

論文

Factors Favoring the Development of Private Sector Higher Education in Japan: An Assumption

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Abstract

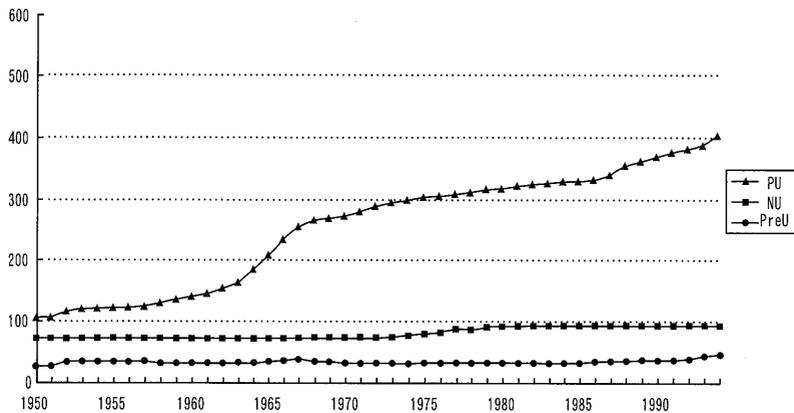
The aim of this study is to explore several factors which have contributed to the development of private sector higher education in Japan. Thus far, Japan has achieved enrollment expansion mostly through the private sector. The total percentage of high school students going on to universities and junior colleges has reached 47.3%. Over 75% of these Japanese students attend private colleges and universities. How has this happened? There is no single factor responsible for this development. This study focuses on the factors pivotal in the expansion of mass higher education via the private sector, and validates the assumption that Japanese post-war economic growth has been the major contributor. The study also confirms that Japan has taken advantage of market economy principles in its development of higher education. Japanese governmental policy has also played an influential role in developing private sector higher education.

1. Introduction

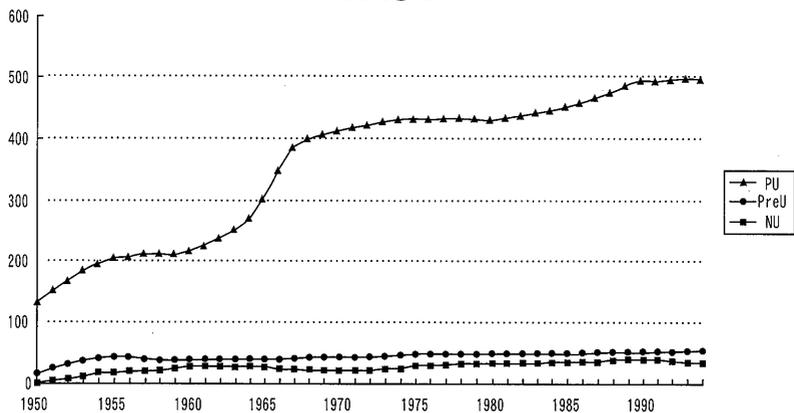
In recent years, Japan has seen a significant increase in college enrollment mostly in the private sector. The total percentage of high school students going on to universities and colleges has reached 47.3% and the number now exceeds 799,000. In 1997, over 75% of graduating students went on to private colleges and universities (Ministry of Education, 1997). This reflects the fact that the number of students going on to higher education institutions has increased remarkably. In some countries outside Europe including some in North America, South America, and Asia, the growth of private institutions has helped meet the increasing social demand for higher education. Japan is one of these countries.

Historically, after the Meiji government decided to adopt a policy to modernize the education system, the core of Japan's higher education institutions was made up of government supported schools. On the other hand, private colleges and universities played a supplemental role, sharing about half of the number of students with the public sector. However, after WWII, the situation changed drastically, particularly in the last thirty-five years. Entrance to publicly supported schools and private schools has moved in favor of the latter. The turning point came in 1965, when the number of students in private schools exceeded that of public schools remarkably, and the trend has continued (see Figure A).

Universities



Colleges



(PU: Private Universities, NU:National Universities, Pre U:Prefectural Universities)

(Source: RIHE, Hiroshima University, Statistical Data of Higher Education, 1995, p.151)

Figure A Number of Higher Education Institutions

Why did the private sector of higher education develop so much in Japan after 1960? The next figure shows the factors favoring the development of private sector higher education in Japan (see Figure B).

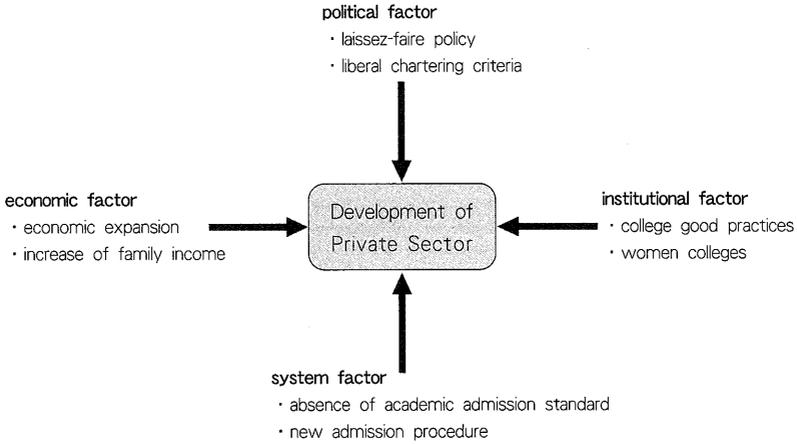


Figure B Factors affecting the Development of Private Sector Higher Education in Japan

It is generally perceived that there was a correlation between the development of the national economy and an increase in college enrollment after 1960. During the last thirty-five years, the nation's industrial development has accelerated both in size and quality. In fact, Japanese manufacturing industries have increased the size, depth, and scope of their products significantly, and they, in turn, required a great many trained personnel. It is obvious that this economic expansion has brought about an upsurge in enrollment at higher education institutions via increasing job opportunities in the workplace. In fact, Japan's postwar economic development favored private colleges and universities because they strove to produce the required trained managers and sales force.

For example, the primary industries such as agriculture, mining, and forestry have shrunk from 19.8% in 1968 to 5.7% in 1996. Manufacturing, down from 34% to 32.9%, has also been in a decline in recent years due to automation and technological innovation. However, the service sector of the economy has increased significantly, up from 46.1% to 61% (Management and Coordination Agency, 1996 and 1997). One study shows that the expansion of higher education in terms of enrollment in colleges and universities is directly related to the economic growth in the same period (Management and Cooperation Agency, 1997).

It is perceived that the economic expansion was a timely vehicle for private institutions because it not only furnished the front wheels in the guise of giving more job opportunities to graduating students, but also the rear wheels by providing a sufficient income for families who wanted to send their children to schools. The average Japanese family has become more able to pay tuition fees in the last thirty-five years because the increase in family income has outpaced tuition increases. The annual income per capita has grown 22.3 times, from US\$ 1,432 in 1960 to US\$ 31,992 in 1996, and the annual workers' average household income has grown 15.1 times in the same period, from US\$ 3,690 in 1960 to US\$ 55,628 in 1996 (Economic Planning Agency, 1997; Management and Coordination Agency, 1966, 1976, and 1997).

However, there are other contributing factors besides industrial expansion that have promoted the private schools. For example, external factors such as liberal chartering criteria and accreditation standards were very important. Also internal factors such as the absence of academic admission standards, cost-effective operation, and flexible management practices that the private schools adopted for themselves in

that period were indispensable. The author has classified these into economic, systematic, political, and institutional factors. It is, therefore, worthwhile to look into these underlying factors in depth and examine the relationships between them in order to assess the validity of the overall claim that economic expansion was the overwhelming factor in the development of the private schools.

In an effort to explore these factors, the author set a basic question of the effectiveness of the Japanese government in its role of formulating policies and implementing practices to meet the rising demand on higher education. Is the government more responsible for the development of private schools than the efforts and commitment by the schools, students, parents, and citizens? Or, does the government deserve any credit on this matter at all?

Compromised University Standards

Realizing that the government could not meet the huge demand for higher education caused by the baby boomers reaching college age, in 1960 the government liberalized the chartering criteria and accreditation standards for college and universities. As a result, the private sector could step in and establish new institutions easily, and the existing private schools could expand their enrollment without a conflict with governmental guidelines. This was a big shift from the previous governmental policy on higher education, that is, from the strict control of the Ministry of Education for the chartering criteria. This meant, in other words, that the central government escaped from its duty of establishing national colleges and universities to provide for the huge growth of students.

The history of Japanese higher education reveals that there were

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two turning points. At the beginning of modern higher education some 100 years ago, Japan modeled itself on the American system as opposed to the European system. It was liberal in terms of governmental control, and it imposed fewer regulations as to the procedures for establishing as well as operating schools. Therefore, it was easy for private parties to establish their own schools. As a result, the Japanese higher education system started with two channels, national schools and private schools. This dual system is still intact today. There are two different laws involved: one is the National School Establishment Law which regulates public institutions and the other is the Private School Law which regulates the private ones.

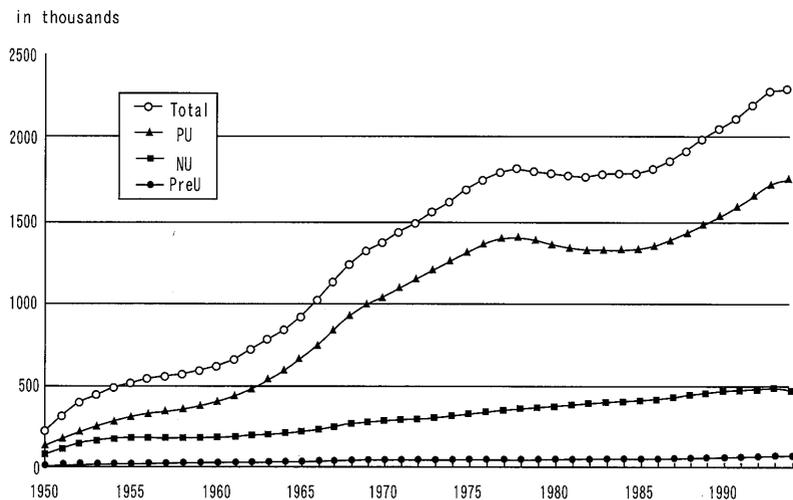
The rationale for the dual system was that government schools existed to promote quality education because their primary responsibility was to develop national leaders. Consequently, the national schools were subject to stringent governmental supervision via the Ministry of Education. Whereas the private schools catered to the demands of the citizens who wanted an education but were academically less qualified, and they were subject to less governmental supervision and control.

The first major change took place when the quality of higher education became a critical issue. The government realized the importance of its role in shaping the future of the nation and training national leaders in 1918. It passed a law to adopt a policy for strengthening its control over higher education institutions. It set national standards for academic achievement which included the privilege of exemption from military service for students in private institutions. Due to this change a handful of private institutions earned the legal status of university. In fact, the total number of universities, both private and national, never exceeded 26 until WWII.

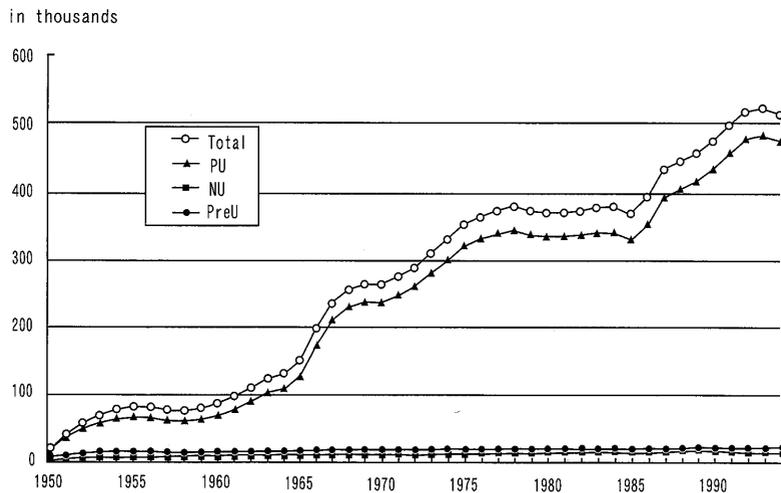
The second policy reversal came in the 1960s, when the government was faced with huge increases in college enrollment. The Japanese government compromised university standards in favor of private schools to allow them to increase their enrollment. This meant that the government was no longer the sole authority on higher education and it also meant that the private sector would assume a substantial portion of the responsibility for Japanese higher education. This was unprecedented and had huge implications for the future of Japanese higher education.

Due to changes in university standards and liberal chartering criteria, private schools mushroomed. During the period between 1959-1977, as many as 189 private colleges and universities were established, while only 9 national schools were founded in the same period (Tsuchimochi, 1996). The enrollment numbers were even more revealing in that the private sector student population tripled during that time (see Figure C).

Universities



Colleges



(Source: *ibid.* pp.19 and 21)

Figure C Number of Students

In 1962, in addition to the liberalization of university establishment standards and chartering criteria, the Japanese parliament approved governmental subsidies to private universities for the first time. It intended to stop the raising of tuition fees, but actually it contributed to an increase in the number of faculty and their salaries. In 1970 another law was passed allowing substantial subsidies for private schools. In fact, in 1980 the governmental subsidy reached 29.5% of the operational budget of private institutions (Ministry of Education, 1997). In essence, the government achieved its goal of meeting the enrollment requirement, and they still imposed some control over the quality of higher education. For example, they asked private schools to meet STR standards.

Absence of Academic Standards for College Admission

The lack of national standardized tests for screening college-bound applicants helped the expansion of higher education, particularly at private colleges and universities, because it encouraged students to apply for schools regardless of their native intellectual ability. In Japan, college admission is open to anybody as long as they complete the high school curriculum and pass the entrance examinations imposed by each college and university. This open door policy for college admission gave enormous incentives and encouragement to students who sought higher education, especially those who were intellectually less qualified.

The private schools took advantage of this situation and offered various courses, majors and academic disciplines with varying degrees of sophistication to students who sought a college education. In reality, there are a vast number of different academic levels among private schools. Some private schools are equal or better than the topnotch national schools. Others are substantially below the national average. But

the fact remains that there was easy access to the schools, and almost any student could find a suitable institution according to his/her academic achievement and ability.

It is safe to conclude that the absence of standardized entrance tests helped expand private schools because if a screening test such as the GCE used in the UK or the Baccalaureate of France was imposed on Japanese high school students, then the percentage of those advancing to private colleges would have been and would be substantially reduced.

Good Management Practice by Private Schools

There has been a longstanding belief among people in Japan that national institutions are superior in quality to private institutions. This notion also prevailed in higher education. This is changing due to the good management practices of private sector institutions and also to the indifferent attitudes taken by national schools.

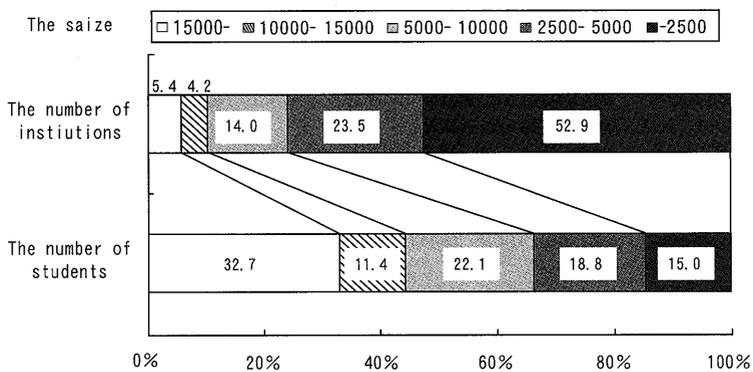
Faced with three major obstacles – financial difficulties due to decreasing government subsidies, parental opposition to tuition fee increases and a recruitment crisis due to the declining population of college bound applicants – many private schools adopted some of the principles and practices of the market economy in order to survive. Incidentally, the majority of national universities have done very little in this respect because they have not been exposed to these critical problems.

These are some of the effective business practices that were implemented:

- 1) Reducing the operation budget by trimming down the organization
- 2) Creating new fields of study to attract more students

- 3) Selecting or relocating campuses to urban areas in order to enhance convenience
- 4) Providing a better campus life for students
- 5) Adopting cost effective classroom management
- 6) Creating less expensive departments and faculties

1) Money matters. Many private schools sought to trim their organizations with the assistance of teams of management experts to cut down the cost of operations. They found that one way of saving money was to increase their enrollment by accepting many more students than allowed by the Ministry of Education. As a result, classrooms became crowded. Another policy to save money, led to enlarged universities. Most prestigious universities enlarged their size and became so-called "mammoth schools." The enrollment of some of these schools exceeds 50,000 students. There are twenty-three of these large schools in Japan, for example, Keio, Waseda, Nihon, Meiji, and Housei, and the average enrollment is 26,200 (see Figure D).



(Source: Ministry of Education; A List of Universities. 1998)

Figure D Comparison between Large and Small Universities (in 1997)

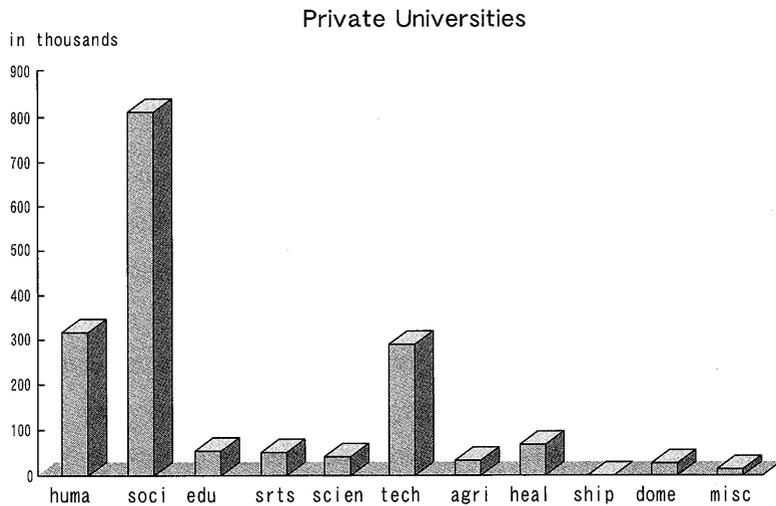
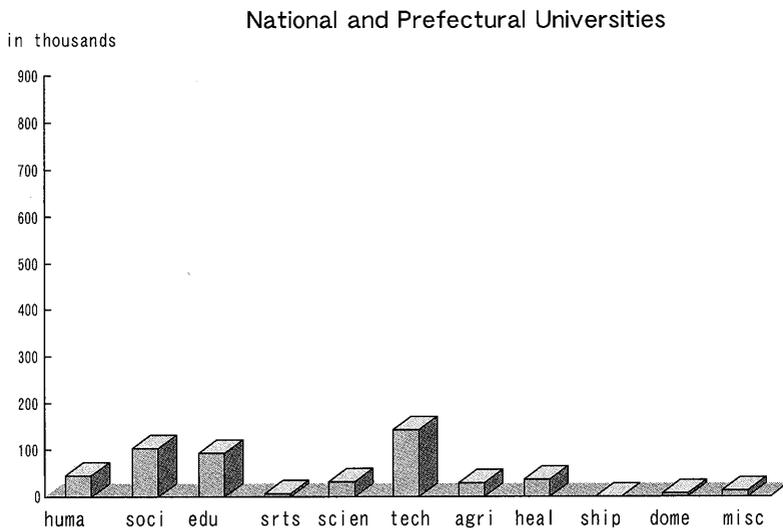
2) They also realized through market research that schools had to be more sensitive to social change and needs, and they acted upon those findings. It was mostly private schools that formed new schools of study to accommodate the needs of society. For example, such disciplines as oceanography, information science, international relations, social welfare, and sports science are almost exclusively offered within the private sector. There have been almost no new fields of study established in the public sector in response to the needs of society. National universities are comparatively conservative in responding to social change and needs.

3) The selection of campus locations and their relocation are other examples of business-savvy practices implemented by private schools. Our study shows that the majority of private universities have been located in urban areas where higher income families reside. The chances of the children of these families attending such schools as commuters were high (RIHE, 1995). Urban locations were a better environment for professors to interact and communicate with other people. It was also convenient for the students to find part-time jobs in order to make extra money.

4) Making sure that campus life is safe and comfortable for students is not just a luxury but a high priority on the survival lists of private schools because research indicates this is very important for the recruitment of students. Today, generally speaking, the cafeterias, toilets and student lounges of private schools are far better than those of national schools. These facilities attract lots of students, in particular female students.

5) Many private schools increased their class sizes, resulting in a more favorable student/teacher ratio. On average, it reached as high as 1 to 25 for private schools while that of national schools maintained a 1 to 10 ratio. Also many private schools hired part-time instructors and lecturers instead of full-time professors to cut costs by minimizing fringe benefits. The part-time instructor system, which was originally meant to provide for the shortage of teachers who were well qualified to teach western knowledge and skills, was regarded as a means to hold down personnel expenditures.

6) Private schools expanded enrollment capacity in departments where large capital investments were not required. Fields of study such as science and medicine were seldom established as a part of a private institution's curriculum expansion due to the high cost of running those programmes. On the contrary, they established departments of arts and social sciences, which didn't need so much capital investment. Humanities and social sciences were the driving forces behind the expansion of private sector higher education (see Figure E).



(Source: RIHE, Hiroshima University, Statistical Data of Higher Education, 1995, p.33)

Figure E Enrollment by Major

As a result, many private schools today have excellent reputations based upon their academic curriculum, research facilities, and learning environment. In fact, well established private institutions are rated higher than the average national schools. For example, the nation's top medical school is no longer a national university but a private institution. In the fields of business management and commerce, the private schools are especially preeminent.

New Admission Procedures

Many private schools have adopted a new admission procedure, called Admission Office Selection (AOS), as opposed to selection based on an entrance examination. For Japanese high school students seeking a college education, the entrance exams are highly competitive and excessively harsh. To pass the exam of a first-rate institution, students are subjected to undue pressure, spending countless hours preparing for it. AOS has provided welcome relief for them.

The "entrance exam hell" has been a serious social and educational problem for Japanese youth for the last thirty-five years. However, there had been no substantial innovation to improve the situation until some private institutions adopted the AOS.

College admission by means of AOS is based upon an interview, essays and an applicant's academic record during his/her high school years. This process does not require long intensive preparation by the students. Therefore, it does not interfere with the normal life of those high school students who want to go to college. There are a significant number of students who prefer this approach to taking the exam for college. In fact, about one third of all college applicants now apply to colleges that use AOS, although all of them cannot pass the AOS

Factors Favoring the Development of Private Sector Higher Education in Japan: An Assumption successfully.

In many instances, AOS is beneficial to colleges and universities because it helps stabilize college recruitment by providing a better network through which high-school students can apply to college, and it also helps to secure the student's commitment. Today, over 80% of private universities have adopted the AOS system. Some universities recruit about 20 percent of students through the AOS, while other colleges get about 50 percent or even more by that means (Amano, 1996).

Women's Institutions

In the past, women's institutions were neglected by the government. There were only two government supported colleges that educated women exclusively. The main reason why women's education was neglected by the government was that it was not considered profitable nor beneficial for the purpose of the quick development of society, and so they did not feel they could afford to establish colleges for women. The private sector saw this as an opportunity to expand and created several universities and junior colleges for women. By 1960, there were over 200 private junior colleges, mostly for women (RIHE, 1995). Presently, many of these women's junior colleges are changing to four-year institutions and are also expanding their curricula to various fields of study.

Female enrollment is the most striking factor in the expansion of private institutions. Currently, more women apply to college than men, which is a complete reversal of the past. The percentage of female students going to universities and colleges reached 48.9%, while that of male students was 45.8% in 1997 (Ministry of Education, 1997).

Societal attitudes concerning women have changed remarkably in Japan.

Concluding Remarks

The growth pattern of Japanese private colleges and universities was somewhat unique in that they flourished within a homogeneous society. Generally speaking, private institutions prosper in a heterogeneous society, as in the USA, where religion, ethnicity, language and economic class divisions are the driving forces behind their success.

Even though Japan's postwar economic expansion was the overall factor in promoting private institutions, the lack of stringent university standards played a key role in the chartering of these institutions. Also, the lack of national academic standards for screening college applicants encouraged college bound youths to pursue higher education, which resulted in an increase in the enrollment base.

Faced with the increased demand for higher education in the 1960s, the legislature took an approach which allowed the private sector to meet this demand because private institutions were more cost effective and flexible in adapting to the emerging social changes and needs. They didn't make a concrete master plan for the expansion of national universities at all, which meant that they could save a lot of government money. The overall conclusion is that the success of private institutions was not because of positive and decisive actions taken by the Japanese government, but rather it was a by-product of a non-proactive, noncommittal, and lenient legislature. This might be described by English historians as "a laissez-faire" policy in educational administration in Japan.

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