

Towards a Clearer Understanding of the Socio-economic, Socio-educational, and Socio-political Role of Higher Education in Japan*

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I . Valuing higher education in Japan: what is the aim of the university?

Horio (1988/1994) has stated Japanese education is “riddled with many serious problems” and argues that they are of such serious nature and not merely of “momentary importance” (p.17), and argues that,

... it is necessary to think about the problems involved in the organization and running of our schools in relation to the cultural consciousness of the society which supports those schools and the problems implicit in the society. (1988/1994: 17)

It is crucial for university faculty to have a clearer understanding of the role and responsibility of higher education in the wider Japanese society. According to Evans and Nation (2000), educational aspects have “a permanence about them following well-worn paths of tradition/predecessors” (p.168). If we are to seriously consider any benefits of changing the values, practices, or thinking—or at the very least alerting people to do so—we can not afford to see this imperative as merely an institutional exercise. We must, in Evans and Nation’s estimation, take account of the broader implications (i.e. political, economic) of any paradigm change. As Evans and Nation argue (p.161), “change requires moving from or relinquishing a particular condition or circumstance and adopting another.”

Weaver (1991) in reference to higher education in the United States, states:

... Instead of colleges and universities defending themselves against accusations of fitting young people into, and thereby strengthening extant systems of power and privilege, the same institutions quickly began to compete enthusiastically with each other to convince students how well they were able to do precisely that. (p.2)

Much the same can be said of higher education in Japan, where it has also been argued that higher education institutions compete among each other to convince students how well they can fit into existing systems of power and privilege. Amano (1986), Tokutake (1988), Von Wolferen (1990), Kitamura (1991), Kempner and Makino (1996), and McVeigh (2002) all argue that the main purpose of the Japanese university is not to educate but to sort and certify. McVeigh (2002) in particular contends that the university in Japan is a myth in the sense that there is little if any systemic concern with higher intellectual and critical thought development leading to responsible informed action. On the contrary, the university,

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maintains McVeigh, functions as a certification enterprise. Upon graduation students are certified to have completed their formal education and are now “free” to join the labor force and contribute to the further economic development of Japan Inc.

According to Kempner and Makino (1996) there is a perceived academic quality about university in Japan which in reality is subordinate to socialization training, to personal contacts, and to the courting of businesses by university authorities (e.g. presidents) to ensure that graduates are hired to work for Japan Inc. Practically all students who enter the university are assured of graduation, one reason being to ensure quota requirements year-to-year, quota requirements which are enforced by the Japanese Ministry of Education. In addition, hierarchical social relations widespread in Japanese society exist also at university often more rigidly than outside “in the real world.” This preoccupation with responding to the marketplace, maintaining socio-cultural hierarchical relations that exist in the wider society, and adopting what Tierney (1991) calls a rationalization approach to higher education, jeopardizes the university’s collective ability towards critical intellectual development according to Kempner and Makino.

Yet, the Japanese Ministry of Education University Council Report (1998: 10) explicitly states and we quote, “the philosophies and objectives of undergraduate education are . . . to help them (i.e. students) cultivate the ability to (our italics) *view things from different angles, things independently and to help them obtain an abundance of human qualities*. In fact, in 1984 the Provisional Council on Education Reform (PCER) in Japan, proposed three themes for educational reform. They were: (1) an open mind, a sound body, and a wealth of creativity; (2) freedom and self-determination, and a sense of public spiritness; and (3) “Japanese and the world order,” or internationalization. The University Council, acting as the mouthpiece of the government, has since its inception in 1987, repeatedly argued for the need of universities to help develop students’ creativity and flexible thinking.

Graduates of Japanese high schools are, for the most part, disciplined and spirited but may remain intellectually immature (Kelly, 1993). The child-like dependence that allowed them to follow and obey high school directives uncritically—see Yoneyama (1999), for example, for a description—becomes a liability. Thinking and behavior which was discouraged in high school, such as problem solving and responsible decision making, leads students who enter university to be inept at tasks that are not explicitly laid out or defined, argues Kelly (1993). As a result of a very regimented and controlled high school experience, students lack self-confidence, ingenuity, the ability to adapt to fluid situations, any noticeable degree of independence, broad views, and perhaps most unfortunately, tolerance for people who are different and who have differences of thought and opinion. By the time students arrive at university they are expected, for example, to have developed an independent study sense or self-confidence in identifying problems and possible solutions, but are unprepared to meet these higher education/educator expectations.

What Kempner and Makino (1996) call a modernistic education strategy has the Japanese university function to meet the economic needs and concerns of society and the state, and to turn out competent citizens-to-be who will serve those economic interests. Carnoy and Levin (1985) also stress this reproduction function of the university; the university serves to reproduce the existing work-force and respond or adapt to economic and marketplace conditions outside the university. This rationalist perspective has the university tightly defining itself in relation to the marketplace, emphasizing its distinctiveness based on a clear perceived identity. A critical as opposed to a rationalist view of the purpose of the university affirms the fact that it is not primarily, or worse solely, the training grounds for future workers or jobs.

Universities function to promote inquisitiveness and critical thinking, to question social injustices and undemocratic activities. Such a view of this purpose of the university recognizes that higher educational institutions are complexes of dominant and subordinate cultures where different groups struggle to gain voice, and define and legitimate their particular interests and realities (Tierney, 1991). This view of the role and responsibility of the university leads to a greater concern with identifying and understanding higher education organizations as ideological constructs where there is a set of doctrines (i.e. a

framework) that helps the institution's participants (faculty, students, administrators, for example) make sense of their experiences.

II . A gap between espoused policies and actual higher education practices.

Trends in the labor markets of twenty developed countries indicate that in the next decade some 40% of jobs will require at least sixteen years of formal education (Scott, 1998). Taking these trends into consideration, and recognizing the fact that the university's functions are significantly guided by an economic and adaptive rationale, we must examine the notion of quality in education and relate it to those who are most concerned about it—students and their parents, governments which subsidize education, citizens who pay taxes to the government, employers of university graduates, and instructors and administrators of tertiary institutions.

Institutions of higher education often quantify quality, for example, by counting the number of instructors who have Ph. Ds, and by counting the number of publications and presentations each instructor has. These “input” indicators and measures are important and germane to the notion of quality, but they may overlook what actually occurs, or should occur, within the parameters of higher learning activities and practices (i.e. communication and interactions on the campus). Output also tends to be quantifiable; for example, results on standardized tests such as the TOEIC may serve as a criterion for students to secure employment. Other measures of output may also include ability to successfully ground problem-solving scenarios or ability to know how to think, which may more effectively or naturally be “learned” outside the classroom than inside.

The “value-added” definition of quality addresses the extent to which a program can directly transfer additional positive traits to incoming students. It is at this level of “added value” that faculties need to address how to strengthen the measure of quality. Hence, a comprehensive examination of quality within higher education should include the connected notions of input, output and value-added (Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrinto, 1986). There has always been an espoused emphasis on the quality of higher education. For example, Armstrong and Bergquist (1986) state that the quality of an education should be evaluated by the value-added measures or the extent to which a university adds value to students. For Armstrong and Bergquist quality does not equate with input (i.e. the profile or outline of the institution), or more traditional ideas about output (i.e. the extent to which the institution prepares students for a post-collegiate career in the workforce).

In Armstrong and Bergquist's estimation there are seven criteria that give evidence of design of quality: attractiveness, beneficiality, congruence, distinctiveness, effectiveness, functionality, and growth production. They are concerned with how practices and interactions between students and faculty, and by implication also between faculty and faculty, relate to the seven criteria for quality design listed above. If it is true, as both they and we believe it should be, that value added measures that define or should define a university's attractiveness, beneficiality, and effectiveness, questions remain concerning who is attracted and why, who benefits by the actual higher education that is practiced (not advertised or theorized) and how they benefit, and whether the effectiveness of a university's higher education is or is not seen in (solely or primarily) economic terms.

Traditionally, the university in Japan has been an environment where faculty teach and students learn. But a number of critics, for example Hayashi (2002), have argued that this is too simplistic and worse limiting. Hayashi believes that universities should be places where students and faculty/teachers learn together, and by implication teach each other. Consider the fact that university faculty, and sometimes administrators, develop curriculums and courses of study; students have practically no say in what they study. To make matters worse, the traditional idea of the teacher/university faculty person as knower and expert, and the student as naive and one who needs to know, often creates a situation where students have little if any active involvement in the acquisition of knowledge (i.e. can critically think about it and reconstruct according to their life experiences). Allowing students to evaluate teachers/teaching and

courses' content after they have been provided with the "study package" only makes the situation more limiting for it continues to avoid the central issue of student voice and involvement in the design, development, and negotiation of courses of study.

Students need to be involved in the process of developing university courses of study; by doing so they will be motivated to love learning and questioning. This factor more than any other will, by Armstrong and Bergquist's definition of quality, add value, and relevance, to higher learning. Students need to acquire knowledge but they also need to develop the wisdom to work with knowledge and not allow knowledge to silence them or anesthetize them to active and critical reflection and action. A problem-posing education can prioritize ongoing student involvement in course study and feedback/reflection on that study. Students and faculty have to learn how to learn together and how to involve one another in value added measures that enhance a critical and reflective learning in the process of being aware of and attempting to solve everyday sociological problems that highlight conflicts between the individual and society and different social groups.

The university must also be concerned with autonomy if it is to focus on developing criticality and inquisitiveness in a much wider sense than, for example, faculty having almost complete freedom to teach and research as they please in collegial isolation, or students having almost complete freedom to study and learn (or not study or learn) as they see fit. Autonomy equates with individual and social/collective freedom (1) to explore and inquire, (2) to challenge existing knowledge bases and co-construct new knowledge, (3) to challenge authority and question aspects of, for example, hierarchical relations, and (4) to enact social justice and democracy inside and outside the classroom. Barnett (1994) maintains the two dominant contemporary ideas of higher education—academic and operational—are both reflective of very narrow interests and limited worlds (i.e. academia and the workplace). In Barnett' opinion higher education ought to provide experiences to students which encourage (1) reflection on one's own thought and actions, (2) reinterpretations of presenting situations where the curriculum is not a set of impositions on students but a set of possibilities and practical hopes in large part framed by students, (3) development and continuous expression of a skeptical and questioning outlook, and (4) continuing reappraisal of one's own learning.

True reform of higher education in Japan must also recognize undergraduate education as the foundation of graduate education, and the absolute necessity of connecting higher study (e.g. social welfare, mass media, theories of social organization) with the real-life concerns of students and faculty as they struggle to define and give meaning to their daily lives. What this means is a focus away from, what Freire (1972) labels "banking education" to problem-posing education. The key to developing a problem-posing higher education is dialogue between faculty and students, and by implication greater and more critical dialogue between faculty and faculty, and students and students. By problem-posing we do not refer to "solving problems "out there" in the world. Problem solving in our thinking refers to the ability of our students to make everyday life decisions such as organizing activities, making plans, and deciding on courses of action or inaction based on what they study and learn in, for example, mass media, communication, social welfare, social psychology, or any other area of social research.

Higher education must be the practice of intellectual freedom, not the continued practice of domination, as for example domination of knowledge by faculty over students. Whereas banking education conceals facts which liberate students from uncritically accepting the ways in which they and fellow humans exist in the world (Freire, 1972: 83), problem-posing higher education demythologizes what Habermas (1974) has called the colonization of the life world by systems of power and dominance-and values in support of power and dominance-which can deny or seriously limit the human capacity to question and create. A problem-posing education is not a "set menu" where knowledge is already determined and delivered uncritically from a knower (i.e. a professor) to an unknower (i.e. student). As Freire states, "problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming."

III. The constituent components of a critically reflective higher education that aims to promote intellectual development.

In order to clarify what is actually happening in the higher education system in Japan, we have to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative problems of learning abilities of university students. Even though the general phenomena of the quantitative decline of the learning ability of university students is evident, the more profound and serious problem is, in our estimation, the qualitative deficiency of learning seen among university students. Not only students, but also the system of higher education at university, including student and faculty attitudes to study and learning is to blame for this problem. Quantitative learning equates in our estimation with the ability of students to absorb/process information and acquire knowledge, and also be able to demonstrate an understanding that can be translated into self expression. Qualitative learning on the other hand, is the ability of students to reflect critically on the knowledge that they acquire and be inquisitive about who provides the knowledge, how reliable the knowledge is, how certain knowledge benefits some people at the expense of others, and so on; in other words steps toward wisdom.

As is well known, the Japanese education system is said to be useful in transmitting knowledge and information to students. But it is said to be useless in implementing and encouraging the activity of learners themselves through the process of education. As a result of such an education system in Japan, students who study at higher education institutions are not so good at thinking and learning on their own or in being able to engage in problem solving that utilizes their active engagement with the knowledge that they acquire. University faculty in Japan face this problem when they try to educate their students at university. Even if students have a lot of knowledge or information about subjects they study (e.g. their 'automatically-memorizing abilities' are nicely cultivated thanks to '*Juken-Benkyo*' or exam-directed learning /study, during middle and high schools), it seems very difficult (sometimes almost impossible) for many students to engage voluntarily in the learning activities in the course of university curriculum.

In order to address this problem, we have to find a way to encourage and foster voluntary engagement in the learning of students. In this context, the conception and practice of 'voluntary engagement' means not only active participation, but also critical and reflective learning. Without this sort of learning process, higher education at university will remain little more than an advanced education system to enhance the 'automatically-memorizing abilities' of the younger generation in Japan. In order for us to enhance the critically reflective learning for students, we have to "rearrange" the present curriculum of university education in Japan. A large part of this rearrangement must include a kind of "benevolent de-programming" which helps students move away from an education imposed on them to an education which involves them. Lecture-based classes, which dominate the present curriculum as a whole, are indispensable in higher education at university. However, we must rearrange lecture-based class so that critically thinking activities between lecturer and students can be guaranteed in the process of the transfer and re-construction of knowledge.

What this re-arrangement also requires is more interaction and dialogue between lecturer (s) and listener (s). Text-based classes, which are often a vital component in the seminar-style class, are also useful and efficient for higher education at university. But to improve students' critically reflective learning, we have to regard the teaching text we use in the classroom not as 'cannon' but as 'text' (in Barth's 1970/75 sense), where the material read is to be interpreted voluntarily and creatively by the readers. Discussion-based classes, which remain uncommon in higher education in Japan should also be utilized for realizing the critically reflective learning. Through discussion between teacher and learner and also learners with each other, students have chances to experience 'voluntary engagement' in critical reflective dialogue among peers.

Each of these three types of class has a distinctive effect and merit for higher education at the university in Japan. None of them, however, should dominate the other. When we try to realize critically reflective

learning at university, it is important to keep a good balance among these three types of class. It is apparent that the present curriculum is excessively dominated by the lecture-based and text-based classes. Moreover, in attending many of those classes, students are required or encouraged to be docile and passive learners. As a result of this normative and “approved” behavior, university students in Japan remain silent in the classroom, their voices unheard, their learning needs and concerns unknown. This is not only an individual or group problem but an institutional problem as well, which has to be tackled politically, culturally, and practically. In order to transform the higher education system in Japan into a more reflective and critical arena of intellectual encounter (s), we have to improve the lecture and text-based classes so that they can be more interactive. We also have to introduce more of the discussion/dialogue-based class into the curriculum as a whole, thus adopting a deep approach to higher learning.

O’Neil (1995) states that “a deep approach to learning adopted by students who seek to make sense of subject content through a vigorous interaction with it captures the essence of academic life as I understand it” (p.117). O’Neil thus supports research into teaching and learning and enumerates principles that,

1. Enhance student capabilities and work-related skills (e.g. set up tasks which enable students to plan and manage time effectively; cultivate intrinsic interest in learning for its own sake),
2. Use student experience as a learning resource (e.g. accept students’ present level of knowledge and experience as a starting point for development),
3. Encourage active, caring, and cooperative learning,
4. Promote responsibility in learning (e.g. allow students to determine what, when, and how they learn),
5. Engage students with feelings, values, and motives as well as intellectual development,
6. Foster open, flexible outcomes-based assessment,
7. Evaluate teaching and learning,
8. Establish congruence between learning and teaching activities.

Wengraf (1995) supports student research into teaching and learning arguing that such inquiry involves not only their own learning practice, but also problems they see with teachers’ teaching. He states that,

a failure to teach undergraduates research findings and debates about undergraduate learning and use them (i.e. students) as contributing researchers into student learning is striking . . . implementation of a policy of promoting learning through student action research will depend on faculty engagement in some form of power sharing. (p.174)

Power sharing can be accomplished in communication, the central process of socialization in the estimation of symbolic interactionists and many other sociologists. It is in the area of a more equal (with faculty) communication that students can begin to exercise more power that benefits their learning. Kumaravadivelu (1993) stresses the importance of maximizing learning potential in what he calls the communicative classroom. He argues that even if a language teacher may be committed to communicative language teaching (CLT), he or she may fail to create genuine communication in classrooms. This may be, he says, because teacher educators have not stressed the importance of necessary tools to achieve genuine communication. He suggests a framework of five macro-strategies that he believes will help CLT teachers to maximize learning potential. These five strategies are equally applicable to content-area instruction and are:

1. create learning opportunities in class,
2. utilize learning opportunities created by students,
3. facilitate negotiated interaction between participants,
4. activate the intuitive heuristics (i.e. cognitive processes of inquiry) of the learner,
5. contextualize linguistic input.

IV. Conceptualizing an interdependent learning community in university where criticality, individual and collective autonomy, and self-reflection is the goal.

Criticality, autonomy, and self-reflection cannot and should not be ‘clipped on’ to existing programs. Cotterall (1995) argues that autonomy and self-reflection have implications for the entire curriculum,” and believes that a large part of learning activity goes on without students—and faculty-comprehending the learning purpose or relevance. She argues that, “it is therefore important to provide frequent opportunities for learners to ask the teacher questions and receive feedback on progress” (p.223). While she acknowledges that this feedback is very time-consuming, the level of dialogue and the quality of the feedback itself about aspects of the study justify the innovation. Dialogue that aims to help students understand the learning experience arises naturally out of classroom tasks, and “by making this process public, learners who are less skilful at addressing their weaknesses can learn from others who are more expert” (p.223) and, we would add, who are more confident and less inhibited as well.

Cotterall cautions that teachers should be sensitive in transferring responsibility to learners (i.e. for understanding and talking about their learning) who may not have (had) this kind of experience in prior schooling. This requires considerable skill, but it is imperative, argues Cotterall, that the link between classroom tasks and learners’ needs be fully appreciated. Any study which has as its aim the promotion of autonomy and criticality must, she says, “incorporate frank discussion of learning objectives, teaching methodology, and roles and responsibilities” (p.224). Cotterall concludes that: (1) autonomy is desirable, (2) dialogue is more important than structure (s), (3) the teacher-student relationship is central, and (4) autonomy has implications for the entire curriculum.

Frazer (1995: 105) has drawn up a short list of the basic components of value added ‘quality that university students and faculty need to collaborate on. These “value added” components should constitute the core of an undergraduate discipline-area studies’ curriculum (e.g. sociology, economics, law, science and infomatics) because they depend on and utilize a critical, reflective, and (individually and collectively) autonomous response to the knowledge that is generated, (re)constructed, and enhanced through dialogic interactions among people using subject matter. They are:

1. Love and respect for scholarship.
2. Love and respect for subject and desire to see subject used for benefit of society.
3. Desire to know more about the subject, and have competence in subject consistent with course aims.
4. Knowing how to learn, and that learning is life long.
5. Knowing limits of knowledge and skills.
6. Experiencing problem solving or opportunity-taking.
7. Developing research skills: knowing how to find out.
8. Formulating arguments and having support for them
9. Avoiding the compartmentalization of knowledge.
10. Developing communication skills and knowing how to work in a team.

Policy implications for tertiary institutions will be addressed in section v, but there first needs to be some additional contextualization given about current educational reform in Japan. In 1998 the Education Ministry’s University Council set forth recommendations to improve the quality of higher education. Stricter grading and raising teaching and research standards were among the top issues discussed. However, employers do not tend to look at standards within institutions of higher education; rather they merely look at where the applicant attended university to determine employability. University faculty need to improve their performance but many students do not have incentive to study because their future is locked in the moment they receive their university acceptance letters. The Japanese Ministry of Education has imposed quotas which force universities to graduate practically the exact same number of students that they accept.

Given the many quality restrictions and contradictions of a higher education that predetermines success and often rewards failure, what incentive do university faculty/teachers or administrators have to improve the quality of higher education?

We need to confirm, or at the very least support, our hypotheses about the redirection of higher learning away from “banking” education to dialogic education. We need to find some support for our main hypothesis: a two-fold autonomy (individual and collective), criticality, and self-reflection are not sufficiently nurtured but need to be to affirm the intellectual purposes for which the university was first established. We need to give some evidence that Japan’s higher education is actually certification posing as higher education. One way to gather some evidence would be to ask our fellow faculty and our students potentially sensitive questions such as those listed below. Answers to these questions can assist us in gauging the extent to which espoused higher education policy and practiced higher education policy does or does not match.

1. What are the learning aims of your class/course? How important are the following to you: giving or acquiring information and knowledge, reproducing and reconstructing knowledge, criticizing knowledge, questioning fact and opinions, remembering facts and opinions, teaching/acquiring skills and operational tools (i.e. thinking and/or behavioral) ?
2. To what extent and how do you focus on communication and interaction in class? What kinds of activities do you either lead, set up, guide, or facilitate in order to activate students’ passion for study/learning? How do you assess the success of students’ learning?
3. To what extent (if at all) is the course/class syllabus negotiated and co-constructed with active involvement and input from students? If students are not involved in the setting up of the course content and/or the activities of learning why not?
4. Do you share your teaching successes with colleagues? Are your colleagues, especially those who teach the same or similar course material as you do, aware of what your higher educational learning aims are, and how you go about trying to achieve those aims?
5. To what extent is there an atmosphere of love of learning in your class, especially for the subject matter being studied? Do students enjoy asking questions, finding out new facts, questioning knowledge sources, etc. Do you enjoy having students be inquisitive, challenging, and critical, etc.?

V. Developing autonomy and criticality in the higher learning classroom

Reflective learning in higher education has revealed, according to Brockbank and McGill (1998) that the social systems in which learners find themselves dominate much of the learning, and state (p.34) that, “no human thought is immune to the ideologizing influence of its social context.” The university, they maintain, through its faculty, has the power to replicate those systems and reinforce them, and can, unconsciously or implicitly, impose the historically embedded philosophies of academia (e.g. academic and/or operational orientations). Brockbank and McGill (1998) argue that many or most students focus their study and learning at university on extrinsic approaches (e.g. what others expect of them like earning a degree). Their intrinsic orientations to learning are discovered only after they have left university and pursue personal and professional goals through independent work and work-related activity. Higher education we believe is the best time for students to begin to more clearly define their intrinsic orientations to learning, and it is the responsibility of faculty to guide them in that direction.

The processes of learning have revealed two general categories of learning behavior. A surface behavior concentrates on the discourse itself, relying on memory and which is associated with a passive approach to learning and a stance which minimizes the learning task as just remembering (1998: 36). A deep learning behavior, on the contrary, concentrates on what the discourse is about, and is associated with an active approach to learning and a desire to get a grasp of the main point, make connections, and draw conclusions. Additional research on learning has also focused on learning strategies (e.g. focus on what

would or could increase the possibility of maximizing the term-end course/class grade). Deep learners are those who find learning in itself satisfying and so persist in learning, whereas surface learners often give up and often find learning boring and tedious.

Learning can be distinguished in another way, according to Argyris and Schon (1974). Single-loop learning is instrumental and does not challenge or question underlying values or theory. Double-loop learning, however, does upset one's assumptions, and underlying values and theory. According to Argyris and Schon, if a learner chooses to go into the double-loop orbit, a structure to harness emotional energy productively and actively is required. A teacher/educator in higher learning who chooses to support student double-loop learning, including emotional intelligence, is required to be a facilitator, and Carl Rogers (1983) believes many academics have acquired this ability and use it in practice (cited 1998, p.46). Rogers firmly believes, as we do, that the goal of education is to facilitate change and learning so that humans can survive in a continually changing environment. The conditions for the kind of learning that Rogers strongly recommends must include: self-initiation, experience, significance, and what Rogers terms gut level learning by the whole person where the "facilitation of significant learning rests upon . . . qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and learner" (1983: 121).

We conclude with concerns and reservations we have about the challenge of advocating autonomy, criticality, and self-reflection in the university.

1. How does knowledge get constructed? Whose interests are served and who are silenced by the manner in which knowledge gets constructed and by whom? Do we have sufficient recognition of the place of higher education in a nation's development (i.e. Japan), and how knowledge, skills, and critical thinking and being is created, managed, and valued both in Japan and at the institution?
2. Is it true, or taken-for-granted, that the current system of (Japanese) higher education provides more for (only for?) a rationing rather than a higher educating function? Has higher education in Japan provided students with cognitive maps that students in Japan need to guide selves and (the Japanese) nation? Does higher education in Japan see any reason to do so?
3. How do different cognitive maps of university faculty influence the formation of students' maps; how does this influence enable us to better understand the place of higher education in the social circumstances of a country (e.g. Japan), and the capacity of higher education to positively and constructively affect social, political, cultural, and economic development?
4. Neave (2000) discusses the ways society organizes higher education in order to fulfill expectations and hopes placed upon it by society. Who defines these responsibilities? What do these responsibilities consist of? To which community or communities are responsibilities rendered? Is the university fulfilling its responsibilities to society, asks Nieve in not seeking alternatives to theories of university responsibility that have been developed and accepted? Christiansen et al. (1991) support a heterodoxical approach and maintain that the main responsibility of the university is to promote dissensus teaching because it raises the crucial question of what university faculty/teachers should know about students' learning, reconnecting knowledge and inquisitiveness, and teaching and learning.
5. Is it possible to institutionalize criticality, autonomy, and self-reflection across the undergraduate university (sociology) curriculum? Readings (1997) argues dissensus cannot be institutionalized. The main task of higher educators must be "not how to turn the institution into a haven for thought but how to think in an institution whose development tends to make thought more and more difficult, less and less necessary" (p.175). Readings believes that the best that we can salvage from what he calls *the ruins of the university* is a renewed focus on the development of thought on a community basis without worrying how systemically we can nurture that thought.

The improvement of higher teaching and learning in universities is important; its purpose is not to provide students or faculty with a pleasant and rewarding educational experience. Its purpose is not to fit

young people into extant systems of power and privilege with the allure of a comfortable and/or secure post-university working life. The improvement of higher teaching and learning must prepare people to take charge of their learning/teaching (i.e. become autonomous learners/teachers) and to participate in a community/society in which learning and teaching are cooperative and collaborative, not competitive isolated acts of display. This goal requires students to examine their learning, with faculty help, and faculty to examine their teaching and their research with a level of inquisitiveness they bring to their own subjects. It also requires (1) students to better appreciate the social complexities of teaching and researching, and (2) faculty to better appreciate the social complexities of student learning as they do the complex structure of knowledge in their special field (s),

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Towards a Clearer Understanding of the Socio-economic, Socio-educational, and Socio-political Role of Higher Education in Japan

ABSTRACT

It is crucial for university faculty to have a clearer understanding of the role and responsibility of higher education in the wider Japanese society. In Japan it has been argued that higher education institutions compete among each other to convince students how well they can fit them into existing systems of power and privilege. Asking faculty and students a number of sensitive questions about teaching and learning can help us gauge the extent to which espoused and practiced higher education does or does not match. Students need to be more actively involved in developing and managing university courses so that they can be more personally motivated to love learning and inquiry. Students need to better understand and appreciate the social complexities of teaching and researching. Faculty, for their part, need to better understand and appreciate the social complexities of student learning.

Key Words: understanding, role, university