CHAPTER III
FORCES OF CHANGE AND EMERGING PROBLEMS IN
JAPANESE HIGHER EDUCATION

III.1 FORCES OF CHANGE: SOME ISSUES

Developments like globalization, internationalization, economic, cultural and technological changes have compelled individuals and countries to set before themselves certain priorities and responses to the changing scenario. Correspondingly in higher education too certain reforms are necessary to meet new challenges. In Japan different groups and institutions have taken different positions on how the higher education is to be developed. These differences are contested at a variety of levels—institutional, regional, national, international and professional bodies, private and public bodies. As a matter of fact, engaging with the different forces of change, Japanese higher education involves risks, ambivalence and uncertainty and new directions and consequences as well¹.

III.1a Globalization

Institution of higher learning in Japan because of their socio-cultural and economic roles, are very much affected by globalization. With the growing public and government concern on the impact of globalization of Japanese economy university and other higher educational institutions feel the need to bring about change in the structure and course content. Similarly government policies needs to be revived which reflect both

¹ For details see, "Higher Education and Japan" online search <www.monbu.go.jp/hakusyo/1995eng/contents.html>
societal and economic concerns. In the 1990's one witnessed that universities in Japan reviewed their goals and structures. These changes remove universities away from needs of the society and cater mainly to market needs. These changes largely favor the national and international agenda of government and businesses, who are basically interested in a more pronounced economic role for Japan at the global level. Higher education is expanding a greater economic development and training workforce. The search for new sources of revenues and the maintenance of existing levels of fund has become one of the major activities of an institution. Looking at the limited government funding behaviors and government policy, university managers have become more economically focused and university has become more entrepreneurial in their approach to solve any problem.\(^2\)

Placement of higher education institutions in closer proximity to the market place, especially in fields connected to technoscience is clear manifestation of economic globalization through corporate partnerships and associations\(^3\). Nine behaviors have been identified which characterize how higher education institutions respond to global forces such as global competitiveness. These behaviors are internationalization, multiculturalism, commodification, homogenization,

\(^2\) Rosemary Deem, “Globalization, New Managerialism, Academic Capitalism and Entrepreneurialism in Universities: is the local dimension sill important?”, *Comparative Education*, vol.37, no.1,2001, pp. 10-16.

marketization, restructuring, labor alterations, productivity and efficiency and electronic communication and information.

III.1b Internationalization

Japan's move toward internationalization has had a major influence on the status of higher education. In Japan, the expanded economy made the possibilities and international influence became much more pronounced. Japan was invited to a political summit in 1975 and after that it became a regular member of many political summits. After Sino-Japanese Peace Friendship Treaty in 1978, Japan became more active and also launched an 'all round security' policy involving the protection of the country not only by military power but also by keeping good relationship with other countries. In 1979, in the UN General Assembly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan wished to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world. In the late 1970s and 1980s Prime Ministers explicitly positioned Japan in the western bloc and linked Japanese security with the whole world. Based on this new policy, the diplomatic effort of Japan was internationalized. Moreover, Japan started emphasizing on overseas aid with the change of foreign policy in the late 1970s. By the late 1980's overseas aid increased enormously and Japan became one of the largest aid donors in the world. Thus, a strong desire for internationalization compelled Japan to adopt a more open and flexible policy in its higher educational front. But, Ministry of Education avoided its commitment to UNESCO's new education for International
understanding in the 1970s. In 1984, internationalization became a principal issue in discussions of the Ad-hoc Council on Education instituted by the then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone who was very keen to raise Japan's international status.4

In recent years, the number of foreign students, teachers and researchers at Japanese colleges and universities has been rapidly increasing. The number of foreign students accepted in Japan increased from 10,000 in 1983 to more than 50,000 in 1993. The government's expansion plan also encourages an increase in foreign student strength in the 21st century. Similarly, Japanese students and teachers studying abroad has also increased. In addition, the real problem of internationalization of the Japanese higher education system is that it not only promotes international exchanges but also requires internal structural changes in order to promote the exchanges. So, some aspects of the traditional Japanese patterns of teaching and learning, evaluation and accreditation system, course contents, and the crediting system should be reformed to adapt to the international system of higher education.5

III.1c Technology

Technology has revolutionized organizational, management and socio-institutional models. Technological change in relation to

the economy and its requirement for competitiveness in the
global economy is highly appreciated. The exploitation of new
(information) technology is seen as part of the path of
progress—a progress that is necessary and inevitable. There are
important issues about the ways it is introduced through
negotiation or imposition—questions of whether the human
dimensions of technology are encompassed within
considerations of change. Technological change is not new but
the speed at which it takes place has resulted in a greater
integration of the world. New technologies through their
capacity to transgress frontiers and to subvert boundaries are
implicated in a complex interplay of deterritorialization and
reterritorialization.6

Technological use in forms of flexible open and distance
learning, supported by educational technology increases and
widens access to learning and the learner becomes more
independent. So, it promotes the individualizing tendencies.
Moreover, information technology also redefines knowledge,
whereby computers commodify knowledge into information.
Through the use of computers, CD-ROMs, e-mail and the
Internet, individuals can access information, interact with it
and with others without attending centres of learning. So,
educative processes are displaced and reconstituted as a
relationship between producer and consumer in which
information or knowledge is exchanged on the basis of the
value it has to the ‘consumer-as-learner’ and ‘learner-as-

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consumer'. The formation of virtual networks provides different opportunities to bring people together in new forms of gathering and increasing levels of interactivity. Technological change providing the possibility for new centres and forms of knowledge production and distribution makes an impact upon universities significantly. Universities would appear to be losing their privileged status as primary producers of knowledge as they become part of a wider learning market which includes the research and development departments of large organizations, think tanks and consultancies. They are unable to control access to knowledge and a sense of challenge pervades.\(^7\) In the context of Japanese higher education Provisional Council on Educational Reform stated the view that based on the advantages and disadvantages of greater reliance on information, measures should be taken toward building an information based society where people can be harmony with the natural environment and traditional cultural values.\(^8\) So impact of technological change on education is far more complex. The manner in which technology should be integrated in education is also difficult to decide.

**III.1d New Market Forces**

After the first oil crisis in 1973, Japanese companies competed to improve resource and energy efficiency in production processes. Consequently in 1979 when the second oil crisis

\(^7\) Ibid, p. 56.

came Japan was in a better position. They continued to remain competitive in the world market. The expansion of trade to overseas production became its new market strategy. Japan developed an economic style similar to that of the western industrialized countries by expanding into the field of foreign investment. So, the desire to compete in the global market in economy made Japan to improve into higher education system to get highly skilled people. Further, as the higher education system itself got entangled with global market economy it was subjected to marketization and the introduction and enlargement of private higher education system.

Akira Arimoto, a noted higher education expert and professor of Hiroshima University asks:

Is the Japanese higher education system sufficiently competent and useful for international competition in overseas markets? With regard to this, does it demonstrate flexibility, openness and efficiency or does it demonstrate traits like rigidity, closeness, and non-efficiency.

The necessity to increase flexibility and competitiveness is the current focus while restructuring Japanese higher education. Today, the predominating response to changes in the global market system move mostly to a production oriented economic development with a greater emphasis on skills and techniques,

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10 Ibid, p. 199
preparing students for work in hierarchical organizations. While wealth creation is a legitimate goal for nations, organizations and individuals, it raises important issues about how opportunities and wealth are distributed. From this perspective, the objective of higher education is not only to contribute to economic policy but a social policy. Therefore, in Japan, it is difficult to predict how the higher education system will change due to the shift to the new global market model. 11

III.1e Cultural Sensitivity and Change

In Japanese culture, both continuity and change is to be found. Continuity includes the old tradition, its elements and its way of life whereas change reflects the interaction with the outside world. In Japan, on the one hand, universities most subject to political and social industrial and technological, commercial and economic dependence have risen in defence of the cultural values of the nation. On the other hand, they are called upon simultaneously to recognize the emergence of new cultures in society and to integrate them to the activities of formation and research.

Moreover, the issues raised by cultural change have an explicit impact on higher education. It involves an effort to provide a certain democratic tradition of tolerance and difference. It provides opportunities for diversity for new and innovative practices and the possibility is raised for new and multiple

11 Ikku Amano, “Structural Changes in Japan’s higher education system—from a planning to market model,”, vol.34, 1997, p. 137.
forms of learning. Therefore, cultural change does not only result in greater interest in higher education system, it also has an impact on the types of opportunities developed and ways in which opportunities are to be structured and delivered.\textsuperscript{12}

III.1f Pressure for Democracy and Peace

Before World War II, Japan's policy of engagement with militarism and ultra-nationalism was a major concern but the post-war reform by Allied occupation democratised the country and established and enacted a peace constitution for Japan. The occupation was able to implement most of its reform proposals, but there was substantial opposition to the new reforms especially when the state control was strong during the pre-war period.\textsuperscript{13} Today, in the globalized world scenario, democratization of higher education has become top priority in the context of socio-political change. The internationalization initiative of Prime Minister Nakasone to be materialized in terms of national interest must promote democratic principle and world peace. Japanese higher education has to adhere to promote attitudes that encourage the development of individuals who can live in harmony with others to participate in the life of a democratic society in responsible way.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Edwards, n.6, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{14} Ishii, n.4, pp. 337-41.
III.2 PROBLEMS IN JAPANESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Highlighting the problem in Japanese Higher Education, Akira Arimoto says:

Today, a rationale for the existence of universities and colleges is likely to be sought in terms of their economic relationships, with a focus on accountability and relevance. Moreover, while the importance of academic institutions for social and economic development through the expansion of educational opportunity and knowledge has been increasingly emphasized, the institutions themselves, exhibiting little evidence of economic efficiency and rationalization appear to be on the road to failure (abstract: p. 199).\(^\text{15}\)

The first problem that today's higher education faces is the gradual change from an elite system of higher education largely confined within national boundaries, to a mass higher education system in a global market oriented society. Numbers, finances, structure, purposes, students, governance, confines, technologies, the amount of available knowledge and its diversity have all changed. These external factors have had and will continue to have major consequences on how universities should operate and how the academics should be managed. The development in higher education in Japan is remarkable. The student unrest is related to various political and social problems. So, many of the university problems can

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15 Arimoto, n. 9, p. 199.
not be solved exclusively within the higher education system. There are also many problems in the systems of teaching and research and of administration and management and these also contributed to student unrest in 1968 and in 1969.

Financial constraints are one of the most fundamental problems confronting Japanese higher education. The other major problem is how to maintain or develop academic freedom and still be accountable to the state and society, and the relevance of higher education to society in terms of quality or the level of excellence and massifications.  

III.2a Financial Uncertainty

As in other countries of the world, Japanese higher education is also subject to lack of funds. Some exports claim that the lack of funds for research is the most salient currents issue of higher education in the 1990s and today the government must eventually take measures to redress this situation. Also, W.K. Cummings a noted expert on Japanese education observes:

As Japan did not have a strong tradition of philanthropy, competition for private donations to the universities did not develop. The majority of the private universities were obliged to depend on tuition fees paid by students as virtually their sole source of income. In 1970, the government started

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16 Ibid, p. 199-210
subsidy system for private universities. For a while it enabled several of the private institutions to improve their situations significantly. However, the subsidy that once covered nearly one-third of the private universities annual expenditure is currently decreasing because of the government's financial crisis.\(^{18}\)

In Japan, the tremendous expansion of education in 1960's was made possible by the fact that government put a great deal of public resources in that sector. It reacted so positively and so quickly because education was being taken for granted as a highly profitable investment. UNESCO also pointed out that, within the limits of available findings it was the responsibility of government to adequately fund higher education. Again finances should be distributed fairly and not directed towards few universities only.\(^{19}\)

According to the White book on education 1990, about 1.8% of the gross national product was spent on higher education in Japan in the late 1980s. The government provided 41% of the income of universities (60% of that of national institutions and 13% of that of private institutions). Again, Japanese university students spent in 1992, on an average, more than 1.8 million yen for an academic year, of which about 42% was for tuition and fee. While university students at private universities spent almost 2.0 million yen per year, the respective amount was


less than 1.5 million yen per year for students at national universities.

The administration of budget within institution differs among the national, public and private sectors in Japan. For the national universities, the budget is determined by legal requirements within the national budget. The public sector supported by local government has almost, the same form of budget allocations as the national sector. Moreover, the private institutions now depended not only on income from student tuition charges and other fees, but have started commercial activities to support their financial burden. On the other hand, national universities are slow to make change and hence face financial problem. It is, hence, not surprising that national universities do not find adequate funds for research and related activities. Parents are experiencing increased financial burden for the children's private education because university tuition and fees constantly rise. National universities have also suffered severe shortfalls of funds for teaching and research and an absence of sufficient laboratories and equipment because of the government policy to curtail spending for higher education in the past decade.

III.2b Challenge to Academic Autonomy

Academic freedom is a fundamental prerequisite for an effective university and it is a core value for academia.

20 Arimoto, n. 9, pp.199-200.
22 Kitamura, n.5, p. 149.
Just as human rights have become an international priority, so academic freedom has been placed at the forefront of concern for the higher education community 23. When academic freedom is gaining ground at the top of the agenda for everyone concerned with higher education, from the point of view of autonomy, university institutions still fluctuate between complete academic freedom and subservience to political and economic power. This results in the deterioration of the universities moral and scientific autonomy in the face of undue external pressures that prevent it from behaving according to its own nature. 24

The issue of the appropriate role for universities in social, economic and political spheres remains an unresolved part of the debate about the role of academic freedom. On the one hand, some argue that academics and politics or academics and private business enterprise should not be intertwined. Universities are not explicitly political or economic institutions and those involved in the academic enterprise need to recognize that university's survival depends on its ability to keep an appropriate distance from partisan politics or profit making business enterprise. On the other hand there are also views that faculty members should be engaged in such activities. However there is as yet no consensus on this issue

24 Cabal, n. 19, P. 35.
and as a result there is considerable debate about the appropriate limits to academic freedom.

Professionals demand freedom and autonomy in their work, given the complexity and uncertainty of the tasks they have to deal with and the considerable expertise they have acquired. In the university context, demand for autonomy and academic freedoms are related. Professionals also think that they may be controlled and evaluated only by their peers. This is an important source of conflict between academic and administration and sometimes between academics themselves across disciplines. For example, academics in a given discipline may be reluctant to have their research proposals or projects assessed by a board with faculty members from other disciplines. Moreover, in the university system, with the growth of 'managerialism', the activity of the professors to determine the direction of the university has been challenged.  

Autonomy is indispensable to the role, work, goal and purpose of the university. Very recently, it is differentiated into organizational autonomy, academic autonomy and financial autonomy. This autonomy was real and vigorous earlier but today is vulnerable and weak. University autonomy in Japan has a proud history but today with the growing market model of the state it is confronted with many challenges. In addition, throughout history, the intervention of political powers, to a greater or lesser extent has threatened autonomy with

different philosophies and many policies for higher education. Universities have also been affected by various financial pressures to the extent that they have asked themselves whether autonomy has become a myth.26

The increased involvement of corporations in academic and the growth of privately sponsored research have transformed research finding. Higher education institutions have become corporatized and the interests of firms have become dominant on campus. Basic research is being deemphasized in favour of applied work that will bring quick results for corporate sponsors. So that, government supports for basic research has either been reduced or has not expanded to keep pace with scientific needs. A growing portion of research funding, especially in the biomedical sciences is directly provided by corporations, leading to patent and other benefits for the sponsor. Sometimes, research findings are actually suppressed because of corporate funding arrangements and this is seen as clear violation of university autonomy by many.27 In Japan, university administrators have been doing their part to ensure that the autonomy of their institutions remain intact and while private universities have been keen to team up with private sector companies in research and development projects in campus, public universities are more hesitant.28

26 Ibid, pp. 215-217
27 Ibid, p. 216.
III.2c Value conflict

Universities in Japan face value conflict to lead higher education on the current perspective of social transformation, educational democratization and continuing education. The university's future trend is emphasis on research or emphasis on teaching, independence or integration, academic liberty or national interest, quality or quantity. Issues concerning quality or quantity is that whether the university should be open to everyone or whether students should be selected purely for their ability. The call for democratic principle for equal opportunity in university education is sought. However, equal opportunity depends on cultural and economic constraints that are difficult to overcome. This debate is a burning, emotional issue.  

Concerns for the quality of teaching in educational and university administration put forward the idea that the purpose of the university is to educate, and not just train a student for a profession. Educating is an action that should take into account the subjectivity of each student who is, after all, a human being. On the other hand, the introduction of the element of competition now characterizes the increasing government expenditure on research. Again, as Japan is going towards the process of internationalization, higher education institutions call for more university autonomy in teaching, research and other activities. However, at the same time its

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29 Cabal, n. 19, p.75.
30 ibid, p. 74.
political and economic position is placed in opposition to the national interest. From today's viewpoint, when a market compulsion have dominated the academic as well as in the business world it is clear that in some areas the Japanese system has made much more progress than others... Yet, the problems of coordination of the conflicting values between quantity and quality, equality and excellence, and loyalty and freedom have not been solved.31

III.2d other problems.

One of the biggest problems inherent in the Japanese education system probably most often have been the "entrance examination system". The crushing competition for admission to high schools and universities in Japan is often described as an "examination hell or war".32 Japanese children are pressured by their parents to go to juku (tutoring establishments and cram schools) after school to prepare for these exams. In recent years the prevalence of juku has been largely confined to large cities. Some people call it 'college entrance war' where the entrance examination is a national obsession. Because of this highly competitive system of examination students have no time for anything else and severely limit their perspectives on life. It has been blamed as an underlying cause of bullying, suicide, violence in schools

and other problems. Further, student learning have been constrained by the standardized examination system retarding the intellectual aspect of inspiration, innovation and creativity.33

Declining Population Growth and its Impact:

Another problem of Japanese higher education system is associated with the nation's demography. Future shifts in the demographic structure as predicted, the 18 year old population that reached two million in 1990, declined to about 1.5 million in 2000. Again, the number of babies has already decreased to less than 1.2 million in 1993. So, there is little likelihood that Japan's youth population points will increase before 2010. Kazuyuki Kitamura points out that 500 colleges and universities and another several thousand institution of higher education will gradually find it difficult to survive. More than 70% of the institutions of higher learning are private and heavily dependent on tuition income. So, the expected decline of the 18 year olds will adversely affect the future of some private colleges and universities in Japan. In this context, the university council is attempting to control expansion emphasizing more on the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. This problem has become an urgent concern among administrators and faculty of higher education in Japan.34

34 Kitamura, n.5, pp. 146-47.
Need to Encourage Individual Talent and Personality:

With the growing international competition in the globalized world Japanese higher education must produce students with an enhanced education relevant to present situation. Due to the changing scenario of corporate Japan in the global economy, its industry is calling for a new type of graduate who can be better educated, more autonomous, more creative, more influential, more international and one possessing a spirit of challenge. Earlier, university had been dutifully producing an obedient workforce that could be trained easily and be trusted worker in the company. Today, employers have found an urgent need to recruit uniquely talented workers who can compete in an information oriented, international, global and competitive system.

Japanese industry in an era of globalisation needs vibrant, unique and ambitious talents rather than merely diligent, conformist students who have been traditionally selected favourably through higher education as a screening device. They demand that institutions of higher education with emphasis on its screening function must add value function of creativity and individuality. So, how to produce highly talented students, has become a challenge for the Japanese institutions of higher education today in this globalized world.\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\) Ibid, p. 147
Another pressing problem for Japanese higher education to tackle is to inculcate a "spirit of belongingness" among the new generation of students those who are coming up. Paul Doyon, a noted author of higher education reform puts forward the point that a new generation of students has been appearing on university campuses for the past twenty years or so and they are considerably dissimilar to the hard working generation of their parents. He also mentions that, this new generation of students seems to be a people apart, they know nothing of post-war reconstruction or the turmoil of 1950s and 1960s, they are the first generation Japanese to know only affluence, they spend rather to save, they feel no obligations towards society, they do not care for corporate loyalty or lifetime employment, they seem to have no point of view, no identity, no political perspective.  

In the 1960s, in Japan, student unrest was a result of problems in higher education. The students demanded curriculum improvement, withdrawal of raises in tuition fees etc. In October, 1969, when student unrest was at its peak, 41 national, 7 local public, and 29 private universities were involved. This student unrest persisted for the longest period of time and this occurred more frequently in national universities with favorable educational condition than in private universities. This implies that the problems were complex.  

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36 Doyon, n.33, p. 449.  
37 Osaki ,n. 17, pp. 151-163.
In order to meet the changing needs and demands, colleges and universities will have to undertake continued reforms and innovations in the field of enactment of basic laws concerning higher education, the creation of new systems of teaching, and research, administrative, and managerial structures. Thus, Japanese education faces serious challenges and decisive policies at both the national and institutional levels need to be clearly defined. However, reform initiatives have already been invariably directed by central authorities in the government.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} Kitamura, n. 5, p. 148.