universitarios*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, p.79 (EUNSA, 1982), original in Spanish

<sup>30</sup> JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *Conversations*, n.79 (Scepter Publications, 2003)

Western countries with respect and interest, but in a balanced, critical way, with neither an inferiority nor superiority complex. The importation of foreign culture and values is a necessary element in a globalized society, but it is also essential to preserve Japanese identity and its traditional values and virtues: solidarity and group work spirit, abnegation, honesty, perseverance in the search for an ideal, etc.

However, all these problems in Japanese society also remind us about the responsibility Western countries have: the influence their societies had and still have also in other cultures, even in the Far East is not small. The present lack of fidelity to their roots and traditional values, the irresponsible attitude toward human dignity, and the violent materialism and relativism that have infiltrated the West surely affect directly all other societies in the world, heirs of their cultural and social treasure.

In the dawn of this new millennium there is a need for people with the same magnanimous ideals of some figures of the Meiji period -people like Nitobe Inazo, Niishima Jo and Iwashita Soichi- that succeeded in joining in a marvelous way different cultures and values, people that found a bridge that transcended borders, languages and cultures.

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