This monograph is a substantial contribution to our knowledge of the internal workings of a Japanese university, focussing on the world view of the professor. In this anthropological case study of a private university in urban Tokyo conducted through extended participant observation, Gregory Poole, at once both an insider and outsider, tells an ethnographic story that explicates a professoriate’s working world.

The author addresses one basic problem—how do Japanese professors configure their working world? In answering this research question, he demonstrates how the present climate of competition and restructuring means that faculty members in Japan are faced with the challenge of culturally translating largely western concepts of the university while steadfastly preserving their own local culture of higher education. This book describes the resulting cultural debates and competing discourses that surround the key concepts in the work-life of Japanese professors. It is of special interest to scholars in the fields of comparative education, Japanese Studies, and sociocultural anthropology as well as academic and administrative staff employed at universities in Japan and abroad.

“There have been few anthropological analyses of the lives and work of university professors in Japan, or for that matter, anywhere else. Poole is able to give satisfactory explanations perhaps for the first time in the English literature as to why Japanese universities function in the ways that they do, ways that sometimes seem bizarre and counter-productive to the western observer.”

J.S. Eades, Professor of Anthropology and Dean of the School of Asia Pacific Studies, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.

Gregory S. Poole is Professor of Anthropology in the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Tsukuba. His area of research includes the anthropology of education, language, and Japan and his publications include *Higher Education in East Asia: Neoliberalism and the Professoriate* (2009), co-edited with Ya-chen Chen, and “The Japanese University in Crisis” (2005), coauthored with Ikuo Amano (*Higher Education*).
THE JAPANESE PROFESSOR
The Japanese Professor
An Ethnography of a University Faculty

By
Gregory S. Poole
University of Tsukuba, Japan
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FOREWORD

From the beginning of the 1970s, when the Japanese economy first began to take off, western observers became interested in those social systems in the country that might explain its economic growth. Education was an area on which they focused particular attention and, by the beginning of the 1980s, it was almost expected that Japan would be the first place that any new minister of education in the U.S., U.K. or several other European countries would visit in search of different ways of thinking about their own systems.

The main focus of western observers of Japanese education was on the primary and secondary levels. In part, this was because children at this stage could (and frequently were) shown to be doing much better in international tests of mathematics and science than their counterparts elsewhere. In part, it was because government investment in education at this level was, in absolute terms, considerably lower than in other OECD countries but with no obvious deleterious effects for the nation either economically or socially. Explanations for the success of Japanese education ranged from cultural (that there was something in Confucianism that encouraged and gave high status to study that stimulated children, rather as in Judaism in western societies) to politico-economic (the educational systems were designed to meet the economic concerns of the societies by those who ran big business rather than simply as arenas for self-growth) to pedagogical (the concentration on the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic as well as the systematic way these were taught by well-trained teachers meant that all students got a good educational grounding; these systems had little truck with western fashions of developing individual creativity, which often serve only the best at the expense of the weaker student). From the mid-1980s, a large, generally favorable, literature written by foreign observers began to appear explaining the operation of a large number of East Asian education systems and not only Japan. Much of this literature was government-sponsored, and its findings were widely reported in the mass media.

The literature on the education systems of East Asia, however, contained one very obvious gap. Virtually none of it referred to higher education. This was not because there was no higher education in these societies. Indeed, they all had well-developed systems, and a much higher proportion of students went on to post-compulsory and tertiary education in East Asian countries than in many European societies; Japanese universities for example could, and sometimes did, trace their histories back many centuries and, in the early 1980s, at least twice as many young adults in the relevant age group went on to university in Japan (which at that time numbered over 500 four-year and the same number of two-year institutions) than in
the U.K. (where there were only 44 universities and a similar number of polytechnics).

For various reasons, however, Japanese higher education institutions were not seen as helpful in explaining Japan’s so-called economic miracle. Some indeed, argued the opposite—that Japanese economic growth was achieved despite its institutions of higher education. The negative view of Japanese higher education seems to have become so pervasive that it generally became accepted that there was virtually nothing in the system worthy of study.

The last few years have seen a reevaluation of the importance of Japanese higher education and the beginnings of a new academic literature that has attempted to look at it in its own right and on its own terms. Most of this literature—and Greg Poole covers it succinctly in the analysis that follows—looks at why the higher education system has been reformed over the past decade and presents the different views of the various stakeholders in the system: the state, the parents, the students and the academics themselves. Poole’s own book, however, brings a completely new (and much needed) element to the debate in that he lays out in great detail how the proposed reforms have been enacted (or in many cases blocked) in a single Japanese private higher education institution, which he calls Edo University of Commerce (abbreviated to EUC), in Tokyo. In the process, he sheds light, in a way that has never been achieved in a monograph in English before, on how such universities—and it is important to remember that 75 percent of Japanese universities are private—actually function in practice. In particular, he gives us an account of the differing views of Japanese professoriate within a single institution, which has hitherto been almost completely missing in the academic literature.

Greg Poole has been unusually well placed to piece together his account of EUC. As well as being an associate professor in the institution, he was also de facto head of the language program, head of the international program, and a member of the president’s “kitchen cabinet.” He managed to be both an insider and an outsider, and this gave him access to a huge range of both opinions and information. It is, however, Poole’s training as a social anthropologist that gave him the tools to use the data he collected in the nonjudgmental and illuminating fashion that follows. While some of the practices and views expressed might at first gloss seem puzzling to academics in other societies (although most of them will actually appear very familiar), Poole’s detailed ethnography allows us to see how they all fit together to constitute a coherent set of world views. The book will appeal, of course, to anyone who has ever taught or intends to teach in a Japanese institution and will help explain many practices that foreign professors in such institutions have often wondered at. Its intrinsic value, however, goes far beyond providing a user’s guide to such institutions, as Poole teases out the underlying assumptions which guide the activities of individuals and groups of actors in a system, which, for demographic, political and economic reasons, has been placed in recent years under increasing stress. We learn in the course of reading about Edo University of Commerce not only a great deal about the changes taking place in
Japanese society more generally over the past decade, but also in higher education globally as the professoriate in many higher education systems confront the problems faced by those in Japan today.

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November 2009  
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Anthropologists’ interest in the social institutions—the university—that reproduce their own discipline, is assumed to be an inherent one, hence the discussions of bureaucratic policy, accountability, and “audit cultures” as manifestations of a global phenomenon (Shore and Wright 1999). Although this interest has generated discussions of students (Holland & Eisenhart 1990; Lee-Cunin 2004; Moffatt 1989; Nathan 2005) and the state (Altbach & Peterson 1999; Eades et al. 2005; McVeigh 2005) as key actors in this social institution of the university, perhaps because academics feel uncomfortable exploring a subject too close to home, the anthropological literature is nearly devoid of close analysis of the professors themselves. Yet on the stage of higher education, the professoriate is a diverse set of actors that is in some ways the most influential.

Notwithstanding famous calls to “study-up” (Nader 1972), much educational anthropology remains more focused on “the culture of the powerless,” that of students, than “the culture of power,” that of teachers. In this book my intent, then, is much like that of other anthropologists conducting similar studies of the powerful—“to place a human face on the elite” (Moore 2005). In doing so I demonstrate how at a private university in Japan “the culture of power” is more effective at maintaining traditions than implementing change.

To begin to address this gap in the educational literature—this “averted anthropological gaze” (Wisniewski 2000)—in this research project the focus is on the social world of the Japanese professoriate. Modestly, one basic problem is addressed—how do Japanese professors configure their working world? Is this concept of daigaku (university) being affected by the cultural change of the present atmosphere of globalization and university reform in Japan, and if not, why?

In answering this research question, two anthropological projects were required. The first is the obvious challenge of culturally translating the modes of thought of the Japanese professoriate—a crucial problem of interpretation that is arguably a defining activity of the anthropology profession. What are the “key verbal concepts” (Parkin 1978), the “keywords” (Williams 1976), the lexical categories of cultural thought surrounding the Japanese daigaku (university), as described by professoriate actors through their discourse and action? I identify six such concepts, which can be grouped under the rubric of educational anthropology—kyōiku (education), kenkyū (research), kyōju (professor), daigaku (university), soshiki (organization), and kaikaku (reform). Since the globalizing discourses of university reform are slowly impacting the Japanese higher education system, these six verbal concepts of daigaku are being contested in a cultural debate among members of the professoriate at a private university.
Since the focus of inquiry in this book is the “indigenous intellectual” (James 2000), the professoriate at a private Japanese university, one could argue that the actors themselves are in fact as acutely concerned with these processes of cultural translation as is the anthropologist. They struggle to attempt first to interpret the key concepts of both the Euro-American concept of the modern, postindustrial “university” as well as the concomitant “audit culture” and then to reinvent, or at least contest, their own categories of thought as they mostly resist, or occasionally adapt to, this unfamiliar culture of reform.

A second project is to show the extent to which, in times of change especially, cultural translation into etic categories might not only be performed by the “translator,” but understood by the “actors” themselves. As much as the anthropologist struggles to mediate between two habits of thought, “theirs” and our “own” (Lienhardt 1954), in this case so does the informant. The Japanese professoriate is struggling to maintain a traditional culture of daigaku amidst a larger trend in Japan toward models along the lines of the western university. In doing so they can be seen to be divided into two contrasting categories, Weberian “ideal types,” oriented either centripetally or centrifugally vis-à-vis the social world of the institution as they struggle either to maintain tradition or attempt change.

In order to answer the aforementioned research question of “the professoriate world” and then attend to the ensuing cultural translation “projects,” I conducted an anthropological case study of a private university in urban Tokyo. As a full-fledged, card-carrying member of the professoriate at this less-famous university in Tokyo enrolling 2,500 students, I exploited my full participatory status for ethnographic “fly-on-the-wall” observation (cf. Whyte 1993 [1943]) in both the formal arenas—committee meetings, ceremonies, classrooms, and the faculty senate (kyōjukai)—as well as the informal ones—the faculty lounge, administrative offices, professors’ offices, and off-campus pubs. Through participant observation, informal interviews, and analysis of both spoken and written texts, this case study provides ethnographic data that helps to better identify the cultural traditions of the Japanese university.

Analysis of the ethnographic data has been framed along three lines of inquiry: the multivocal nature of daigaku, the Japanese university (Chapter 3), social and cultural capital (Chapter 4), and role performativity (or “performative competence,” as I refer to it, drawing on Hymes’ (1972) sociolinguistic concept of “communicative competence”). I describe the competing social worlds of this university faculty. The value of such an ethnography of one powerful group in a complex institution of a modern society, in this case “the Japanese professoriate,” was first demonstrated thirty years ago in a landmark monograph in the anthropology of education. Wolcott’s (1973) exhaustive case study analysis of “the American school principal” is an approach that is certainly of no less utility today and fills a gap in the literature on educational anthropology.

I attempt to take the analysis to the next step. Though the general climate of the discipline has to a certain degree been addressed reflexively in recent work
(Coleman & Simpson 1999, 2001; Mills 2003, 2004; Shore & Wright 1999), very few anthropologists have actually tackled the bothersome project of analyzing their home institution—their own academic place of work—(see Bailey 1977; Williams 2002). How often do we consider those we work with, those we know most intimately, as “anthropological actors” rather than simply “departmental colleagues”—the anthropology of anthropologists? I try to demonstrate how, when we place our working selves at the center of ourselves working (on research), much like the indigenous anthropologist writing for a local audience (Yamashita et al. 2004), we can attain yet another level of understanding in explaining actors’ social worlds within an institutional bureaucracy.

By describing the competing discourses, the cultural debates, and the performance of roles that surround the key concepts in the work life of the professor—an actor who is at once “myself” and “the other”—I try to demonstrate again how knowledge can be derived not only from distant but also from close positions (Kondo 1986; Rosaldo 1993). In many anthropological studies the informants themselves are uninterested in the etic models of cultural translation derived by the anthropologist to describe their worldview—the Penan themselves would presumably not be overly concerned with “friendship-names” (Needham 1971), nor the Na with “matrilignée” (Hua 1997), the Iatmul with “schismogenesis” (Bateson 1958), the Azande with “oracles” (Evans-Pritchard 1937). However, the present climate of university restructuring in Japan means that professors are necessarily concerned with not only maintaining their own professional identity and traditions within the university, but also keeping a job at a university. They arguably have an ethnomethodological interest in their own performance of their social roles.

As with all such projects, in writing this book I accumulated a tremendous amount of personal debt. I am especially thankful to my mentor, Roger Goodman. His timely and insightful suggestions and guidance gave me support and encouragement. Kim Schuefftan helped immensely to sharpen the argument and presentation of the book. One could not ask for a more thoughtful editor. This goes as well for my publisher, Peter de Liefde at Sense, who was always helpful and understanding. I must also thank Jerry Eades and David Parkin for their detailed and constructive suggestions and criticisms on a previous draft. Marcus Banks and Laura Rival were helpful and forthright with their comments at earlier stages of the project. I especially thank my partner, Kumiko Sawaguchi, for her patience and moral support. This book is largely a product of the inner strength that she has shared with me daily. Of course I could not have started or completed this project without the kind support of the entire faculty and staff at the “Edo University of Commerce.” All that being said, any shortcomings are my responsibility alone.

“Edo University of Commerce” (EUC) is a pseudonym, as are the names of all the individuals mentioned. Japanese names are written as in the vernacular, surname first followed by given name. 100 JPY ($100) is equivalent to about 1 USD ($1.00).
PREFACE

I dedicate this book to my parents, Thomas and Cynthia Poole. Their progressive view of education undergirds my own core beliefs, idealism, and anthropological perspective.

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Anthropologists and sociologists of education in Japan have long considered the university to be an anomaly in an otherwise highly structured and generally effective educational system. Descriptions of the university as a “leisure land” (White 1994, p. 133) and higher education as “a myth” (McVeigh 2002b) reflect the prevailing view among observers that because of the undemanding academic requirements at Japanese higher educational institutions (HEIs), lessons to be learned from the study of universities have to do more with socialization and peer education than with teaching and learning and the role of the professoriate (Kelly 1997, p. 178).

The literature on education in Japan reflects the perception that the university experience is anticlimactic because the process of actually preparing for and being admitted to university is deemed more fascinating, the university, as compared to pre-, primary, and secondary schools, has been described as “an ethnographic black hole.” The accuracy of this description is debatable (McVeigh 1997; Befu 2000; Lee-Cumin 2004), yet certainly more attention has been placed on students, and very few studies of the professors have been conducted. Even beyond anthropology in the wider fields of education and Japanese studies, over the years the number of articles written on the professoriate are few indeed (Arimoto 1997; Befu 1977; Cummings et al. 1979; Ehara 1998; Nakano 1974; Ogose 1988; Shimbori 1981; White 1994; Yamamoto 1999). As well, the point has been made that in North America “no [institutional] history takes the professor as its central focus” (Wisniewski 2000).

In my view the most pressing reason for a study such as this is not merely the dearth of literature on the topic but also the timeliness of the matter. For the past five years Japanese higher education has been facing sweeping change at both the national and local levels (Eades et al 2005). Since they are among those most affected by these reforms, it seems pertinent that professors’ views on their own role as professors be explicated.

CULTURAL DEBATES

The shortcoming of an otherwise “top-down” approach to examining these reforms is that it leaves out the crucial first step of cultural translation. The research here takes a stab at this missing step. I describe the “culture” of a university by focusing first on the behaviors and values of professors and administrators as they interact with one another. Later, within this empirical framework of culture and its construction, the history, purpose and organization of higher education (HE) in Japan can be effectively debated.
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By demonstrating how the actors construct their social worlds in a way that makes sense to them in the context of their own cultural traditions, histories, and understandings, that organizations and institutions appearing remarkably similar on the surface function with quite different understandings is demonstrated. Western criticism of the university in Japan can be traced to different cultural meanings. The “daigaku” is not necessarily equivalent to the “university.” When reform and changes are introduced into the HE system in Japan, they are coming through the introduction of new cultural discourses that originate from the neoliberal world of North America or Britain. These discourses are unfamiliar in Japan and do not fit with Japanese assumptions of daigaku or “higher education.” The result is a series of internal cultural debates (Parkin 1978) located between discourses of western reform and Japanese tradition.

These debates are acted out at numerous social arenas within the university community. As a full-fledged, card-carrying “member” of the Edo University of Commerce (EUC), I exploited my full participatory status for ethnographic observation in both the formal arenas—committee meetings, ceremonies, classrooms, and the general faculty senate (kyōjukai)—as well as the informal ones—the faculty lounge, administrative offices, professors’ offices (kenkyūshitsu), and off-campus pubs—of this university in Tokyo. Participant observation, informal interviews, and analysis of both spoken and written texts provide ethnographic data that helps to better identify the local knowledge of the Japanese university. Through the “thick description” of one institution, I wish to paint a picture that shows a different understanding of educational organizational dynamics than is often presupposed and assumed by observers and critics, beginning the process of culturally translating the indigenous categories and understandings of “university” (daigaku) and “professor” (kyōju). This effort will, I hope, show the internal cultural debate inherent in the HE reform drama in Japan.

Specifically, some key concepts need explanation, especially in light of the recent rhetoric of reform. Because of multivocality (the different meanings and narratives associated with a concept depending on the context), these cultural categories cannot be directly equated with “equivalents” in western universities. Kyōju appear to spend most of their time in meetings, administrative tasks, and politicking and little time in “educational” activities: teaching academic subjects to students. Likewise, time and energy spent on “research” seems limited, and the publication of the results in unrefereed, in-house journals is often considered “subpar,” not only by outsiders. However, the following are among many questions about professoriate work in Japan that remain unanswered: 1) What is the understanding of “education” and is it equivalent to a “western” notion? Is much energy expended in educationally related activities, and what is the quality of this work? 2) What qualities define a “good” professor? Is there a hierarchy of work activities and, if so, what role is considered most “important”? 3) What formal and informal bureaucratic and organizational processes pattern professoriate work and the university? How do professoriate actors negotiate and construct the organizational structure? 4) And most important, what do the answers to 1), 2), and
3) above communicate about the multivocality of indigenous understanding of such concepts as “education,” “professor,” “scholarship,” “organization,” and “reform” in Japanese HE?

The story of the Edo University of Commerce serves to address these questions. In this story, the focus is on a traditionally oriented, indigenous ideology—kazoku kyōiku (family education)—through which actors invoke an ie (household) model of Japanese kinship organization. In both ideology and practice, as an institutional organizing principle kazoku kyōiku links six different concepts that I believe are key to understanding Japanese higher education. These key concepts are: kyōiku (education), kenkyū (research), kyōju (professor), daigaku (university), soshiki (organization), and kaikaku (reform). By referring to these and a few other select concepts in their romanized vernacular, I wish to emphasize that anthropologists and observers of Japan may do well to unpack and examine them in their cultural context before making broad comparisons and assumptions on the basis of “family resemblances” (Wittgenstein 1953). If their cultural context is ignored, there is a danger of lumping concepts without discipline, missing the fact that institutions that appear remarkably similar in fact function with different internal cultural logic.

EDO UNIVERSITY OF COMMERCE

The field site for this ethnography, EUC, is a part of Edo Gakuen, a private educational “corporation” (gakkō hōjin), and founded one hundred years ago. “Gakuen” signifies that it is an academic campus as well as both its private and comprehensive nature. The gakuen is a common institutional model in Japan, best described as an educational entity that include many different schools under one umbrella—a comprehensive academy, of sorts, where school-age children can be seen walking to school together with their seniors (senpai) in high school or university. Over its one hundred years of existence, Edo Gakuen has undergone various amalgamations. Originally the Gakuen included a kindergarten, primary, and secondary school (later becoming a tertiary institution during the era of postwar reforms). Presently it consists only of a highly acclaimed kindergarten (gaining prestige largely from its location in a fairly affluent and desirable location in Tokyo but also because of the long history and excellent reputation), and the university (which, despite its history, is not very highly ranked in the strict hierarchy of the postwar Japanese university system).

The urban campus is on a few acres of prime real estate in a rather affluent area of west Tokyo, 15 minutes from both Shinjuku and Shibuya stations, two of the busiest train terminals in the world. EUC admits around 500–600 new students a year, and there are about 2,500 students enrolled in the four-year undergraduate program. There are more men than women (80/20); the school was originally not coeducational and the subject matter—commerce—does not fit with the “finishing school” mindset of a traditional college education for women (McVeigh 1997). There are two schools, the Faculty of Commerce and the Faculty of Management, and students choose from a number of different programs of study. A third division,
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Liberal Arts, of which the author was a member, plays strictly a supportive role to the other two faculties, and while there are numerous classes offered in the humanities and sciences, students can only read for a degree in one of the business faculties. As elaborated below in Chapter 1, this faculty configuration is a vestige of the “general education” (kyōō) curriculum in many Japanese universities that resulted from the prewar post-secondary prep schools (yoka) and secondary schools (kōtōgakkō) merging with the specialized HE programs (senmon) after WWII. There is also a small graduate program, which offers a masters and Ph.D. degree in business management on a full- or part-time (nights and weekends) basis, normally enrolling working adults from the Tokyo business community rather than students directly from undergraduate programs.

For the most part, since there is no student representation at a departmental or institutional level, the community is dichotomized into student (gakusei) and professor (sensei) groups, both having a contrasting cosmology (see also Lee-Cunin 2004). This is unlike British and American universities, which tend to have much stronger student representation, at least on paper. That being said, anthropologists going “undercover” to examine the social worlds of the American undergraduate student (Moffatt 1989; Nathan 2005) have shown in their ethnographic accounts that there is a similar “gap” in the U.S. (even with student representation), and faculty are certainly not very aware of the realities of student college life.

Many of the students are graduates of commercial high schools, certainly not “college material” in the days before the massification of HE in Japan, and even today there is a decidedly “vocational” stigma attached to these schools. In what is one of the finest educational ethnographies of its kind, Japan’s High Schools, Rohlen (1983) convincingly demonstrated how Japanese education, although arguably egalitarian and meritocratic through the compulsory levels of primary and lower secondary school, has a well-developed system of academic stratification at the upper secondary school level. “High school entrance exams then sort each age cohort into what amounts to an eight- to ten-tier high school ranking system” (Rohlen 1983, p. 308). Compared to countries like Germany, for example, commercial and vocational high schools have a rather low status in this strict hierarchy; most are probably in the lower percentiles of this high school ranking system in Japan. Since EUC is a commercial college, many of the students come from commercial high schools.

Some students have spent a year, occasionally more, as a “lordless samurai” (rōnin) after failing in their first attempt, cramming to sit the entrance exams at a more elite university before “giving up” and accepting a place at EUC. This is not often the first choice for many students. Because of its long history and highly acclaimed (but now defunct) upper secondary school (i.e., high school), historically Edo Gakuen has had quite a few rather illustrious graduates in the business world. However, presently EUC is definitely well down on the hierarchy of Japanese higher education institutions, usually ranked as a third- or fourth-tier university. Because of the common belief that Japanese society is a gakureki
INTRODUCTION

(shakai) (credentialized society), many students are hesitant to lower their standards and apply to a third- or fourth-rate university. There are, however, a small number of academically oriented students that find themselves at EUC because they either decided not to attend a larger, more prestigious institution for a number of reasons, or, more likely, they did not do well on their entrance exams and were forced to apply to and choose a less-competitive institution. There is also a group of international students (ryōgakusei), mostly from ASEAN countries. Some of these students are successful at the school despite the fact they are in a second language (L2) environment, while others struggle for lack of institutional support.

There are no dormitory accommodations at EUC, so it is, like most such institutions in Japan, a commuting school. The majority of the students live with their families and commute by train every day. Although a few students grew up nearby and can therefore travel by bicycle or short train ride, EUC students often end up traveling an hour or two from the more affordable “bed towns” surrounding the Tokyo metropolis. Students whose families are from distant prefectures must rent apartments nearby and live alone. This accounts for a fair proportion of the students. Even the simplest, tiny one-room flats begin at ¥40,000 to ¥50,000 a month, so this is not a preferable option for most students, at least economically, even though the tuition fees are about ¥700,000 per year, fairly average for a private institution.

EUC PROFESSORS

A salient feature of the EUC “professoriate culture” is that there is a very striking, and important, distinction between “core” and “periphery” faculty at the university. EUC employs 50–60 “full-time” (i.e., tenured) and over 100 “part-time” (i.e., adjunct) faculty. Full-time staff teach between three and eight (more for a few professors with responsibilities in the graduate program) 90-minute classes (koma) per week in addition to various committee and departmental responsibilities. The Foreign Language Department (FLG, as it is often referred to by its faculty members), of which the author was a member, comprises six full-time and nearly 30 part-time professors. The six full-time members of the FLG have between 7 to 20 years experience at the university. In addition to teaching between five and seven classes per week, all six professors are responsible for committee work, including the chairing of campus-wide committees. There is some resentment with the committee work. It is not always taken seriously. One full-time professor commented to me that “X-sensei is hardly involved in the committee he chairs so does he really deserve to be collecting the extra allowance?!”

The adjunct, part-time faculty at EUC can be divided into two groups: those with full-time positions at other schools (the minority), and professors who have a full schedule of entirely adjunct work (the majority). Most part-timers have as much experience teaching at universities as the full-time faculty. In the case of the FLG, the resources that 25 part-time professionals might bring to the department
INTRODUCTION

are impressive, if there were fewer exclusive structural impediments. Unfortunately, these resources are not always realized for various reasons, a fact that perhaps could be classified as institutional “culture.” It is rare that part-time colleagues are formally and systematically included in the curriculum planning or implementation; most of the interaction is limited to friendly pleasantries, not professional exchange. The primary responsibility they are given is that of the classroom—show up for the lessons. Although the part-time professors are on one-year contracts, for all intents and purposes the contracts are renewable without limit. In fact, the university is so reluctant to fire part-timers that even a part-time language professor who was absent without excuse for nearly half of the lessons one year was given a contract the next year, with no admonishment and at the same pay as the previous year.

The part-time faculty are not expected or allowed to attend the many “confidential” staff meetings held by full-time faculty throughout the year. Since most full-time professors have experience as part-time faculty at other institutions, there is no illusion of either expecting or allowing adjunct professors to provide input into the language program. Beliefs about the peripheral status of part-time academic staff are so strongly held that even when the “progressive” step was taken of administering a questionnaire to elicit feedback and constructive criticism from part-time professors, the data was not analyzed and basically ignored.

Conversely, a few of the (foreign) adjunct faculty feel that the tenured professors “work too hard [at administration]” and need to “get a life [outside the university] during school vacations.” There is the perception that the full-time faculty live and breathe the university, even though the assumption is that they have a choice not to be so “busy” outside the 9 to 5 workday. This interpretation misses the symbolic significance of the core/periphery distinction at EUC, however. Even if the full-time professors actually have a lighter teaching load than the part-time professors, they are involved in the powerful core activities of the university, not least of which is the faculty senate (kyōjukai). There is high value attached to participating as a “core” member of an organization, related to positive views of stability in the career and life-course of individual workers in Japan—life-long employment practices are one example. Salaries for the permanently employed salaryman in Japan (usually company office workers, but encompassing school teachers and academics) progress by seniority increments, dependent on the number of years of employment rather than on a merit system. This system is commonly known as nenkō joretsu (cf. Stockwin 2003, p. 146). A part-time, peripheral member of an organization is outside such a system so has a lower status. There is a cultural stigma associated with unattached, itinerant work, a source of stress for, especially, male academics with only part-time, status. This stigma is arguably not felt as strongly by those minorities of society already “on the margins” in Japan, such as women and members of the foreign community.

Another disjuncture arguably impeding educational change, is that between the Japanese and non-Japanese faculty. Of the forty some-odd language professors at EUC, over half are “foreigners” (gaijin). There is very little interaction between the
Japanese and western professors, for example. In fact, in the past the once-a-year faculty meeting and party for part-time professors has been divided into two separate events—one for Japanese professors and one for non-Japanese professors. There is a definite, perceived gap in teaching methodology. The foreigners tend to believe that all Japanese teaching pedagogy is basically teacher-centered, lecture-style, grammar-translation (GT), while the Japanese professors often consider the communicative classes taught by foreign professors “easy” courses. Probably due to both different ideas of teaching methodology and contrasting work ethics, the foreign staff is sometimes accused of not being “serious” by the Japanese staff. Other ethnographers have noted a similar observation. In his fieldwork, McConnell (2000) notes how Japanese English teachers have a rather serious, humorless attitude toward classroom teaching and lecturing (also mentioned in Rohen’s 1983 ethnography) and so consider any “fun” approach that foreign teachers may have in public school classrooms to be “classes without rigor.”

Informally, as well, the professors’ lounge is divided by social space into two groups: westerners and Japanese. Interestingly, even the Taiwanese Chinese professor tends to converse more with western colleagues, in English, Japanese or sometimes Mandarin. Although discussions are predominately not about work-related issues, peer support is evident, and teaching methodology and classroom management ideas are shared fairly openly among western colleagues.

One of the major perceived differences involves divergent ideas of university education. Although most foreign-language professors are lenient in their assigning of year-end grades, 10 percent of all students still fail to pass the first-year English classes required for graduation. In informal interviews and on questionnaires, non-Japanese professors reveal that the majority of these students fail because of lack of attendance. Special classes are then set aside for second-year students to “repeat” the required coursework they failed to complete in their first year of compulsory studies. When the pedagogical appropriateness of this segregation was questioned, a Japanese faculty member commented that the practice, though not educationally sound and certainly not western, was in line with a perceived difference in the “Japanese philosophy of university education. By “giving” unmotivated students credits merely as a convenience, there is less conflict because the students are allowed to graduate.”

Interestingly, however, not all professors have the same ideology. As described in more detail below, a Japanese business professor refused to pass a student who, without excuse or prior communication with the professor, handed in a term paper two weeks late. The student, upset that she could not graduate, performed “ritual begging” (seiza) in the administration office together with her mother, and then later was found crying in the president’s office. She did not graduate. The fact that a Japanese professor did not budge on his decision to fail a student points out that even though there may be a gap between Japanese and non-Japanese staff, diversity among staff teaching philosophies is not strictly divided along Japanese/non-Japanese lines.
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What are faculty views on education and pedagogy? In a formal sense, though there is much concern about the basic abilities of EUC students, there is a tacit understanding that these students do not come from the most privileged backgrounds, have not had the best high school educations, and most are struggling with their intellectual development. In the front-stage formal forum (such as a special meeting on the freshman seminar class), there is a push to standardize and consolidate and otherwise “audit,” the instruction of basic writing and research skills for all first-year students. Again, there is conflict between an “agreement” that most freshmen do not have the proper skills to “succeed” at university and an “academic pride” that a university professor should have the autonomy to teach the way he/she sees fit (Marshall 1994). In a comparative light, Reid (1986) points out that in Britain, “like sexual activity, teaching is seen as an intimate act which is most effectively and properly conducted when shrouded in privacy,” and this privacy includes concern for autonomy from peers as well.

Most classes, especially those in the curriculum that are requisite for graduation, are large lectures. Some have upwards of 400–500 students, which is interesting since the largest lecture hall at EUC only has seating capacity for about 300. Of course such “overbooking” assumes that many students will not attend the lectures or drop out of the class.

In an entrance ceremony speech, the university president observed that chatting during lectures is endemic in these classes (though some professors purportedly do not have much of an attention problem in their classes, which points to a diversity of experience and teaching styles). Attendance is rarely part of the assessment for lecture courses, where for the most part the grading depends totally on a year-end examination either with high “reliability” (i.e., usually a multiple choice test) or high “validity” (e.g., short essay test²⁰), but rarely both. On the other hand, computer, bookkeeping, language, and seminar-based courses usually include attendance and participation as part of the year-end assessment. Language classes, for example, tend to be smaller—anywhere from a handful of students to no more than 40 or so—and assessment is often more “valid,” but less “reliable” (e.g., spoken assessment through short interviews).

THE ETHNOGRAPHER

There is a recent tendency in ethnographies—whether they describe fieldwork carried out in a “home” society, a “foreign” society, or a multisited combination of both—for the anthropologist to reflexively discuss his or her own role in the research. As a full participant and player at my field site, I feel it is imperative to state at this introductory juncture that, as with any ethnographic account, this project is inherently biased inasmuch as a description of social reality as constructed from the perspective of the describer. My voice is that of observer, participant, and player (and not always in this order).

Since my field site choice was made out of personal interest in addition to a basic theoretical concern, rather than familiarizing the exotic, as is often the case in
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anthropology, I was struck by the uncommon challenge of exoticizing the familiar—my everyday experiences at my field site—of having to think of my Japanese university field site, EUC, as the analogue of an aboriginal community in the outback of Australia. The difficulty of viewing a familiar social environment in an “unfamiliar” way is not to be underestimated. I grappled with an inner battle to separate my three roles—the personas of Greg the anthropologist, Greg the jokyōju (associate professor), and Greg. A collision of these personas was, alas, inevitable at a few frustrating moments, and during this project more than once I came face to face with my own expectations and prejudices.

It is one problem to learn to adapt to a new workplace (which I had done fairly well), but quite another matter to step back from this workplace in order to conduct fieldwork and write an ethnography based on these professional workplace experiences. The one advantage I did have is the fact that I am writing this ethnographic account about Japan for an English audience. If the university had been in London or Boston, for example, I believe the cultural translation would have been more difficult to exoticize. If this account sounds plausible and “normal” to my informants, that perhaps would be an indication of success.

Certainly there may be alternative readings to the ethnographic material, analyses, and conclusions that I present below, depending on the referential point of the reader. Although I have practiced a certain vigilance in seeking out a variety of voices by speaking to older professors, younger professors, women, part-time lecturers, administrative staff, and students, the reader may legitimately ask to what extent the writer is shackled by his own beliefs as a full-time, male professor in his forties. If the writer was a sixty-five-year-old veteran at the university, might not he come up with an entirely different interpretation of events and alternate analysis of social reality at EUC? Such a question, of course, has been posed, and debated, in sociocultural anthropology (e.g., famously, Freeman 1983; Lewis 1951; Mead 1928; Redfield 1930).

“STUDYING UP” AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The inherent capacity for humans to learn, a capacity that arguably defines the limits of anthropology (Riley 1988, pp. 19–20), is a social process that has always been a concern central to anthropology. This concern has not always been applied explicitly to educational studies. Kroeber’s inventory for ethnographers (Kroeber 1953) failed to list education as one area of application of anthropology. Though anthropologists often described socialization, the result of education, the process itself was not always investigated fully as “teaching” or “learning” or “education,” per se.21 Indeed, as Roger Goodman (2001a) points out, educational anthropology is certainly at the core of the anthropological agenda, even though fifty years later educational anthropology “has yet to create … a niche for itself as a separate academic discipline.” 22 Much of the classic work of sociologists and anthropologists in the field has focused on the social worlds of schools and formal education (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Lacey 1970; McDermott 1993; Rohlen 9
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One aspect of education that has not yet been adequately addressed by anthropologists is “noncompulsory schooling,” such as postsecondary education. Although there are a few studies of universities (Bourdieu 1988; Bourdieu et al 1994; Moffatt 1989; Nathan 2005), for the most part higher education and other forms of adult schooling has not been investigated with nearly the same rigor as has pre-, primary, and secondary schooling. Like Gumperz and Gumperz (1994) suggest in their description of recent anthropological approaches to language and education, this study supports neither a functionalist nor neo-Marxist analysis, but focuses rather on an interpretative and discursive approach to analyzing professoriate construction of “work” at the university.

For example, to explain such interaction by following the dichotomous model of formal/informal education, kyōiku (education) at a Japanese university, this category of noncompulsory, school-based education can be further dichotomized into academic and nonacademic learning. Professors’ view of Japanese university education is focused on a considerable amount of informal, nonacademic learning for students. Inculcating the “college life” involves the learning of skills as well as sociocultural norms and roles. After a rather structured high school culture, students are said to be learning the important norms of the culture of working adults (shakaijin) by participating in, for example, off-campus seminars with professors (zemi gasshuku), part-time jobs, independent living, club activities, and drinking parties. In addition to this nonacademic, informal educational mode, there is the academic, informal mode of the ubiquitous “seminar” (zemi) classes themselves, where students practice group-based research projects and apprentice-like learning.

Therefore, to paraphrase Lave (in Pelissier 1991, pp. 88–89), although students and professors are in a formal, contractual relationship through university tuition fees, it is not teaching and learning that organize activity, but the activity of college life that organizes teaching and learning. Both students and professors are focused on the activity of college life, which in turn provides opportunities for learning, not the reverse. This fits also with Lave’s (1991) concept of Limited Peripheral Participation (LPP), which focuses on the idea that learning an identity is as important as learning a skill. At least one scholar of Japanese education admits that it is “a reasonable argument that identity formation, especially in terms of social identity and social maturation, is very significant at the Japanese tertiary level” (Cummings 2003).

Additionally, I would like to consider the Japanese university in this era of reform, the activity of college life, as a locale not only for studying students’ social identity but that of the professors. Not only has much of the anthropological work focused on compulsory schooling, but it is largely concerned with either the processes of social reproduction in education or the recipients themselves, the
students. Historically anthropologists have focused on studying “the weak” in both nonwestern, small-scale societies as well as postindustrial states (Moore 2005, p. 2; Nader 1972). In the study of education as well, anthropologists have tended to look at the culture of the nonelite, the children or students, often minorities, in a hegemonic system. When “the powerful” groups are considered, it is often an analysis of the hegemonic power of bureaucrats and intellectuals, rather than an actual case study of the elite within a particular educational community (Bailey 1977; Bourdieu 1988; McVeigh 2002b; Strathern 2000a). The study I have undertaken, though, investigates the social identity of the professoriate—the perspective of professors on noncompulsory schooling, education at a university in Japan.25

Analyses of the global reforms of HE as a bureaucratic, business-like phenomenon of an “audit culture” potentially conflates the categories of thought that are critical to a proper contextual understanding of the various HE systems in industrialized societies. Though there is much to be said for constructing models of reform to describe similar practices of university reform across societies, much of the literature has taken Euro-American organizations as the starting point (Strathern 2000a). I focus more on the construction of these educational organizations by the actors themselves. I argue that in fact if we attempt to deconstruct the keywords and cultural debates that categorized noncompulsory schooling in a nonwestern society, we will ultimately be more effective in understanding our own cultural categories.

Admittedly, such analyses have not always been feasible through participatory ethnographic methods at institutions of formal education. Ogbu excuses this lapse. “Although ethnographers of education cannot establish a long period of residence among their subjects [sic], as in classical ethnographic research, they do maintain a long period of association with the school populations” (Ogbu 1996, p. 373). In my case, I have been able to establish both a long period of residence and a long period of association not only as a researcher but also in my role as an employee under contractual obligation.

CULTURAL TRANSLATION

The translation of internal cultural categories of one society into concepts understandable in another has long been considered a defining project of the field of social anthropology (Beidelman 1971). Such translation becomes especially critical in cases where terms appear to have a linear gloss across two languages, but the cultural reality describes quite different meanings. This is the case for higher education in Japan, where the cultural categories of daigaku, kyōju, kyōiku, and kenkyū, for example, carry quite different meanings from the terms into which they are typically translated—“university,” “professor,” “education,” and “research.” Throughout this book I will be exploring such cultural constructions in search of the meanings behind the cultural categories of the Japanese daigaku.
Admittedly cultural translation is a contested concept (Asad 1986; Ingold 1993), not least because much of the work in this area is conveyed into powerful western languages and hegemonic academic discourse. Nonetheless, we do not necessarily have to adhere to a discontinuous, bounded, functionalist world view in order to admit the value of interpretation and the fact that “social anthropologists are engaged in establishing a methodology for the translation of cultural language” (Leach 1973, p. 772). This translation does not need to be of an artificial sort that arbitrarily divides the world through an alienating discourse (Ingold 1993, p. 230), but can be rather an exploration into the interpretation of the complex cultural meanings in situ of identities and subjectivities (Hall 2002, p. 2).

The increasingly global world of higher education is a domain in which the actors, in this case my kyōju informants/colleagues and me, are moving between two cultures—one familiar and one less familiar—and thus are struggling to translate the cultural meanings of terms such as “syllabus,” “faculty development,” “accountability,” “admissions office,” and, not least, “professor” and “university.”

Those outside the field but with keen interest in language have made the observation that anthropologists may evade the obvious engagement with linguistic terrain when discussing or practicing the translation of culture (Jordan 2002, p. 100). This is not entirely the case, however, as using the idea of “key verbal concepts” (Parkin 1978) or “rich points” (Agar 1991, 1993) anthropologists have often undergone ethnographic work that is sensitive to translating the way in which informants speak their worlds and perform their identities, a method of cultural interpretation that has been labeled “ethnosemantics” or “semantic anthropology” (Parkin 1982). This is one approach I use in this ethnography. Exploring the cultural categories of daigaku, I find it fruitful to examine within the discourse of the professoriate the contested meanings (or multivocality) of certain “keywords” (Moeran 1984; Wierzbicka 1997; Williams 1976), six of which I summarize in the concluding chapter.
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JAPANESE TERTIARY EDUCATION

Japanese education has been a focus of numerous comparative studies for the past 30 years. Many scholars have attributed the economic success of this industrialized society to a highly literate and well-educated “human capital.” However, over the past few years, some scholars (Horio 1988; McVeigh 2002b; Schoppa 1988; 1991; Yoneyama 1999) have tended to be more critical of the Japanese educational machinery, often concluding that without major reform the system of schooling in Japan may not adequately service societal needs in the 21st century.

Although arguably the least regulated and therefore a potential starting place for change, tertiary education in Japan has been targeted by observers as lagging far behind that of Western societies, an embarrassment to one of the world’s largest economies and a potential Achilles heel in the fine-tuned engine that is the Japanese state and economy (McVeigh 2002b). In a polemic against putative trade barriers toward foreign professors working in Japan, one critic (Hall 1995, 1998) has even charged Japanese universities with “academic apartheid.” Over the years, others have suggested that this accusation of cultural and national parochialism might apply to segments of the hegemonic Euro-American academy as well. Indeed, I would like to emphasize here that unfortunately much of the comparative educational debate on Japanese education in the U.S. and Europe is sometimes fueled by journalistic, and occasionally overblown, polemic reports on Japanese education that are often not substantiated with qualitative data.

Many universities in Japan are acutely aware of the need for change, and a considerable effort at institutional change has been sweeping the nation (Amano 2004), a somewhat global trend, since colleges and universities in Europe and Asia are also undergoing a period of upheaval (Altbach 1997, 1999). This change, or “reform” as it is often called, is especially noteworthy if the intrinsic conservative nature of such institutions is considered. Furthermore, discourses of reform are unique in the academic world of debate if only because the subject being discussed directly affects the careers of the discussants. Whether an academic is an expert in the field of education or not, all professors at universities seem to have an opinion on this subject. A parallel, but different, example can be found in the world of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the field of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In countries such as Japan where English is widely taught as a foreign or second language, most teachers (and even the average man or woman on the street, for that matter), no matter what their subject area, have an opinion on how English should or should not be taught simply because of their own experience in learning the language.
As Roger Goodman (2001b) pointed out in the introduction to a workshop on East Asian HE at the University of Oxford, “lay” opinions are not often taken seriously, or even considered, by those implementing the reforms, a point that others have made as well (Wisniewski 2000). Indeed, educational experts themselves are not all of the same mind, and some have questioned the need for HE reform, as the title of a lecture at the Nissan Institute suggests: “Why Reform Japanese Education?” (Cummings 2003).

Despite the recent interest in university reform, years ago Nakano lamented how “Despite the increasing popular demand for understanding ‘universities’ (professors, students and what is going on in campus) … little has been done by sociologists to clarify the facts about this part of the social phenomena” (Nakano 1974, p. 47). Twenty years later, another researcher echoes this same point, noting that it is especially the case that “Relatively little research on academic staff has been done. Even studies done in the United States—which are the most important ones in this field—are only a small part of Higher Education research” (Karpen 1993, p. 142).

Much of the literature speaks in generalities, usually about the problems with the Japanese tertiary system, namely: 1) no quality control (e.g., private accrediting associations, university assessments, course evaluations, departmental reviews, interuniversity evaluations, inspection committees, peer review, etc.); 2) bureaucratization (HE is centrally monitored by the Ministry of Education, which discourages innovation); 3) lack of competition (no probationary period in the tenure system); and 4) superficial schooling (no semester system means students are enrolled in fifteen classes per week, and since the lectures are uninspiring, attendance is poor) (McVeigh 2001). These criticisms notwithstanding, obviously “there are no stereotypical generalizations that explain all of Japanese education” (Shields 1998, p. 133).

**DAIGAKU: THE UNIVERSITY IN JAPAN**

The development of tertiary education in Japan, as with education in general, can be divided into two if not three historical stages or periods of reforms (Hada 1999)—the internal period of reform after the Meiji Restoration (1868), the stage during the Occupation (after World War II) that was motivated by “external guidance” (largely American), and a third wave of “internally motivated” changes, which are taking place at the moment. Of course “internal” and “external” must be considered in a relative sense, since a modern nation like Japan is certainly not immune to global trends—indeed, one may argue that *gaiatsu* (external, international pressure) in some cases defines Japanese internal policymaking.

The University of Tokyo was established in 1877 by the Meiji government as the first public *daigaku* in modern Japan and in both university rankings and national psyche is commonly recognized as the most prestigious institution of its kind in the country. Rankings of educational institutions in Japan are closely scrutinized by the public. In terms of international rankings, even though the
criteria and objectivity was questionable, the Gourman Report ranking of the University of Tokyo at a mere 67th among universities worldwide was an embarrassing but oft-cited statistic, part of the “culture of self-criticism” in Japanese education circles. This reaction speaks loudly to 1) the high prestige with which Tokyo University is held in Japanese society and 2) the history of sensitivity in Japan of criticism from the west (as well as a self-criticism, a sort of “What do the foreigners think of us?” syndrome), which may be a throwback to the post-Meiji push for modernization. The University of Tokyo has been given some belated redemption in recent international university rankings of research quality by the Times Higher Educational Supplement and Shanghai Jiao Tong University and in both studies ranks first among all universities outside North America and Europe and 12th and 14th, respectively, in the world.

The name was changed to Tokyo Imperial University with the Imperial University Act of 1886, its purpose defined by the Teikoku Daigaku Rei (The Imperial University Ordinance) as “to provide instruction in the arts and sciences and to inquire into the mysteries of learning in accordance with the needs of the state” (Nagai 1971, p. 21). Within thirty years, the Meiji government had established four more imperial universities (Kyoto, Tohoku, Kyushu, and Hokkaido). All institutions were expected to, and did, contribute to the modernization process, so important to Japan’s “mission” at the time. Entrance examination competition to the national universities was (and arguably still is) fierce, as it also was for the university preparatory schools, the higher schools (kōtōgakkō). The imperial universities included faculties of law, engineering, agriculture, medicine, and natural sciences, a much more vocational focus than had been the case with higher education in the past.

The demand for higher education increased tremendously during this period of rapid modernization, and to fill this need a private tertiary sector parallel to the flagship national institutions also developed. Keio Gijuku (Keio University), the oldest of these private institutions of higher education in Japan, actually predates Tokyo University by twenty years, though it has been argued that the institutional roots of Tokyo University can be traced back to a shogunate research institute for Dutch studies, the Tenmon-kata, or Astronomy Office, established in 1684 under Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, the fifth shogun of the Edo period. On the other hand, Keio Gijuku was founded in 1858 by an intellectual leader of the time, Fukuzawa Yukichi (whose portrait adorns the Japanese ten-thousand yen note), as a private school for Dutch studies in Tsukiji, Edo (present-day Tokyo). Along with Waseda University (founded twenty-five years later as the Tokyo Senmon Gakkō by Ōkuma Shigenobu, a scholar and government leader), Keio University developed into one of the two most prestigious private universities in Japan. Keio and the other privates received no government subsidies and for lack of financial resources were initially forced to focus on the cost-effective subjects of the humanities and social sciences, foregoing the establishment of strong departments in the hard sciences for lack of money (Yamamoto 1999). Despite this, and the fact that they were not granted full legal status until 1918, these private universities grew in
number, and by 1925 more than half of all university graduates in Japan had attended private institutions (Amano 1989). Except for the institutions led by the liberal minds of Fukuzawa (Keio University), Ōkuma (Waseda University), and Niijima (Doshisha University), most of the other privates were not necessarily “united in the quest for academic independence and freedom of inquiry,” either seeking to restore pre-Meiji traditional values (e.g., Toyo University) or provide a semiofficial conservative education for aspiring lawyers (e.g., Chuo, Meiji, and Hosei Universities) and “private higher education during this period was the scene of active conflict among these heterogeneous elements ...” (Nagai 1971).

Before the Second World War, the role of the university in Japan was to provide education for the elite, while the multitrack system of higher schools and technical schools served the needs of mass education. The United States Education Mission arrived in Japan in March of 1946, and under the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law of 1947, the prewar system was streamlined into a single-track of higher education that defined three types of tertiary institutions: four-year universities and two or three-year junior colleges for graduates of high school, and five-year colleges of technology available for students directly from lower secondary school (i.e., middle school). The Education Mission recommended that tertiary education be available to the masses, “setting a standard of free thought, bold inquiry, and hopeful action for the people” (Nagai 1971, p. 48).

Accordingly, the Occupation stressed a liberal arts education, and the present state of (relative) confusion in the nationwide General Education (GE) curricula at universities can be traced back to 1947, when the Education Mission converted the curricula of the state-run higher schools along with the independent, postsecondary prep schools (yoka) into the first- and second-year General Education curricula at public and private undergraduate schools throughout Japan. These higher schools and prep schools were literally transferred in their entirety into the universities—materials, methods, and faculty—with little effort at integration with the more specialized subjects of the university faculties. In fact, the prep school curriculum of the 1920s is strikingly similar to the GE curricula at most universities today, 80 years later (Terauchi, 1996, 2001). There was little attempt to incorporate a system of majors and minors that might have better harmonized the disparity. Instead, a dichotomy between General Education professors and specialist (SE) faculty evolved. Many in Japan could not accept the lack of differentiation and specialist training that was imposed by the “liberalist” Occupation. The new tertiary colleges were clearly inferior institutions labeled “universities” (Schoppa 1991, p. 36), a situation that still exists—as mentioned above, daigaku does not necessarily translate into “university” in either an American or British sense of the term (Kinmouth 2005, p. 107). Even in the ivory-white echelons of Tokyo University, the festering debate amongst the faculty over the lack of quality in GE compared with that of specialized training came to a head in the 1980s; three senior professors resigned in disgust (Marshall 1994, p. 247).
This second period of university development was certainly successful in terms of growth, however. A veritable boom in Japanese higher education furthered the heterogeneity of the institutions. At the end of the Second World War, Japan had 48 universities (both state and private) and approximately 100,000 college students total. In 1969, barely twenty years later, those numbers had risen to 1.6 million students enrolled in 852 universities, state and private. Twenty percent of the college-age group was enrolled in higher education institutions (Nagai 1971, p. 45). By 2003 the official Ministry of Education numbers had climbed to 4,729 tertiary institutions enrolling 1.14 million students with 75 percent of these students enrolled in private institutions, for an 87 percent participation rate of 18-year-olds. This participation rate is for entrants into tertiary institutions, not graduates, and assumes the historical average of nearly 100 percent of entrants being in the 18-year-old age bracket. This present rate is one of true “universal access” to higher education (Trow 2005), not even equaled by the United States amongst OECD nations, and probably impacting the “Japanese imagination” in ways that have not yet been fully explored by researchers as it has in other societies. Eickelman (1992) keenly observes the impact of mass higher education on the interplay of religion, politics, and national identity in Arab societies. I know of no such anthropological study of the connections between universal access to HE and Japanese sociocultural concerns, though McVeigh (1997) deftly explores the impact of college socialization on issues of gender and “internationalization.”

Despite the incredible diversity evident in the sheer numbers of institutions and students, explanations of university governance in Japan (Arimoto 1997; Kuroha 1993; Maruyama 2002; McVeigh 2001; 2002b; Okushima 2002b; Ushiogi 2002) invariably paint a picture of government bureaucratization. Indeed, all higher educational institutions are subject to careful state scrutiny at the time of their establishment and when adding new faculties. When EUC went through a three-year process of accreditation from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) to establish a new faculty, the procedure was quite costly, and the paperwork time-consuming. This is the mechanism that MEXT uses to assess new faculties and universities, both state and private, under the “Standards for the Establishment of Universities,” keeping a relatively tight grip on the reigns of university expansion and assessment (Hosoi et al. 1998; Kitamura 1996).

This MEXT grip on HE might not be as totalitarian as first appearances would have one believe, however (Kaneko 1998). Since until recently there had been virtually no horizontal self-inspection on behalf of universities through external accreditation agencies (as in the United States’ regional, independent accreditation system), the MEXT authority was perhaps a necessary evil. At least it afforded some semblance of assessment in a top-down fashion, from the government perspective of auditing from above. In spite of the centralized bureaucracy, the laissez-faire nature of this university governance means that the overall autonomy of HE institutions in Japan is equivalent to that of European, if not American, universities, and the overall assessment and regulation is probably less. Indeed,
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with the new semiprivatization of national universities (dokuritsu gyōsei hōjinka) stance of MEXT, not only state and public but private universities as well have been afforded even more freedom in both their day-to-day affairs as well as long-term funding, though this approach is not without ulterior motives (Hatakenaka 2005).

Management and administration at the state universities, national and local, have the European traits of strong faculty autonomy and committee structure—bottom-up governance (kyōjukai shihai) (Egnor 2001, Goodman 2009). The major responsibility for university administration matters and academic affairs lies with the faculty senate; historically the executive powers of deans and the president are relatively weak. MEXT privatization reforms have affected an increase in executive style management (rijikai shihai), embracing a managerialism that follows closely the recent U.K. model of HE governance.

Private universities also place much of the responsibility for governance in the hands of the professors, though this is usually limited to mostly academic matters, while the business side of the school is run in a more top-down fashion with the chairman of the board of trustees representing the corporation of the private school. As with state institutions, government reform and other pressures for change have infused even more top-down power structures in the privates as well, (Eades, personal communication). In my experience there is a diversity of approach of school governance in the private sector, and the generalizations made by some authors do not necessarily apply to all cases. For example, Arimoto (1997, p. 202) discusses how in the state sector the president is elected by the vote of the kyōjukai, “but in the private sector it is a committee of the trustees that selects the president.” However, at EUC I have observed and participated in the selection of two presidents by vote at the faculty senate, totally independent of the board of trustees.

JUKEN: EXAM PRESSURES

The phenomenon of daigaku entrance exam pressures is infamous in the west, a defining image of the cut-throat competition among high school students for places at the most prestigious HE institutions. Based on my experience at EUC and my observations in Japanese society, I believe the reality today is different from what is, or what has been, portrayed in Japanese and western media.

As mentioned above, Japan has one of the highest rates of university attendance among all industrialized nations, with 51 percent of all 18-year-olds (almost 1 percent of the entire population) enrolling as undergraduates at over 700 national, public, and private four-year universities (Hirowatari 2000). If one considers participation in all tertiary institutions, not just universities, the U.K. figure for the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) was 44 percent in 2002/3, while in Japan the rate was nearly twice that—51 percent for universities and junior colleges and 36 percent for “specialized training” and “miscellaneous” colleges, according to the 2003 figures on the MEXT website. Over half of all
Japanese teenagers, then, apply to take an entrance examination for admission into a university or junior college. The entrance system into these universities and colleges in Japan has been described as a hierarchical system of “examination hell” (じゅうけんじごく) by more than one critic (Cutts 1997; Yoneyama 1999). Families invest enormous resources, both in time and money, for students to cram for the tests. In nearly one-third of these cases, students even devote a year or two after high school to further prepare to sit the examination yet again, often receiving intense instruction at preparatory schools designed to help them cram for these tests.

However, to what extent this “hell” affects the entire university-bound student population is open to considerable debate. Hood points out that the predominant assumption that almost all Japanese students have to endure an examination hell is both “over-hyped” (Hood 2001a, p. 7) and “was probably never correct and certainly does not apply now” (Hood 2001b, p. 166). The obvious reason is that as in Euro-American HE systems, the pressure on students taking entrance examinations is directly proportional to the prestige of the institution to which they are applying (Lee-Cunin 2004, 2005). After helping to prepare and administer entrance exams and interview questions for the selection of three cohorts of incoming freshman at EUC, I must admit that my data is supportive of Hood’s analysis. The majority of entrance exam takers are not worried about getting into a university as much as which university. EUC entrants are not shooting for the top universities, so the students I have spoken with assure me that they felt no exam hell type of pressure. This EUC-type group is statistically the largest group of exam takers.

Nonetheless, in a competitive atmosphere, these tests for entrance into universities are given great importance by students, parents, institutions, and the general public. Considering the authority these university examinations hold in Japanese society, as well as the “washback” effect they have in influencing rote memorization pedagogical strategies in secondary schools, in my experience a commensurate assessment of the quality of the tests themselves is usually lacking (Poole 2003a). Each university in Japan develops and administers an in-house entrance examination, and the entrance test developers themselves, as well as the institutions where they are employed, are especially hesitant to offer public data that would objectively evaluate these numerous admissions examinations. My involvement in test development has been with the foreign language portion of the exams—admissions examinations include a compulsory English proficiency subtest, although English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is not officially a state-required subject at primary, secondary, or tertiary schools in Japan. Partly because of this university entrance examination focus on English, while there is only a small, albeit growing (Aspinall 2005), number of students exposed to language classes in primary school, over 10 million 12- to 18-year-olds, and another million or so university students, have no choice but to study English.

Since universities in Japan do not normally have an American-style admissions office, the Admissions Committee, a group of appointed faculty, is responsible for
the PR and recruiting process. At EUC all fifty-nine full-time faculty members are expected to support this committee and must be present to administer the examinations during the exam season in January and February. The English portion of these examinations (of which I have firsthand knowledge) is developed from scratch in-house every year by the entire staff of six foreign-language professors. The content of the language examination is for the most part determined practically. Individual professors are very conscious of completing the onerous task of test writing as swiftly and painlessly as possible. For this reason, previous examinations are used as models, and only slight modifications are made year to year. It is no surprise that, since there is no resident testing “expert” and nothing but very rudimentary knowledge of language assessment, the full-time professors among the staff at EUC hold very little discussion regarding either communicative language testing methodology or exam quality. There is, however, much discussion and concern for “saving face,” i.e., avoiding mistakes in clarity, grammar, spelling, and typing mistakes. There is also tremendous care taken with maintaining the security of the tests; the drafts are kept under lock and key as they go through the various proofreading processes over the course of three months, from October to December (cf. Aspinall 2005; Poole 2003a).

The perception of an exam hell is closely tied to the ideal of an “educationally credentialized society” (gakureki shakai), or a society that places utmost importance on a person’s educational background, particularly where they studied rather than what they studied, a “diploma disease” of sorts (Dore 1976). In many cases, the extraordinary emphasis on ranking colleges and universities has led to a brand-name sensitivity that may affect a person for his/her entire life. Observers argue, and the public knows, that one effect of a credentialized society is the phenomenon of exam hell. The pressure to pass high-stake exams is felt by many young adults in Japan (as well as South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and other OECD countries), and some critics argue this pressure is great even when applying to second- or third-rate “low-status” schools such as EUC (McVeigh 2001, p. 31). Most teenagers are expected to prove their exam-taking talent on these fact-oriented examinations, even though they are rarely pushed to excel academically once they have matriculated at a college or university (McVeigh 1997). Another of the negative aspects of credentialization, as discussed in the literature, is that entrance into a university is often equated with passing the test. This is partly true since, though admissions procedures are becoming more creative, the majority of universities have resisted any change in a system that has been in place, so it is argued, since the late 1800s (Amano 1990). One school of thought sees the university entrance and overall education system itself as inherently immobile (Frost 1991; Schoppa 1991), a societal “filtering” mechanism to create a class structure where otherwise none purportedly exists (McVeigh 2002b).

In this university entrance system, students are strictly ranked according to a mock examination system administered by prep schools in which individuals are assigned a score (hensachi) that is norm-referenced and indexed nationally (Brown 1995). Using this score, high school and prep school teachers advise their students
about which university entrance examinations they should take based on the probability of their acceptance (a high school teacher’s reputation is on the line if their students shoot too high and miss their mark—conservatism is a necessity). In fact, the largest cram school syndicates in the Tokyo and Osaka area publish *hensachi* ranking lists of two- and four-year colleges and universities, which students and teachers use to make application decisions.

Japanese society is faced with two demographic challenges that have affected, among other social systems, the university and entrance exam systems. These phenomena have been termed low birthrate syndrome (*shōshika*) and aging syndrome (*kōreika*). These, of course, have repercussions throughout society, and schools are witnessing the effects. Most universities in Japan have seen, first, a slowing in the rate of applicants, and, then, an overall decrease in the number of students sitting the yearly examinations. This has forced a normally conservative sector of society to move in relatively innovative ways in an attempt to counteract the growing inability to attract students.

Even top-name schools in the higher echelons of the rankings have had to consider the ramifications of increasingly fewer applicants each year. Not the least of their concerns are financial, of course, since entrance examination fees are a substantial source of revenue, even for the prestigious, but inexpensive, national universities (roughly ¥20,000 per student). No school in Japan can afford to sit on the laurels of past achievement and national prestige, least of all the universities occupying the lower rankings. University prep and cram schools have instituted an "F" rank, designating those universities where the entrance examination is a mere formality, since nearly any student that applies and sits the exams and interviews is automatically accepted. Such universities have a tacit open admissions (*zen'nyū*) policy, and the post-2007 period, the year when nationally the number of 18-year-olds equaled the number of university enrolment places, has been labeled the "era of open admissions [to universities]" (*zen'nyū jidai*).

**SOSHIKI: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Although much has been made of the decentralized and autonomous system of professorship chairs (*kōza*) that organizes departments and university life at the former imperial university, there is a huge diversity of institutional structure among HEIs in Japan. Some generalizations about *daigaku* organizational structure can be made by examining a specific institution, such as EUC (see Appendix for the "official" organizational map of EUC).

Other participant observers have characterized both American academics and the organizational structure of academe as generally competitive, self-aggrandizing, hierarchical, and highly conscious of an administrator vs. faculty divide within the HEI (Lutz 1986; Wisniewski 2000). In what ways does or does not the ethnographic data for Japan, and for EUC specifically, bear out these same generalizations made of American HE?
CHAPTER 1

In describing the organizational hierarchy of kyōju at EUC, one of the first observations to be made is the sharp distinction that emphasizes the full-time and part-time (hijōkin) faculty, as mentioned above. Although hijōkin is usually glossed as “part-time,” more accurate is the direct translation, “non-full-time.” Much has been written about how “part-time” is a misnomer, since many professors who do not have a full-time position are teaching as many, if not more, hours than the “full-time” staff, but for less pay and no benefits—a second-class or under-class professoriate (Pratt 1997). At EUC and many other universities in Japan as well, this is largely the case.

Hijōkin faculty often teach as many, and sometimes even more, classes than full-time faculty, if demand for professors in their subject is high (e.g., language, computer science, accounting, etc.). They are usually paid in the order of ¥300,000 to ¥400,000 per year-long course (roughly 26 weeks of one 90-minute class per week). The most ambitious hijōkin professors, usually busy language teachers in a large metropolis, have part-time work at three, four, or five different universities and are able to make as much as ¥7 million a year by teaching intensively for the roughly six-month university calendar of classes. When one considers that the cost of living in Tokyo or Osaka is probably less than London, and the fact that a hijōkin university lecturer can potentially take five or even six months of holiday with no pressure of research papers to write or committee meetings to attend, it is no wonder that quite a few hijōkin are content being “non-full-time.”

On the other hand, it is a precarious existence with no guarantee of classes from year to year, no pay raises or bonuses, no office space or money for research, and no health or retirement benefits. To make a living teaching part-time, a professor has to be able to build a full and intense schedule of university work, literally in the classroom teaching at least eight hours a day, five or even six days a week for those six months of classes. This could take years of networking to achieve, and because of the demand for “native” university English professors and the ample supply of Japanese English professors, this aim is more realistically achieved by a foreign instructor than a Japanese instructor. Also, foreigners sometimes receive a higher per class wage than Japanese teaching the same class, a practice that can probably be traced back to the Meiji era system of hiring “foreign employees” (oyatoi gaikokujin) to train the emerging Japanese elite.

For Japanese professors, this is compounded by the fact that without a “real” full-time position, socially one has an “unaffiliated” status in Japan, less of a problem for foreigners who are already outside the system (indeed, the word for foreigner in Japanese literally means “outside person”). For this reason, many are content with their part-time existence out of necessity—they see no hope for securing a full-time position because of the scarcity and competition. There is little time for research or further credentialization.

At a liberal arts department meeting in September 2002, Baba-sensei, who sits on the board of trustees and is one of the most vocal of the senior faculty members, implied that the new curriculum being proposed for implementation in 2004 and 2005 would be partly designed to minimize the number of part-time faculty being
employed at EUC. This was a cost-cutting strategy, because our subsidy from MEXT was to be less in a few years time, and “since EUC employs the third-largest number of hijōkin in Japan, we must reduce the number.” This is an interesting statement if compared with much of the literature in the U.S. that describes part-time faculty employment as clearly an exploitation of cheap labor. At EUC the board of trustees identified hijōkin as expensive labor. Full-time faculty are on a salaried wage, of course, and not directly reimbursed for each class taught as are the part-time instructors. Rather than hiring part-time staff, it makes economic sense for management to simply ask full-time staff to teach more class hours for the same pay.

Once a full-time position is procured by an academic at EUC, competition for academic status is not a great motivator for the professors I observed and spoke with. For one, there is no tenure system, a major factor in most accounts of competition, uncertainty and stress at universities in North America (Pescosolido & Aminzade 1999a; Tierney 1999; Tierney & Bensimon 1996). Once hired as full-time at whatever the rank, job security is guaranteed. The great divide in the faculty at EUC is between full-time, permanent faculty members and contract academic staff, either employed on a two or three-year contract basis (ninkitsuki) or as part-time faculty to teach a certain number of classes on a year-to-year basis (hijōkin).

Hierarchical Structure

The hierarchical structure of the university organization is more important in terms of ideology (tatemae) than actual practice (honne). Tatemae (the official or explicit rule, the “surface ideology”) and honne (unofficial or hidden rule, the “actual practice”) is a dichotomy critical to understanding the social world of Japan, used effectively as units for analysis in Japanese organizational life (Graham 2001, 2003, 2004). For example, moving up the ladder, from sen'nin kōshi (assistant professor in the U.S.), jokyōju (associate professor), to kyōju (full professor) offers only incremental increases in pay, roughly ¥8,000 per month, or around ¥130,000 per year if bonuses are figured into the equation. This pay increase is even less attractive if one considers that an equal increase in pay is awarded on a yearly basis, regardless of performance or rank, as part of the seniority system (nenkō joretsu seido). Furthermore, in terms of power as well, though the appearances (tatemae) of rank and seniority are extremely important, this organizational hierarchy is manipulated by the professorial actors resulting in a practice (honne) model that largely ignores overt organizational structures. Eades (personal communication) mentions that junior staff may avoid promotion at some institutions because of the added teaching load a full professorship often entails, though at EUC there is no such extra workload associated with a promotion (the younger, lower ranked faculty members do more of the teaching and committee work than the professors).
At EUC, like at most smaller privates, there is no system of department chairs linked to professorships, as exists at many national universities. This means that there is no limit to the number of professorships awarded. The result is that nearly 70 percent of the faculty has the rank of professor. This has resulted in a competition of sorts, if only because of the conspicuousness of not being a “professor.” When the university president (gakuchō) was an associate professor himself, he spearheaded a political move to accelerate the process of promotion, encouraging a more flexible reading of the bylaws concerning number of publications and years of service needed for the nomination of a promotion. As president he decided to further reduce the number of publications needed for promotion, rationalizing this with the explanation that a climate of extensive and time-consuming administrative work prohibits professors from publishing in a timely fashion. It is interesting that the university president apparently did not see the need to reduce the amount of administrative and committee work placed on the shoulders of the academic staff.

Although a hidden organizational structure of EUC is overtly acknowledged, as Chino-sensei related to me in a candid discussion about promotions and professoriate ranks, the import of titles (katagaki, literally “shoulder writing”) in Japanese society should not be underrated. Within the EUC community itself, knowledge of the small pay difference and the noncompetitive “escalator” approach to promotion purports a rather egalitarian outlook with respect to job titles. This is not the case within larger society. There is no doubt that the title of “professor” on a name or business card demands much more attention than the rank of “assistant professor.” Granted, the name of the institution at where one holds this rank is not of small interest. While at Oxford, my wife and I observed the interest with which wives of visiting Japanese academics often compared their husband’s institutional rank.

The cut-throat atmosphere of large research universities has been most famously stereotyped by the famous 1965 Yamazaki Toyoko novel, made into a TV series as recently as 2003. Shiroi Kyōtō (“Ivory Tower”) dramatizes the promotional process at an elite university teaching hospital with a fictionalized account of the dirty politics involved in competing for the prize of professorship. Though the pressure to obtain the badge of professor is less severe than at such elite institutions, even EUC faculty members are conscious of their title when pressing palms at an academic conference, applying for a mortgage at a local bank, or generally presenting themselves to the world outside the university. During a debate in the faculty senate, Umehara-sensei related to me that the importance of Amagawa-sensei’s promotion had also to do with a grant application to MEXT that required at least an associate professor rank.

On the surface, an observer of an EUC faculty senate would unwittingly surmise that the professors, or those with age seniority anyway, wield the most individual power within the university. The voices of younger members of faculty, especially relative newcomers and women, are conspicuously absent in the faculty senates unless called upon specifically for their opinions. After extended observation of the
workings of the institution, however, it becomes obvious that for older faculty (late fifties and sixties) this is largely a case of bark rather than bite. Indeed, a few senior professors do tend to dominate the floor at meetings. At one faculty meeting that I transcribed, one professor dominated 70 percent of the discussion, even answering questions that the school president specifically addressed to other faculty members.

However, it is evident that an informal organizational model circumvents the formal hierarchy. At the center, real faculty power is wielded by a few younger (thirties and forties) male members of the president’s inner circle. Their power derives from the influence they are able to exert on the president. President Asakubo, in turn, relies on them for strong support in the affairs of university governance and reform. The older professors he “buys off” with such positions as vice-president, board member, or committee chair—a calculated, pragmatically principled leadership, as opposed to one that is ideologically principled. There is also a hidden dynamic that President Asakubo is attempting to reinvent his identity, from that of a bad professor (warui sensei) to a good professor (ii sensei) and to accomplish this, one of his tactics is to overtly distance himself from the cynicism of the other older generation. Related to this is that the younger generation only knows him in this new mold of seriousness, so it is easier for him to work with them for change—he may even be slightly embarrassed around the other older professors because they know too well the “old” Asakubo. He has accumulated little cultural capital among the older kyōju as compared with this “new blood.”

Much of the push for reforming EUC, in terms of faculty development and curriculum change, comes not directly from the president himself, but rather often originates with his inner circle of influential faculty supporters. Though a strong internal leader, expert at navigating the maze of personalities and personal histories at EUC, Asakubo’s fairly conservative view of education, and his many years within this one institution, inhibits him in his ability to be creatively innovative or to look at EUC from an objective perspective.

Changes are implemented top-down by the president, who uses his considerable political skills to co-opt the opposition into compliance, if not cooperation. One faculty member explained to me how professors Baba and Fuchida were appointed to the board of trustees so that during the faculty meeting they would be forced to sit alongside the president facing the rest of the senate body and therefore unable to challenge his leadership by disrupting the meeting with ornery questions or complaints. Their power within the board of trustees was muted as well. Past studies of organizations in Japan often indicate that salarymen advanced in age and status within a company expect their underlings to bear the brunt of the overtime work as they themselves relax and enjoy their hard-earned status in the twilight of their careers, having gone through apprenticeship and worked their way up the organizational ranks. This is not the case at EUC, however. The older kyōju at EUC (fifties and sixties) openly resent Asakubo’s present tactic of assigning all important administrative tasks and decision-making influence to the younger kyōju (thirties and forties). The president himself is keenly aware of this resentment. This
correlates with a model of prioritizing administrative work discussed below. Kyōjū
following this model of “work” that prioritizes administration lose a crucial part of
their professional identity if left out of committee posts and other administrative
work, not least because such work enables them to remain “in the loop” of EUC
knowledge-building and cultural capital accumulation.

This is not to say that the president is a puppet. President Asakubo is extremely
opinionated and exudes an almost brash sense of authority in meetings, both formal
and informal. For example, in his office after work hours, the president enjoys
talking about the latest developments among the faculty at EUC, usually an
incident that focuses on some facet of administration. Invariably in these
discussions he will contrast his disapproval of the “selfish” or “willful” behavior of
older faculty members with the “selfless” and “serious” nature of younger faculty.
He perceives in these younger male professors both a strong work ethic towards
administrative and teaching tasks and sincerity in their service to the university,
and thus is very open to their suggestions and recommendations. He considers
these ideas very deliberately before implementing them in a stern manner, though
entirely fairly and “by the rules” in his own estimation. The president has an
observable concern with the appearance or form (katachi) of reform measures—
perceived transparency, accountability, clarity of his decisions—and is not
extremely worried about the actual content, or even result, of the changes.

An important part of the president’s discourse of reform is framed in his reliance
on the younger generation of professors. He has backed up his words, for the most
part, with his committee chair appointments—professors Genda and Hamaguchi—
to what he views as the key committees—the student affairs committee and
academic affairs committee, respectively. Both are not only in their forties, but
have not been part of the university faculty for very long. Genda-sensei is a
favorite of the president. Some say he is being groomed as the next president and is
an extremely able administrator. Not only has the gakuchō informally suggested in
a rather direct way that he supports Genda in becoming the next university
president, but I learned from another faculty informant that past presidents have
usually served as chairs on both the academic affairs and student affairs
committees. These are considered two of the most important and influential
committees at EUC, and faculty members who have chaired both make electable
presidential candidates in the faculty senate. Genda was only at EUC for a year or
two before he was appointed to the chair of the academic affairs committee and
then, after two years in this important position, the gakuchō asked him to chair the
student affairs committee. Hamaguchi-sensei, as well, was a surprise choice as the
next chair of the academic affairs committee because he had only been at the
school for a year and a half and had not yet proven himself as an administrator. His
appointment, in particular, emphasizes the gakuchō’s “new blood doctrine.” It was
obvious that this was a deliberate attempt to send a strong message to more senior
members of the professoriate.

Moreover, the gakuchō similarly hand-picked his candidate for dean of the
management faculty, Professor Iida, who was subsequently voted in at the faculty
senate. This was quite a surprise, not least of all to Iida-sensei himself, since he was only in his mid forties. There is a definite and deliberate attempt by the president with the tacit support of the board of trustees to infuse “new blood” into the organizational structure of the faculty senate, something the president often verbalizes during the after-hours inner circle meetings.

The “president’s office” committee is the one that has been charged with researching and directing the university reform efforts, and hence this is the committee that has the most direct line to the president’s ear. It is an overarching committee that effectively crosscuts the many competitive fiefdoms and invisible walls between the various administrative departments and committees. Not surprisingly, this committee is made up of a mix of individuals—many are extremely capable multitasking administrators—all young, and all people that could be counted as, if not overt supporters of the president, certainly proponents of changing EUC for the better, i.e., “reformers.” These president’s office committee members are extremely dedicated, meeting every Tuesday morning at 9:00. At one point they gave a 30-minute report to the entire faculty senate, supported by a 50-page document entitled “The EUC Entrance Process: A Survey of Student Attitudes,” written by a woman member, Jinbō-sensei. Especially on this occasion, on the kyōjukai stage, the president was extravagant in his praise of the hard work exerted by this committee, and Professor Jinbō received a commendation in the form of a bonus.

The school calendar is divided into two semesters at EUC. The first semester lasts from the beginning of April through July, and the second semester begins in mid September and finishes at the end of January, divided by a six-week summer holiday and a two-month spring break before the start of the new school year. On April 1 the professoriate holds its first faculty senate of the year in the morning. This is followed by a social get-together held at the dining hall in Central Square, the newest building on campus. The head of the personnel office acts as the MC as the new permanent faculty members and both permanent and “temp staff” administrators are introduced to the other EUC employees. Both the president and chairman give greeting addresses, which are followed by a ceremonial toast. The luncheon buffet and drink is catered by the same company that is contracted to provide the lunch and snack services at the university. It is a stand-up party and attendance, though obligatory, is only required for the first half-hour, after which faculty members begin to disperse. The board of trustees is normally referred to as the “management team” of EUC. It consists of the chair, Mr. Kawaguchi, the president of the university and general faculty senate, President Asakubo, three other senior faculty members, the head administrator, and five other men, who are either prewar O.B. (“old boys,” graduates of EUC) or local retired businessmen—except for President Asakubo and one faculty member, Professor Chino, all eleven members of the board are male senior citizens.

Playing a supporting, but largely celebratory, role is the “advisory board” (hyōgikai) which is comprised of the entire board of trustees plus an additional four senior faculty members, two more senior administrative staff in addition to the
head administrator and thirteen others—O.B. and businesspeople. Of the 30 members of the advisory board, only one is a woman. This is only partly explained by the fact that EUC was a boys’ school for the first 50 years of its existence. EUC is still a “man’s world,” as many of the women faculty members are acutely aware. Though the advisory board meets very infrequently, once a year at most, the symbolic value of being a member is not small. I was surprised when a senior faculty member, Professor Nakata, getting ready to retire in a couple of years, was not pleased when he was relieved from his position as committee chair. Nakata-sensei does not enjoy administrative work, nor is he particularly adept at the politicking that comes with such a position as chair. Nevertheless, I learned later that if he remained chair for one more year he would be eligible for election to the advisory board, hence his disappointment when he was rotated out of the post.

The chairman of the board of trustees is a retired Kirin Beer executive. Kirin Beer, the largest manufacturer of beer and one the largest beverage manufacturer in Japan after merging with Suntory, has employed many EUC graduates over the years. EUC events often feature Kirin beverages. The chairman of the board is also former graduate of EUC when it was still a high school before WWII. EUC was the first private higher school of commerce in Japan and had a rather elite status as a high school, sending many of its graduates to Tokyo Imperial University (now Tokyo University), Tokyo College of Commerce (now Hitotsubashi University), and other top-ranked universities.

Besides the president, there are three other members of the faculty senate appointed to the board. Interestingly, even for Japan, neither of the faculty deans nor the department head of the liberal arts division are automatically members, effectively keeping them out of the loop.

*Keiretsu* can roughly be translated as “department,” but this is somewhat misleading because certain *keiretsu* have only two faculty members. The *keiretsu* are organized around both academic disciplines as well as major courses of study. For example, although there is obviously no course of study (or “major” in North American terminology) in the humanities at EUC, a college of commerce, the “humanities department” in the liberal arts division consists of two historians, a philosopher, and a Japanese literature scholar.

**ADMINISTRATORS**

The administrative staff of EUC is made up of 45 full-time employees, and another 10 “temp-staff” (contract workers). Much like at a Japanese company (Graham 2003; Rohlen 1974), the staff is divided into departments (-bu) and sections (-ka), or *teams* as they have recently been renamed. The University Administration Office is a department divided into three sections—personnel and publications, accounts, and grounds and properties—with a full-time staff of 11. It could be described as the brain of the university in terms of both location (closest in physical proximity to the offices of the chairman of the board and president) and importance. The head of the administrative staff, Mr. Mori, is a Tokyo University
graduate and former top executive at Kirin Beer (former president of the Shakey’s Pizza restaurant subsidiary of Kirin). He has a desk both in this administration office and in the office of the chairman of the board of trustees. Chairman Kawaguchi, himself a former Kirin executive, personally recruited Mr. Mori to this amakudari (see footnote below) position after his retirement from the corporate world.

The Academic Affairs Department, also with a staff of eleven, is divided into two sections. The first section is responsible for the registration of students, scheduling of classes and professors, and coordinating the curriculum and syllabuses for both faculties. The second section handles the extracurricular classes for certification, the study abroad and international programs, and the grant applications for academic funding, both internal and external. There are also one staff member who handles the secretarial work for the graduate school, and another who is responsible for the licensing program for student teachers.

The Student Affairs Office has a staff of nine and is divided into two sections: student affairs and careers. The student affairs section focuses on all aspects of the students’ affairs, including clubs and circles, university cards, and scholarships and fees. The careers section busies itself providing information for and counseling students to find work and placement in jobs after graduation.

The Library Office consists of five full-time staff members and numerous part-time circulation desk employees. The majority of these “librarians” do not have specialist qualifications in the library sciences but, rather, are regular members of staff who are rotated between departments like everyone else. The Admissions Center has three staff members as well as a former high school teacher who has been hired as an assistant.

There is a nurse in the nurse’s office, a professional counselor in the student counselor’s office, a groundskeeper employed for the sports ground located just west of Tokyo in Kawasaki, a cadre of campus security guards working for an outside agency contracted by the university, cheerfully manning the guard house 24/7, and a live-in caretaker family at the EUC seminar house, a facility rebuilt in the late nineties and located in the mountains of Gunma Prefecture, four hours north of the EUC campus. The seminar house can accommodate more than fifty guests. It is mostly used as a retreat for seminar classes, as well as student-run clubs and circles, but any member of the EUC community, including alumni, is entitled to stay at the facility at a subsidized rate.

Last in this description of the administrative departments is the IT/Media Center, which controls the largest administrative budget at EUC. The “medeia sentaa,” as it is usually called, employs a modest full-time staff of only two (originally three), one of whom is an IT specialist hired specifically for the position in addition to hiring an outside private computer consulting firm, which has assigned a few consultants to work at EUC on a semipermanent basis.

Perhaps because of the lack of transparency in the use of their budget, which includes huge grants from the Ministry of Education, there exists a jealous perception that this administrative department has somehow achieved a
CHAPTER 1

semiautonomous status outside the informal organizational structure of the university. An entire conference and edited volume has been devoted to the analysis and discussion of the many sociocultural conflicts that plague IT centers at Japanese HEIs (Bachnik 2003). Not surprisingly, the EUC Media Center was at the center of controversy at the university on a number of occasions.

The first move by the head of the administration offices was to deny the recently married computer specialist at the center, Ms. Ōta, the right to continue using her maiden name at her professional workplace, EUC. This decision was viewed as rather draconian by more than a few in the EUC community and strongly criticized by many faculty members. The EUC labor union, consisting of both faculty and administrative staff members, submitted a formal protest to the board of trustees on behalf of Ms. Ōta. Though the head administrator did not budge in his conservative policy, this incident paved the way for a compromise with new women faculty members a year later. By opposing a change in the national law that would allow married couples to keep separate surnames, conservative members of the Japanese Diet are even now fighting this battle against popular opinion in their effort to “protect” the “traditional Japanese household” (ie).

A second major conflict erupted when a computer security breach forced the head administrator and the Media Center committee to play a heavy hand in their personnel decisions. In an intriguing case of alleged sabotage, Mr. Sekiguchi, the network specialist at the EUC Media Center, was suspected of hacking into the university administration offices server from outside the university firewall. Though this suspicion was at first largely kept secret by the president and his inner circle on the one hand, and Mr. Mori, the head administrator, on the other, with the support of the board of trustees, the president, the Media Center committee, and the evidence provided by the outside experts at the consulting firm, the head administrator openly accused Mr. Sekiguchi of shirking his responsibility as university network and security specialist. Though he was neither fired nor demoted in terms of pay scale, Mr. Sekiguchi was subsequently ostracized to a clerical position in the library with strict orders not to touch any of the university computers. Villages in Edo Japan were known to have used the weapon of social ostracism (murahachibu) to punish individuals and their families. Although allowed to remain in the village, the victims and their families were given the silence treatment and forbidden to participate in village activities. The “curse” was only ignored in the case of fire or death. Though officially still members of the village, they were no longer part of the community. The way of dealing with Mr. Sekiguchi was reminiscent of this custom—he was not fired by the university, but his silent penance in the library, where few people spoke to him, effectively forbid his participation in the EUC community.

Mr. Sekiguchi attempted to appeal his case to the university community by posting a letter of petition and “supporting documents” to the home of every faculty and staff member. He did not do much for his own cause, however, when he accused the EUC labor union of not properly coming to his defense, when in fact the elected board of the labor union, three faculty members, had spent hours
investigating his case and attempting to work out a compromise with the administration and board of trustees. His claim that he was now wrongfully employed and his offer of proof of how he was initially hired specifically as a computer network specialist fell upon deaf ears.

In analyzing this case of conflict, after having participated in the two-and-a-half-hour union meeting at which Mr. Sekiguchi clashed openly with the board members, a few observations can be made. First, this represents an example of how the label of “general office worker” can be invoked by the personnel office and applied as a means of control even in instances where an employee is initially both recruited and subsequently hired for a certain skill and specific job description. Nearly all, 85 to 90 percent, of the administration staff were hired as nonspecialists. Except for the nurse, counselor, seminar house caretaker, IT specialists, and Mr. Mori, the present head administrator, the administrative staff is rotated among departments and sections throughout their careers. Studies of the Japanese corporate world also commonly describe such management practices. In this case, even a computer specialist, Mr. Sekiguchi, recruited and hired especially to work in the IT center, was “rotated” to the library as punishment for poor performance and insubordinate behavior. By definition, even if one is hired for a specific job, one is part of the “administration team.” Regardless of rank or specialization, during the freshman orientation, entrance examinations, graduation ceremonies and other university-wide events, all staff are expected to participate, even though these events often fall on the weekend or national holidays. Even the caretaker of the seminar house drives four hours to Tokyo to deliver fresh vegetables from the countryside to sell at EUC during the University Festival in October.

Second, the Sekiguchi case exposes the thick partition that divides the administration and faculty at EUC. Mr. Sekiguchi is a doctoral candidate at one of the top schools of education in Japan. He holds a master’s degree in educational technology, presents papers at academic conferences, and even teaches classes at other universities as a part-time faculty member. It is interesting that much of the criticism of him voiced by faculty members was because he was perceived as having a condescending attitude toward professors and was insubordinate, refusing to give computer support to faculty members claiming that such tasks were “not part of my work description.” He was a very capable network and computer specialist, however, and a very hard worker from what I observed. He gladly assisted faculty, especially the IT faculty members, in educational endeavors and was supportive and instrumental in improving the classroom teaching facilities for the freshman compulsory course, “Basic Computing.” I observed that he worked better either alone or with professors on equal footing than he did when he was forced into a subordinate role. He was not willing to kowtow to those in positions of power simply because they had a title. This made it difficult for him in terms of interpersonal relations.

In my own role as faculty member, I never had a problem working with Mr. Sekiguchi on the occasions where I had the opportunity. I believe this is because
our interaction was often focused on tasks directly related to educational endeavors. In addition, my interaction with Mr. Sekiguchi might have been unconsciously more egalitarian than other faculty members. After the incident that led to his demotion, and especially at the labor union meeting, I noticed how frustrated this man was as an administrative staff member. He obviously was more interested in individual educational projects in teaching or research than in the clerical focus of the administrative team. Both his skill and CV suggested that, even though he may have been initially hired as a computer staffer, his services might have been better utilized if he was given the possibility of ad hoc teaching responsibilities and even a modest research agenda. However, the wall dividing the academic and administrative staff was unscalable. Sekiguchi’s peripheral status became the source of debate and conflict. As a member of the administrative staff, to be “egalitarian” in management he is moved around to various posts irrespective of his expertise or wishes, as are all staff, in the best interest of the entire organization of EUC, or regardless of the best interests of EUC, depending on one’s perspective.

Last, the Sekiguchi case demonstrated how faculty members can wield power over administrative staff, in certain cases, and even influence personnel decisions. I was told by faculty members very familiar with the specifics of the incident that if Mr. Sekiguchi had better social skills, been better able to interact with the faculty in a fashion more acceptable to them, he would have been spared. What turned out to be a witch hunt, of sorts, could have been avoided and the security problems might not have been blamed entirely on him. At EUC, faculty can influence administrative decisions, but not all faculty, however, have such power. It is reserved for those that are perceived to be a positive force in the EUC reform process, the young faculty team players that the president looks to for his support.

In this way EUC can be used as a model of the organizational structure of the daigaku. Closely related to organization are the professors’ administrative and committee tasks.

GYÖSEI—ADMINISTRATIVE WORK AND PERSONAL NETWORKS

In discussing Befu’s social exchange model of Japanese society, Moeran (1984, p. 254) makes the vital point that Nakane’s “group model” (1970) does not properly account for the structural role of the phenomenon of tsukiai—personal, and usually informal, networks and relations often maintained through eating and, especially, drinking sessions. Any observer or participant working in a Japanese organization quickly acknowledges the ubiquitous and important nature of tsukiai (cf. Graham 2001, p. 74). Much of the practice of university governance and management is dependent on a network of personal relations that supersedes the organizational structure of the institution. The practice of tsukiai—the “management” of these (good) relations—though beyond the bounds of any kind of conspicuous organizational structure, is nonetheless tacitly influenced by the ideological organization of the university.
The president, for example, practices tsukiai in a different manner than when his position was merely that of chair or faculty senate member. He is cognizant of his position within the organizational structure of the university and, because of this responsibility, is prone to wield tsukiai to control or punish others, often through exclusion. Graham (2003) makes exactly the same observation of management practices at a Japanese insurance company.

Mr. Taguchi, a fun-loving professor who enjoys golf, has always been part of Mr. Asakubo’s circle of tsukiai friends at EUC, and the two have spent many hours drinking and golfing together during the more than fifteen years of their working relationship at EUC. Before he was elected president, Mr. Asakubo often joked to me in an obviously friendly way about Mr. Taguchi being a “goof off.” In fact, not only was Taguchi the person who first introduced me to Mr. Asakubo at an after school eating and drinking event organized by Mr. Taguchi, but he explicitly expressed to me and others his support of Mr. Asakubo as the future president of EUC, prior to the faculty senate elections. He expressed excitement about the prospect of an anticipated “insider” position with his friend, Mr. Asakubo, as the leader of EUC.

Once he became president, however, Mr. Asakubo has since used this tsukiai that exists between himself and Taguchi as a form of control, and in some cases punishment. Taguchi is viewed by President Asakubo as an irresponsible faculty member who cannot be trusted to act appropriately as a professor (e.g., to show up at scheduled lectures on time), as an administrator (e.g., to fulfill his responsibilities as the chair of a committee), or as a researcher (e.g., to publish the results of research projects for which has received funding). Consequently, Mr. Asakubo has excluded Mr. Taguchi from his “inner circle” and does not invite him to drink with other “young” faculty members. The change in the nature of their relationship has been marked. Though they still joke and are friendly in public, the president is intent on his attempt to control Taguchi through tsukiai, by withholding offers of sharing information and, thus, power. Taguchi’s visibility within the organizational structure has shrunken considerably; his influence has been controlled through sanctions. Mr. Asakubo’s role as president has significantly affected his tsukiai, a crucial part of his job.

Tsukiai has the crucial function of transmitting the tacit, and especially centripetal, knowledge of the organization and its rituals. This insider knowledge is directly related to both time spent employed at the university, and also, perhaps even more importantly, to the time spent in building strong informal networks of knowledge transmission. The lack of such local knowledge and influence, prized cultural capital at EUC, can and does directly, and usually adversely, affect a professor’s performance at work. Yamagiwa-sensei, for example, worked in industry and government before becoming an academic and thus has a huge store of social capital external to EUC. She has not taken much interest in complementing this with internal networks and knowledge since beginning work at EUC, so she has been unable to effectively express her opinion on work-related matters, something that might normally be accomplished through tsukiai, for
example. Consequently, her only resort has been through open and public conflict with the president and Endō-sensei over the design and implementation of one of the management courses, normally a means not preferred in Japanese organizations. “Japanese do not savor open confrontation and animosity, especially in groups of colleagues who must continue to work together … (Graham 2003, p. 130).” Graham has made the insightful comment that typical “Japanese practices” in organizational settings are often a product of the organization itself, and so it is a mistake when observers consider such cultural practices in isolation, as they sometimes do. I realized this firsthand at EUC. The surface impression I first had during my participant observation of the general dedication of a few individuals soon transformed into an almost palpable tension in the work environment the more personally involved I became in the “local” culture—a pressure to gain in social capital by investing time and energy in administration and tsukiai and the parallel risk of losing important links to knowledge and network by not investing in administration and tsukiai. The recognition of this tension is perhaps missed by observers whose careers are not tied to their places of observation, unlike either Fiona Graham or myself.

So, indeed, although on the surface occasions of tsukiai can appear to be light-hearted events of after-hour leisure, as Graham points out, they “are not social occasions in the western sense of the word, but rather an indispensable part of work” (Graham 2003, p. 129). But “meetings” in a Japanese organization of course appear like work to an outside observer, and these events are also, of course, an indispensable part of work. What may be surprising, however are the often late hours of these meetings, since at EUC there exists a “… rather diffuse definition of working hours that characterizes many Japanese organizations” (Ben-Ari 1997b, p. 84).

For many EUC kyōju, meetings and other administrative activities are a defining part of their work. Though in the professors’ room complaints are heard quite frequently in reference to administrative work, in actuality the administrative duties are taken quite seriously by a large proportion of professors. Committee and labor union activities, department meetings, general and department faculty meetings, writing entrance examinations, interviewing prospective students, proctoring both entrance examinations (five per year) as well as midterm and final examinations for all courses, add up to a considerable amount of administrative work during the year. Committee work is by far the most time consuming. There are numerous committees at EUC including: president’s council, academic affairs, student affairs, admissions, careers/placement, library, international programs, extension program, and student teaching. The president’s council is the most powerful, with the academic affairs, student affairs, and admissions also deemed as important committees to chair. In fact, I was once told that the local EUC culture holds that “the [political] path to the university presidency must be pass through the chairmanship of the academic affairs and student affairs committees.”

For this reason the president takes great care and deliberates with confidants at length during bouts of tsukiai before deciding on the personnel assignments, which are obligatory. He occasionally rotates the positions, depending on both personal
requests and assessment of the success of individuals on these different committees. Often otherwise unpalatable choices for committee chairs that are unavoidable for reasons of reciprocity and exchange are softened with by choosing a strong, supporting cast of committee vice-chairs and committee members to ensure the committee will run effectively. This was certainly the case when the president chose the otherwise administratively inexperienced Oshihara-sensei as the chair of the important admissions committee. He placed Aimiya-sensei and Yokoi-sensei in roles of vice-chair, with Umehara-sensei, Wakajima-sensei and Tateyama-sensei and a few other younger cast members on the committee as well to boost what was an otherwise ineffective performance by the chair, Oshihara, himself.

Age and Gender

Indeed, these younger faculty members are playing an increasingly powerful role in the university administration. Contrary to presuppositions of the importance of an aged-based hierarchy in Japanese society, in order to effectively implement changes at EUC, most of the committee chairs appointed were in their thirties or forties, while the older professors have been given less voice administratively. Some younger male professors do not necessarily resent this added workload. The youngest member of the faculty says that, “I feel that my most important role at this university is to help make changes. Though this may come across as somewhat conceited, honestly I feel that if I do not help to make and implement changes [in the curriculum], nobody will.” This commitment to the institution contrasts sharply with the recent voice of faculty members in North America. “Increased demands on faculty to participate in the management of their own institutions means more time spent doing committee work, a source of frequent complaints [among the professoriate in the U.S.]” (Pescosolido & Aminzade 1999a, p. 602).

On the contrary, women have not been given roles of responsibility within the administration and committee structures at EUC. Nor do they necessarily want such positions, knowing full well the time commitment of belonging to committees. For example, one woman told me that, “As a woman I am not asked to participate in a lot of meetings and committees. This can be seen as either a positive [more time to focus on research and teaching] or as a negative [being excluded].”

This is cause for concern among certain people at EUC, and some men wonder aloud whether this is healthy. At a secret, inner circle meeting with only young male members of the professoriate in attendance, a younger faculty member complained directly to the university president: “What about the women professors? President, none of your choices for committee chairs involves women. Aren’t you wasting a valuable resource, since many of the women professors are capable leaders and interested in taking on committee responsibility?”

This awareness of gender issues is atypical, however, as one woman professor noted in an interview. “Not only at EUC, but at many universities there are [male]
professors who express openly their opinion that women should not be given positions of responsibility [within the university].” She continues. “Some openly assert that we must include more women on committees [and in the reform process], which I think is missing the point [that individuals should be judged on their ability and not their gender].”

In the eyes of the president, working hard on committees shows a professor’s individual commitment to the university. Regardless of research output, and teaching ability to some degree, if a professor is deemed a capable, though not necessarily willing, administrator he is quickly brought into the fold of the president’s inner circle. The president is quick to offer disparaging remarks about individual professors who shirk what he considers their fair share of administrative responsibilities. As a professor of organizational management, he takes great interest, and pride, in managing the faculty personnel at the university. He admits openly to playing favorites but insists that the reasons for assessing poorly certain individuals is entirely their own fault and well deserved. Of course such favoritism is part of an organizational management style that is crucial to the ideology of “family education.” Through his network of insiders he monitors closely the amount of work that the faculty is accomplishing for the university. Though the import of research is officially important for career advancement at EUC, administration and teaching, to a slightly lesser degree, are the basis for unofficial, practical assessment.

In fact, too much attention to one’s research, at the expense of time devoted to the university in terms of administrative work, is not regarded positively by the president. Though research productivity is the de facto method for assessment for promotion, the unwritten rule is that this should be balanced with hard work on committees. Academics who spend too much time at research might be looked upon suspiciously because they are more likely to get jobs at “better” research universities. Faculty attrition is a reality, and a good number of younger staff is often on the lookout for opportunities outside EUC.

KYÔJUKAI—FACULTY MEETINGS & CONFLICT

The cultural and linguistic knowledge of meetings in Japan proves useful in understanding more fully indigenous categories of thought. In her description of the untranslatable ethical code (1946, p. 177) of Japanese culture, over fifty years ago Ruth Benedict analyzed for a western audience such enigmatic categories as gi (righteousness), gimu and giri (obligation repayment), on (obligation incurred), and haji (shame). Following suit, in recent years scores of authors, not necessarily trained in the social sciences, have attempted in less rigorous fashion to describe “inscrutable” Japanese “national characteristics” to an interested western audience—a genre of literature (nihonjinron) that has been examined critically by numerous social scientists (cf. Dale 1988, Mouer & Sugimoto 1990, Befu 2001). Titles such as Anatomy of Dependence (Doi 1971), Japanese Cultural Encounters and How to Handle Them (Kataoka & Kusumoto 1991), The Unspoken Way
(Matsumoto 1984), and Communicating with the Japanese (Neustupny 1987) introduce Japanese concepts such as haragei (literally, “the art of the belly” or “belly performance,” indicating the ability to communicate in silence) or amae (dependency) as keys to understanding Japanese communication style.

With the postwar economic success of Japan, the business world has been particularly enamored with Japanese negotiating and management, often discussing styles of communication and thought. Three terms that have been much discussed—nemawashi, kaizen and hansei—are distinctive social mechanisms through which the professoriate addresses the challenge of university reform. Considering the import that most Japan experts in crosscultural business communications give to the categories of nemawashi, kaizen and hansei, there has been a lack of concomitant critical microanalysis. It is assumed that these concepts operate universally in Japanese interactions and are culturally specific, unique to Japan. I feel there is certainly room for ethnomethodological analysis of the language surrounding these indigenous categories, however.

Nemawashi

The first of these “mechanisms” is nemawashi, which means literally “to bind the roots of a tree before its transplantation” and is a term used often in business and institutional situations in Japan to refer to the common practice of explanation and negotiation on an unofficial level beforehand, to smooth the acceptance of an idea among decision makers in an official meeting context. Nemawashi, slightly different but similar to the concept of “spadework” important to American and European businesspeople, is a concept that is said to derive from the propensity for what is described as “consensus,” “conflict-avoidance” or “harmony” (often coined as wa in the vernacular) in Japanese organizations (Rohlen 1973, 1974). This normative depiction of Japan, and especially Japanese organizations, as “harmonious” has been questioned, following what Matsunaga (2000a) and Wright (1994) have pointed out as a trend in the anthropological literature on organizations generally, from earlier models of consensus (the Human Relations school) to more recent models of conflict (Manchester School studies). Certainly I would not describe the social environment at EUC as especially “harmonious,” though admittedly there are certain elements of these stereotypical Japanese “virtues” evident in meeting contexts.

In one of the earlier ethnographies of a Japanese organization, in this case a bank, Rohlen described how most section chiefs submit problems to the entire group (though they have the authority to make all decisions) — to either the rule of consensus or, after discussion, to decide themselves. “Group processes require considerable time, and to push for an early consensus or to fail to involve everyone can lead to resentment and opposition” (Rohlen 1974, p. 107). Part of this process is “spadework,” facilitating consensus and inclusion, since objections or new ideas offered by others in the group may be discovered in advance. Of course sounding out the other side before making decisions, or even proposals, lends certain
“vagueness to the early stages of Japanese negotiating activity that often smacks of furtiveness to foreigners” (March 1990, p. 31). So, the argument goes, it behooves western businessman to familiarize themselves with the intricacies of such “uniquely Japanese” cultural practices.

Rohlen (1974) considers the importance in Japanese organizations of the procedures of discussion and participation and comments insightfully on this element of Japanese organizational behavior. “For the Japanese, the procedures of discussion and participation are institutionalized, office groups are far more sensitive to the process of inclusion, and their leaders are far more inherently equipped to manage this form of direction than their American counterparts. In fact, the term for authority (keni) is not used in common thought to describe the dynamics of group activity. Acceptance (nattoku), participation (sanka), resistance (teikō), and opposition (hantai) are the dimensions of the problem, and impersonal rules and formal position are of little significance in adjusting behavior from the negative to the positive sides of these dimensions.” It is not a surprise to find that at EUC both premeeting negotiations (nemawashi) as well as postmeeting consultations (discussions in the professors’ room, offices, or local pub) are important (cf. McVeigh 1997, p. 90). However, there is also a distinct lack of nemawashi at EUC. I have been a part of many committee meetings that were decidedly unsuccessful specifically because of a lack of proper “spadework.”

Such deliberations ensure that “just as one doesn’t try to pull up a tree stump without accounting for all the roots, one doesn’t try to impose a perspective or solution on a group without eliciting the (wholehearted) consent of each individual; even a single unloosened root can prevent the release of the tree stump” (White 1987, pp. 17–18). Of course this may be a more insidious variation of consensus seeking as in Goffman’s idea of “working consensus,” which is when a person “is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable. The maintenance of this surface of agreement, this veneer of consensus, is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind statements which asserts values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service (Goffman 1959, p. 11–12).” This type of conflict avoidance may in fact be a cultural value that is not only an example of Japanese pedagogy and social ritual, but represents the value of harmony of purpose that some argue is at the core of Japanese morality and, hence, Japanese education (White 1987). This is viewed by many Japanese as “unique to Japan” (Dale 1988), even though Goffman’s description of working consensus is based on his observations of American society.

Kaizen and Hansei

Kaizen, literally meaning “good (or virtuous) reform,” is well known in the west (found in the Oxford English Dictionary as a loanword) as the Japanese business philosophy of continuous improvement of working practices and personal efficiency. The classic example is the alleged bottom-up approach of Japanese that
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is often contrasted with western management practices that are insensitive to input from factory workers (Dore 1973). Outside the business sense it also has the connotation in Japanese of simply continuous improvement and, although it is not always a conscious part of the working, social or home life, an emphasis on small, incremental change over time is certainly evident in Japan (Imai 1997). Hori’s participant observation in a monastery bears out the ubiquitous nature of this concept in the culture of teaching and learning in Japan. “Kaizen, the constant step-by-step analysis, standardization, and improvement of tasks in, for example, a Japanese automobile factory, nicely parallels the monk’s constant attempt to make his way of working more and more efficient … both are institutionalized ways of learning from failure” (Hori 1996, p. 47).

Closely related to kaizen is hansei, another process that has proven important to my study of meetings at EUC because it is purported to be such a conscious part of the Japanese professional culture. Hansei (literally “reflection,” “introspection,” or “reconsideration”) is a self-reflective critical process that is taught during formal schooling in Japan, but is later utilized in a variety of situations: high school, university clubs, company training programs, etc. (Rohlen & LeTendre 1996b, p. 7). This critical self-awareness and reflection is an important part of schooling in Japan. The process of hansei as the focus on errors as a useful data for reflection involves an inherent element of goal setting to improve (kaizen) on past performance. This nuance became evident to me when I misused the term in a faculty meeting and was subsequently warned by a colleague for not considering the long-term implication of actually following through on the self-criticism and demonstrating concrete plans for implementing self-reform measures. Nancy Sato (2004) also notes this complementary element of goal setting.

Basic skills in cooperation are taught by teachers and “the primary means for learning to work with others was, I think, hansei (reflection). It’s hard to spend even a few hours in an elementary classroom without experiencing hansei. After group activities, group members often reflected on the quality of their cooperation” (Lewis 1995). In the professional world some argue that even among the most accomplished, “there is a continual search for improvement, a looking outside oneself (hansei) or one’s company for renewed dedication and insight. The increments of improvement are often miniscule, but they are real all the same. Perfectability [kaizen] builds on past accomplishments” (Rohlen & LeTendre 1996a, p. 375).

If not as often discussed directly in the literature on Japanese business as nemawashi or kaizen, hansei is mentioned frequently as an important concept by observers of education. “I think it’s an important puzzle piece in our understanding of Japanese education” says Lewis (1995, p. 122). She feels that hansei is a powerful process and “undergirds discipline, group formation, efforts to foster the ‘whole child’s’ development, and academic learning as well” (Lewis 1995, p. 170). Is this also a key concept influencing the reform discourses at EUC? “Is it possible,” Lewis asks rhetorically, “to maintain a habit of self-criticism and yet
have the benefits of high self-esteem, such as willingness to undertake challenges?” In the classrooms she observed her answer was “yes.”

There is a healthy self-criticism of academic practice at EUC. Lewis and others (Goodman, personal communication) have attributed to hansei the fact that “Japanese children and parents consistently rate children’s educational achievement less favorably than do American parents and children—an ironic fact, given the higher actual achievement of Japanese children” (Lewis 1995, p. 121). This same mechanism functions in the reform processes at the level of Japanese HE. Nemawashi, kaizen, and hansei prove to be useful constructs when analyzing the meeting discourses unfolding in the many social arenas at EUC, proceedings that appear to the outsider not to be very constructive. These professional processes of inclusion, improvement, and introspection both influence the professors’ role identity as “professor” as well as drive the institutional process of reform.

Aisatsu genre

Clammer (2000) has lamented the lack of just this kind of creative analysis of Japanese society. He feels Japanese society has been subjected to an overabundance of political economic, culturalist, and “classical” theories. These approaches are static in nature, that is, “they concentrate … on structural characteristics of the society and culture and on sets of classificatory principles, which are supposed somehow to “capture” the reality that actually constitutes Japan …” (Clammer 2000, p. 204). What may be missing is the important recognition of indigenous categories of thought and action in the language of Japanese society. For example, through ethnographic description of the Ilongots of the Philippines, Michelle Rosaldo (1982), the late linguistic anthropologist, demonstrates convincingly that the indigenous speech act theories of western linguists reflect more the “locally prevalent” and subjective, even biased, notions of academics than any sort of universal, objective reality. Her argument resonates with David Parkin’s reminder that the “etic rationality of the external observer…is assumed to be over and above these folk rationalities and to be based on universal rather than particular cultural rules, an assumption which ignores ethnocentric intellectual bias” (Parkin 1976, p. 166). In this book, though I do not make bold claims of convincingly demonstrating a salient failing of ethnocentrism in the anthropology of Japan, hopefully I am at least sensitive to the flexibility of indigenous categories, a diversity that necessitates close inspection by the anthropologist.

In my observation of university meetings I found that it is the “small cultures” of activities within a social group rather than the nature of the community itself that influences the language use of its members. The performative focus of interaction exhibited by speakers contrasts with the social function of the event, resulting in a myriad of language possibilities beyond prediction through the application of simple permutation theories. In my ethnographic account, some social events or arenas, such as the faculty senate, contrast with others, such as
drinking sessions, not necessarily of the same “culture.” Hence the participants of these events exhibit different language use because of different interpretations of the greeting or discussion/debate genres, depending on the context. Elsewhere I have tried to demonstrate that *aisatsu* is one such category (Poole 2005a). Though it is essentially a “greeting,” of sorts, to translate and interpret this indigenous speech category so simply may not aptly account for the many “strings to the *aisatsu* bow.” In Japanese usage the breadth of this linguistic category extends beyond Firth’s (1972, p. 1) universalistic characterization of greetings as “the recognition of an encounter with another person as socially acceptable… the prime relevance [of which] is the establishment or perpetuation of a social relationship, the recognition of the other person as a social entity, a personal element in a common social situation.”

Alternatively, the very language use exhibited by members of the university community affects the social construction of the group reality. I have argued that in a university entrance ceremony the *aisatsu* locates the speaker and hearers along a deixical axis that emphasizes the social realities of in-group/out-group. But in this same *aisatsu* genre in the faculty senate, the speaker’s deixis can shrink to the size of “ego”—the president can use *aisatsu* to deflect criticism and construct a consciousness that emphasizes the individual. The speaker makes the context (not just words) mean what he wants them to mean (see Weber 1958). This is not to suggest, however, that the social world is so simple that one specific component is the cause of another. Like Moerman, I would emphasize that “Thought, individual activity, and social action … each has its own determinants and organization” (Moerman 1988, p. 64). Likewise, I demonstrate that we cannot describe the interaction of the social and the linguistic in such a way as to suggest a recipe of words determined by the situation. In demonstrating this, description and analysis of a microethnographic kind proves a fruitful exercise for illustrating how the university community is “society in a grain of rice” (Moerman 1988, pp. 68–100).

Meetings are one arena for such microethnographic observation. In particular, the ritualized and formal faculty senate is quite unlike the smaller, often more relaxed committee meetings. It is an event usually held at 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon on the last Tuesday of every month, with an intended function that appears to be university governance. From my observations, often the faculty senate becomes the political arena for a sort of antagonistic interaction that the anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) has described as typical of social dramas. One faculty senate at EUC was just such an arena for social drama. The president had been hospitalized with a stroke and was publicly lambasted in absentia for his inability to adequately fulfill his responsibilities. This in addition to the complaining and backstabbing that had been conducted over the months before the meeting in the informal social gatherings of faculty members in the corners of the faculty lounge, the privacy of individual offices, and in local eating and drinking establishments after hours.

McVeigh (1997) and others (Roger Goodman, personal communication) have observed that generally meetings in Japan are intensely ritualistic, not least being
the language itself. Such ritual language has been mostly neglected by linguists of Japan in their study of communicative behavior, who are often more interested in more creative language and less so in conventionalized linguistic behavior (cf. Loveday 1986a, 1986b). Within the bounds of such ritual behavior and language of the Japanese meeting, I find that the interlocutors at a faculty meeting generate creative and novel approaches to their communicative behavior and linguistic discourse.

For example, in my fieldwork I found that since the ritualized aisatsu greeting genre used to open the meeting is not normally a form of speech that invites discussion and debate in Japanese, in the faculty senate there are cases where the president is able to avoid argument and thus act in a self-defensive, self-preserving fashion through usage of aisatsu. There are instances where at the beginning of an extended aisatsu the president manipulates his audience by using a framing device to invoke, and evoke, the expectation of a typical, harmless speech event. This, I believe, is a device to hush the murmuring audience so the speaker, the president, has the attentive ear of those in opposition. A potentially hostile faculty senate, being “sympathetic” to the genre (the aisatsu greeting style of presentation), is “tricked” into a polite silence even as the aisatsu genre is extended from the “greeting” variant into a “formal address” that touches on controversial and politically explosive topics. Any other genre, such as the hōkoku (reporting) genre used throughout much of the faculty senate, would leave the meeting floor dangerously open to contentious debate, so a scenario such as I have painted is one that I have witnessed on a number of occasions.

In this way the rules of ritual performance at meetings are well understood by the participants so that deliberate violations are manipulative in the way they can change the entire atmosphere, and possibly the outcome, of the social event. What appear outwardly to be tedious, unproductive meetings may not be so at all, since, of course, the faculty senate or committee deliberation has an internal logic that is implicit and not easily discerned by a visiting academic who happens to participate in the university function. If nothing else, then the faculty senate proves to be an important social identifier in the university community—most members of the university are not invited to this meeting.

Obviously boundaries of “membership” and “community” are contested, and the idea of a Japanese organization as “community” or “family” has been shown to be one that is a fluid and ambiguous one. Not only in the anthropology of Japan, but also in the larger field of social anthropology the notion of “community” has recently been problematized (Amit & Rapport 2002).

CONCLUSION

Through an examination of key concepts such as daigaku (university), entrance exams, kyōju (the professoriate), organizational structures, and administrative work, over the past 150 years the mission of daigaku in Japanese society has changed from that of elite to mass post-secondary education, and from highly
specialized training for a state mission of “modernization” to a more general liberal arts approach in an age of “internationalization” (Atagi 1997) making it the second largest and one of the most diverse tertiary education systems in the world.

The examination system, the phenomena of “credentialized society,” and hensachi grades (norm-referenced scoring system for secondary school leavers) label and rank institutions and their graduates in a hierarchical fashion. Within the university itself, the working characteristics and academic qualifications of the professoriate point to the autonomous nature of the profession and the surprising emphasis on administrative activities as the defining aspect of work. Although in the language of the kyōju themselves this administrative work is disparagingly referred to as zatsugyō (miscellaneous or idle work), administrative activities hold great import in the actual social world of the kyōju—their working lives are often defined by this type of work.

The organization of daigaku and kyōju reveals a dichotomy of full-time (sen’in kyōin) and part-time (hijōkin kyōshi) academic staff, a heavy reliance on part-timers for much of the teaching, and a certain liminal nature of part-time professors’ status within the daigaku community. The consensus-seeking nature of decision-making at committee and faculty meetings, and the conflict that often ensues at such events, can be explained to a certain degree by through examining the Japanese concepts of nemawashi (spadework), kaizen (incremental improvement), and hansei (self-criticism) and the ritualized language of the aisatsu genre.
CHAPTER 2

REFORM OF JAPANESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Around the world, institutions involved with tertiary education are being challenged to change. The “demands on HE outrun the capacity to respond” as societies in many of the OECD countries rush toward not merely mass, but universal higher education (Clark 1997a, p. 291). Of course Japan is not exempt from these pressures and, having one of the largest tertiary educational systems in the world, is more challenged by change than most and certainly a participant in the globalization phenomenon of HE (Shiozawa 2000). In fact, depending on how one defines “reform” (cf. Cummings 2003), it can be argued that the change sweeping tertiary education is, as one scholar has dubbed it, “The Third Great Reform of the Japanese Education System” (Hood 2003).

GAIATSU: THE UNIVERSITY IN CRISIS

In this section the challenges that face the Japanese HE system are examined, focusing on the work of Amano Ikuo, a leading researcher in the field. His writing on HE reform, some of which I have translated for publication (Amano & Poole 2005), clearly explains the dilemma facing daigaku.

As Tsuruta (2003) and others have pointed out, over the past few decades, higher education schooling in Japan has reached a state of massification and universal levels of enrollment. Recently the phenomenon of declining birthrate has presented a challenge for institutions of higher education because of the steady drop in enrollment numbers at many of the less elite institutions around the country. Though external competition, economic recession, political developments, and market changes are all factors driving the HE reform process, the demographic pressure is arguably the greatest impetus for change at Japanese universities. The population of 18-year-olds reached a peak of over 2 million in 1992 and has since dropped to 1.5 million in 2000 and an estimated 1.2 million in 2010—a decline of 41 percent in 18 years (Doyon 2001, p. 445; Goodman 2001b, p. 16). This means that now in 2009, the places available at HEIs more or less equal the number of applicants. Consequently, of course, universities are seeking to expand the market.

One way they are doing this is by offering more noncompetitive, community-college type of extension courses and programs to serve the local working populaces for retraining and continuing education. Recruiting of foreign students, especially from other Asian countries, is another strategy that has heated up with the 2009 MEXT program (“Global 30”) to increase this number to 300,000, as is an expansion in postgraduate programs (Ishikawa 2009). Though the competition
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To enter elite universities will continue to be fierce, lower-ranked institutions are already beginning to feel the crunch of survival of the fittest (Amano 2001). The numbers for 2005 indicate that nearly a third of Japan’s private four-year universities and well over a half of the private two-year colleges failed to reach their enrollment targets. Since tuition fees account for over two-thirds of a private institution’s income, their economic viability is clearly being threatened as universities are being forced to find new markets for students. One of Japan’s most vocal reformists and respected commentators, Amano Ikuo (1999), explains that although in the past HE has been predominately a stagnant seller’s market in Japan, demographics and other pressures are transforming this into a more diversified buyer’s market.

Amano on University Reform

Amano (1999) purports that the greatest challenge to universities is marketization. Since deregulation efforts in Japan started in the 1980s and 1990s, for the world of higher education as well, under the simultaneous control and protection of the government, “liberalization,” “diversity,” and “individualization” became the slogans of university reform. Amano points out that behind such catchwords—“individualization” (koseika), “diversification” (tayōka), and “zest for living” (ikiru chikara)—is this central ideology of deregulation. This reform was designed to “get rid of controls or weaken [the Japanese Ministry of Education],” liberalization that, of course, the ministry initially opposed (Hood 2001b, p. 106). Included in this problem—university reform accelerated by the low position of Japanese higher education in the eyes of the world—was an assertion, voiced since the seventies, that in order to activate research into education as well as to measure the rise in standards, regulations must be relaxed and a principle of competition should be adopted for the allocation of resources. A crisis in the universities and a structural change in higher education was brought about not only by the development of a mass education symbolized by a tremendous increase in the number of university-bound students, but this sudden start of politicization was a result of Japanese society and the economy itself facing difficult times. Amano points out that the severity of the challenge facing universities bespeaks just how high the expectation is for these institutions.

Amano feels that the educational research activities and administration modus operandi of universities are distinct from for-profit enterprises, and they cannot be expected to completely adopt competition and market principles. He also asserts that universities are not immune from marketization forces. As for the national universities, Amano suggests that these institutions have begun to be regarded as a sort of Orwellian Big Brother Japan. Journalists in Japan visiting the research facilities of national institutions dubbed them “a coffin of brains” (Arimoto 1997, p. 204). Trends toward adopting market and competition principles and the demand for the self-government of the university’s management bodies is a worldwide one, observes Amano. “It can be said that the ‘contemporary’ universities that were
Founded at the beginning of the 19th century, Japanese higher education is now confronting an era of deep-rooted reform and change (Amano 1999, p. ii). Yonezawa (2000) explains that the institutional response and governance impact of the process of these “limited privatization” reforms of the national university system include: 1) initial objection to, but final acceptance of the process, 2) mergers of two or more public universities, 3) a new Quality Assessment system (à la QAA in England and Wales), and 4) a new budgetary system with a lump-sum allocation of government funding.

All universities in Japan, however, are not merely standing by passively. Certain four-year institutions appear to be challenging themselves to keep abreast of the changing times. There are plenty of examples of university experimentation in Japan. As with most reforms, changes start not with the traditional established part of a system but rather at the periphery. The case of higher education in Japan is no exception. Specifically, within an environment of both intensified competition from a relaxation of regulations and a steady long-term decrease in the population of 18-year-olds, newly established universities looking to add a fresh approach to “the system” cannot survive and prosper without challenging the established universities and offering a noticeable difference.

The university reforms now underway have as their impetus the revision of the standards for university facilities as put forth in the 1991 report of the Daigaku Shingikai (often translated as the “Ad Hoc University Council”). However, Amano claims that “the revision most aspired toward in this report was no less than an innovation of education itself (Amano 1999, p. iii). He believes that, especially, the liberalization of the content of the education curriculum has achieved a considerable change in the makeup of the four-year university education. The removal of the division between the “general” education (kyōyō) and “specialized” (senmon) education courses has resulted in the disappearance of liberal arts and “general” education curricula at many universities.

The question remains, however, to what degree such reforms have succeeded, or will succeed, in changing the quality of a university education. Although he admits that to assess the results at this stage may be premature, Amano questions whether by international standards the quality of education that students are receiving has actually improved. The relaxation in entrance examination competition due to the decline in the population of 18-year-olds, the diversification in the selection process of applicants, and a curriculum reform that has lowered the standards of elementary and junior high school have all raised new issues about the content of university education at universities. Furthermore, Amano feels that a university attendance rate of 50 percent (approaching the level of Trow’s “universal” attendance1 combined with the development of the information age means that new issues, such as the admission of adult learners and more involvement in the global community, are forcing universities to confront very new and challenging issues.

The issues discussed in this section are only a few of such reform problems that challenge universities.

Amano warns that from the standpoint of both university practitioners and education researchers, these problems are more than ever before issues of such a
new character that the heretofore accumulated experience, information, and research are inadequate. In his book, Amano explains that with the recent establishment of an official organization, researchers into higher education have only just taken the first step to legitimize their findings. He doubts that among researchers such as himself there is enough competence to theoretically, practically, and accurately answer the new challenges. It is not only the universities that are faced with a conundrum. Academics working on research into higher education are finding that they have few answers.

Amano’s discussion of reform, as with many such discussions, is for the most part a consideration of top-down approach, whether at the government or institutional level. One important discourse that seems missing, to me anyway, is examples of changes from the bottom up, “reconstructions” of university culture that may result in reforming practice rather than simply reforming structure. Frost and Teodorescu (2001, pp. 409–410) illuminate such an example of reform of practice, an apparent change of teaching and university “culture” at a major research university. Though initially a top-down initiative, the result was “cultural change,” as they put it. “The discourse moved from initial macrolevel discussions to a university-wide movement on a more micro scale, fostering a culture that not only values research and teaching equivalently but that also values teaching and learning equivalently” (Frost & Teodorescu 2001, p. 410). Though couched in the management language of organizational theory rather than anthropology, Frost and Teodorescu’s point is one that I attempt to explore ethnographically below, looking at individual beliefs of teaching and “the institutional culture” of EUC.

The view of HE reform of many western observers (and western-looking Japanese educators) is more critical, and less optimistic, than Amano’s. Most feel as Doyon (2001), that the paradox of Japanese HE is the commonly held view that students are subjected to an examination hell to enter university, but then the actual university experience of “higher learning” is no more than a four-year leisure land. Of the many popular explanations for this paradox, the two most recurrent “excuses” are that university life is a reward for high school hell and that university life is a break before the hell of working. There are more complex explanations, however.

Brian McVeigh (2001, 2002b) offers an interpretation in which he argues that HE in Japan is a “myth.” In a Parsonian sense, he (McVeigh 2002b) argues forcefully that Japan’s exam-centered schooling socializes students to think that studying means examination prep, classroom participation means teacher inspection, test taking is a sort of multiple-choice “catechism,” academic study is merely credentialism, and learning is nothing more than rote memorization. The education and examination system in Japan encourages in students an apathy toward learning and an overconformity that manifests itself in shyness in the classroom. It is interesting to compare McVeigh’s description of Japanese HE with very similar points that Nathan (2005) makes after her ethnographic study of American university students, crossculturally weighing what may indeed be global traits of HEIs and their students.
Many have observed that part of the “HE problem” in Japan is overbureaucratization, most recently in a detailed OECD study (Newby et al. 2009) that was an embarrassment for MEXT (Aspinall 2009). One question that could be posed is whether or not this overbureaucratization is even more overbearing on an institutional rather than state level, especially for the majority of HEIs in Japan, which happen to be private. Nevertheless, in response to these critiques, the 2004 reforms in the Japanese education system have created a more decentralized, “liberal” government policy whereby schools and universities have more autonomy in terms of courses and curriculum. In line with neoliberal policies in other countries, the Ministry of Education is in turn centrally monitoring institutions through more indirect control as an alternative to direct control audits. Some anthropologists have pointed out that such a trend from central control to “audit culture” is a prevalent one in western societies and have argued that certainly in Britain, at least, it may not be the proper, or at least not the entire, remedy (Goodman 2001b; Shore & Wright 1999; Strathern 2000b). Jerry Eades (2000, 2004b), an anthropologist with extensive crosscultural experience in HE, points out that European and North American scholars may do well to learn lessons from the relaxed and relatively prolific nature of academic enquiry in Japanese universities. John Clammer (personal communication), another British-trained anthropologist with extensive experience at a prestigious Japanese university, adds that Japanese professors are not necessarily operating with the same sort of model of professional performance as British or American professors. This is an observation I also support in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 below.

Whatever the explanation and no matter the best remedy, there is general agreement among the public, academics, the government, and industry that something is amiss with the university system, and reform must be undertaken soon if universities are to thrive as viable educational institutions. This is the crisis described by Amano and others.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM: RECRUITMENT & RETAINMENT

This section discusses the institutional response to outside pressure that I have observed during my fieldwork at EUC. Recruitment and retainment of students has been deemed by faculty members and administrative staff to be critical strategies for maintaining enrollment numbers.

Within the Japanese higher education community, participants and observers alike have often focused their discussions of the declining birthrate problem on the important issue of recruitment of new students. As part of this new market model, recruitment strategies have received much attention by observers of Japanese HE (Imai 2001, Oe 2003, Oono 2000). These strategies are argued to be one indicator of this diversification of the Japanese HEI about which Amano speaks. For example, at many universities the number and flexibility in types and timing of entrance exams means that high school students can often choose between ten or more different admission paths. Nontraditional students, such as mature students
and international students, are being catered to in an attempt to reach beyond that of graduating high school students, who, until recently, have been the only ones participating in HE. Developing new departments with fancy titles using catchy words deemed attractive to both high school students and these new nontraditional students—“international” (kokusai), “environment” (kankyō), “human” (ningen), and “information” (jōhō)—is another strategy that many schools have adopted.

In addition to recruitment, however, an equally crucial issue of retention is just now beginning to emerge (Masuda 2003; Yoshimoto 2003). Efforts to keep students involved in the higher educational process has, for the first time in 30 years, led to theoretical debates about teaching and curriculum reform (Arimoto 2003), and the configuration of the HE institution itself as two-year institutions become four-year, and four-year institutions add postgraduate schools.

For example, the chair of the admissions committee at my field site told me, “We have a growing problem with the dropout rate. What will help the retention rate is getting students to feel better about our university by providing an educational environment where they feel that they have many friends and that classes are helping them reach their goals. There is no sense in putting tremendous effort into admissions if we are just going to lose students [to attrition]!”

Talk about retaining students increased. Attrition rates have never been monitored with anywhere near the interest given recruitment rates. Nevertheless, demographic and market forces in 21st century Japan are forcing administrators and faculty to consider the academic wellbeing of the student body more seriously than in the past. In response, curriculum reform and faculty development, or, FD as it is usually called in Japan, is beginning to gain favor among a few private institutions that are feeling the heat (Inoshita 2003).

Before the start of the general faculty meeting in the afternoon of January 20, 2004, the President’s Office committee gave a detailed report on a survey it had undertaken, which asked first-year students about how they make their decision to enroll at EUC and their subsequent level of satisfaction with the university once enrolled. Although the report provided important data for improving recruitment strategies, which of course was the stated purpose of the report, it also provided revealing insights into how to meet the challenge of retaining students.

Of the various reasons for applying to different universities, by far of greatest import to the EUC cohort was whether or not the school to which a student applied offered a subject of study in a department or faculty of interest to him/her. On the questionnaire, students also indicated that EUC fitted this criterion In other words, for incoming EUC students, the content of academic study is a much greater priority, by a factor of at least three, than either the image of the university or the hensachi grades (norm-referenced scoring system for secondary school leavers) required for entrance. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that it is largely a vocationally oriented university.

As an anthropologist, even considering the methodology problems of administering surveys and the danger of getting exactly the answers anticipated, this information is still revealing and was confirmed by observing and interacting
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with students in my freshman seminar. Marina Lee-Cunin (2004, 2005) details this same student concern with quality of education in her rich, detailed ethnographic studies of a national university in Japan. As with most of their age cohort in Japan, or other societies for that matter, many of the young adults in my classes did not necessarily have a firm idea of what they would be doing in two, three, or four years time. Nevertheless, though they readily admit that making friends and part-time work is an important part of their university experience (cf., Holland & Eisenhart 1990; Lee-Cunin 2004; Moffatt 1989; Nathan 2005; Sacks 1996), many of my first-year students at EUC were initially rather keen on actually studying an academic subject in the faculty of commerce or management.

Such measurement of student opinion entails the novel approach, for daigaku, of attempting to better understand “the customer.” In this section I have provided a few examples of daigaku “cultural change” in the present era of societal pressure.

DISCIPLINARY REFORM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Most of the pressure on English language teaching (ELT) is from the many theories purporting why Japanese have great difficulty in acquiring proficiency in English as a second language. The blame is usually placed on either the learners themselves or their learning environment. After all, the argument goes, motivation for learning English must be low in a country where more than 95 percent of the inhabitants speak Japanese as their first language, though granted there is a language diversity within the Japanese community in Japan that is seldom acknowledged in the popular literature and local mindset, which usually assumes a “uniqueness” of Japanese, a distinctiveness that in reality “relates not only to Japanese linguistic experience but actually to all human language” (Miller 1982, p. 26). In any event, there is little immediate necessity or perceived need for English, or any foreign language for that matter. When explaining these difficulties of ELT and learning in the Japanese context, observers have rightly called for an examination of cultural and historical influences (Koike 1978, p. 3). Unfortunately such an examination of the context of ELT in Japan is sometimes distorted into historically revisionist statements that attribute the failure to the often heard “island nation” diatribe or culturalist arguments that emphasize how the unique traits of Japanese people present a major obstacle for ELT reform. As Aspinall (2003) has pointed out, although such viewpoints have been recently couched in the progressive arguments of “language ecology,” they in fact become a self-fulfilling prophecy and tend to say more about the politics of ELT in Japan than about the actual historical or sociocultural context.

Failure of ELT in Japan

On the surface, the lack of success with ELT in Japan appears discordant with the fact that Japanese education shows relatively good results in other areas. Japan is
famous for “borrowing” and “copying” technology, and anthropologists have noted that such “copying” is an important theme in Japan, in general (e.g., Cox 2007; Hendry 2000a), and in Japanese education in particular—“imitation is the highest form of praise” in the Japanese cultural logic” (Rohlen & LeTendre 1996a, p. 371).

In fact, the Japanese language itself contains fully 13 percent loan words, mostly from English (Honma 1995, p. 45). Why then has there been such a widespread failure in effectively learning to “imitate” the English language? For the past century lay persons and scholars alike have proposed various theories to explain this paradox.

Aspinall (2003) summarizes the five major purported reasons for ELT failure in Japan, arguments of both why English education has “failed” and why Japanese speakers of English as a second language (L2) are inept. Any English teacher in Japan would most likely offer one or more of these as reasons if asked why Japanese cannot speak English well: 1) There is a great linguistic disparity between Indo-European languages, such as English, and Japanese, an Altai language; 2) there is lack of real need for English in a monoglotal society such as Japan; 3) the predominant ELT methodology has been grammar/translation, which is not an effective way to teach communicative skills; 4) the culture of the language classroom in Japan precludes effective language learning; 5) there is an exotic and fashionable image of English, which emphasizes entertainment value rather than the hard work necessary for effective language learning.

Loveday (1996, pp. 95–99) probably goes furthest in explaining the sociolinguistics behind language education failure by placing ELT into the context of language contact in Japan. Reiterating some of the reasons summarized above, he concludes that Japan is a case of a “non-bilingualism” in a “language contact setting” because of deficiencies that are related to 1) the system of education, 2) the teachers, 3) the institutions, and 4) the sociolinguistic environment. He argues that the education system has failed because of the emphasis on grammar and translation, the washback of entrance exams, and a history of reductionist concentration on receptive skills for decoding foreign texts. Teachers are at fault because of their too-often limited proficiency in English, lack of overseas experience and opportunities for practical training (faculty development, or FD as it is often glossed at universities), and for perpetuating large, mixed-ability classes with a strict syllabus and time limits using outdated, boring texts prescribed by the Ministry of Education. An institutional conservatism inhibits effective English-language learning—the local classroom norm of teacher-centered lecturing, collective conformity, emphasis on rote-learning methods and absolute correctness, and students motivated only by the demands of university entrance exams. Years of focus on prescriptive notions of grammar in both the Japanese classroom and linguistic research have resulted in a widespread belief that translation is a mechanical process accomplished through word-for-word rendering of Japanese into English (or other foreign language). Finally, sociolinguistic attitudes hamper proper second-language learning, because of 1) the linguistic distance between Japanese and English, 2) culturally specific styles of expression and interaction.
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with an emphasis on self-control, modesty, reassurance, and perfectionism (factors that when combined prioritize the written text over verbal communication and makes for taciturn students in the language classroom), 3) an attitude of ethnocentrism among native Japanese speakers, 4) a lack of both perceived and actual need for foreign languages, 5) and little support for maintenance of language skills after schooling, leading to a wide-scale attrition of language skills.

Although these hurdles for ELT in Japan parallel factors that hamper second-language learning in other monolingual societies such as Britain or the U.S. (see Holliday 1994; Thornbury 1998), there is a widespread belief in Japan, held by the person on the street and the education expert alike, that ELT has failed. Brian McVeigh sums up this belief nicely: “If English teaching at the pretertiary level is a disaster …, it is at the tertiary level that English education becomes peculiar, with inverted, simulated ideas and practices that actually sabotage English learning” (McVeigh 2002b, p. 157).

The changes in university language programs, and the HE curricula in general, reflect recent societal pressures in Japan. In the past, there was little pressure to reform the curriculum. A buyer’s market, however, has forced universities to seriously reconsider “the product.” Not only are admissions offices scrambling to find new customers, but administrators and faculty are also beginning to recognize an equally crucial issue of retention of students, as discussed above. This has led to a culture in some universities of faculty development and in others of parallel extension programs. EUC decided to go the road of FD in an attempt to improve their HE “product.”

ELT at Japanese Universities

The numerous descriptions and explanations of the poor state of English education in Japan usually emphasize how “the poor English abilities of students are rooted in pretertiary-level training” (McVeigh 2002b, p. 157). Many of these critical descriptions, though accurate, do not necessarily explain the changes that have taken place in ELT at Japanese universities over the past 50 years (Terauchi 1996, 2001; Wadden 1993). Though admittedly inadequate in scope and only effecting incremental change, nevertheless, there have been legitimate attempts to reform tertiary-level English education in Japan. These changes to some degree parallel larger changes in applied linguistic and language teaching theory worldwide. As briefly noted above, much of the explanation of failure in English-language training in Japan has often been based on arguments that are culturally specific in nature. Certainly the sociocultural context of ELT must be paramount in any analysis. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Poole 2001, 2005b), the shortcomings of the reforms at the tertiary level may in fact reflect more upon the sociocultural realities of the institutional milieu of ELT at HEIs worldwide, a smaller culture of the ELT classroom, than on the larger culture of Japanese peculiarities.
As Aspinall describes (2005), most university admissions exams include a compulsory English proficiency subtest, although English as a foreign language (EFL) is not a state-required subject at primary, secondary, and tertiary schools in Japan. Partly because of this, university entrance exam focus on English, while only a handful of students are exposed to language classes in primary school, over 10 million 12- to-18-year-olds and another million or so university students have no choice but to study English. Not only is English a requirement to enter university, most students study the subject at some point during their four years of attendance. Nearly all tertiary institutions offer foreign language courses, and EFL is by far the most studied subject of these. In fact, although students sometimes have a choice of different English classes from which to choose, EFL in some form is a required subject at nearly every tertiary institution in Japan. In fact, the nature of the English language-teaching milieu at Japanese universities corresponds closely to Holliday’s description of a worldwide phenomenon he has defined as Tertiary English and Secondary English Programs, or TESEP (Holliday 1994). These TESEP attributes include: 1) EFL is a part of a wider curriculum and influenced by institutional imperatives; 2) ELT has a role alongside other subjects in socializing students as members of the work community; 3) EFL is but one of many subjects taught and must work within the parameters and resources that are limiting factors for all courses; 4) ELT methodology choice is limited by institution-wide approaches adopted across different subjects as well as by the expectations of the actors themselves—students, language teachers, teachers of other subjects, administrators, and MEXT.

In other words, though there are certain peculiarities that exist in Japanese ELT at HEIs (McVeigh 2002b, pp. 157–158), many of the generalizations that describe the university context of language teaching and learning may be attributes not necessarily unique to the Japanese experience but part of a wider phenomenon of tertiary English programs worldwide. Kubota (1999) has argued, correctly in my opinion, that observers need to take more care in their evaluations of the Japanese context, and that there exists an overemphasis of essentialized, stereotypical “features” of Japanese students in the research literature on ELT. Holliday (1994) points out a similar danger of assuming too much when he argues that “‘learner’ carries the implication that the only purpose for being in the classroom is to learn … [while] ‘student’, on the other hand, implies roles and identities outside the classroom.” Likewise, anthropologists have noted that for many students at HEIs in Japan, classroom learning is in fact not always the main priority and warn that the western view of “learner” may not fit with the Japanese model (McVeigh 1997; Poole 2003b).

One example of the overgeneralizations that are rather common in the ELT literature is the description of Asian students as “often quiet, shy and reticent in ESL/EFL classrooms, indicating a reserve that is the hallmark of introverts. These ethnic groups have a traditional cultural focus on group membership, solidarity and face-saving, and they de-emphasize individualism (Oxford et al. 1992, p. 445). While any EFL teacher who has spent time in a Japanese university language
classroom would probably agree that many of their students are quiet, a language teacher in a North American college might just as easily label their class of 18-year-olds as “reticent” or “face-saving” (Nathan 2005). The dangers of generalization aside, the fact remains that the perception of English-language teaching at universities is that of failure, and this perception has challenged both university educators and ministry officials for much of the 20th century. Responses to this challenge have varied, and for the most part real change has been superseded by mere rhetoric.

ELT Methodology

To address this question of ELT reform, it is necessary to first discuss the major trends in language teaching and learning in Japan, especially noting the change, or lack of change, in methodology over the years. As was mentioned above, in the university tradition of ELT yakudoku methodology, commonly glossed as grammar-translation (GT), has often been the preferred teaching and learning style. Yakudoku (GT), the teaching of mechanical word-by-word translation techniques, has a long tradition in Japan, some (Henrichsen 1989) tracing its origin to the Nara and Heian periods (A.D. 710–1185), when Japanese Buddhist scholars were greatly influenced by the Chinese written language without regard for oral proficiency.

Though this GT method may have been predominant at preparatory schools for university, once entering university, Meiji-era students were trained in English (often by foreign professors) as specialists in subjects such as medicine, economics, law, or engineering, and English lessons were not part of the curriculum. So, while in much of the Meiji period university students studied “in English and through English, but never about English,” by the 20th century a growing nationalism changed the medium of instruction and meant that students “had reached the stage of learning about English in Japanese” (Bryant, 1956 in Henrichsen 1989, p. 122). The GT methodology of explaining English grammar and translation techniques in Japanese gained prominence as the preferred form of teaching English.

In prewar Japan, then, while English taught through GT was part of the liberal arts approach to preparing students for the imperial and private universities at the secondary-school level of kōtōgakkō (higher schools) and yoka (preparatory schools) respectively, the curriculum of the HEIs focused on specialized training. While the intention was not to develop proficiency in communicating in spoken English, nevertheless for those Japanese that traveled abroad, lack of communicative skills proved embarrassing, and spoken skill gained in priority. The Palmer Oral English approach was an important predecessor to a later reform innovation implemented in postwar Japan by the English Language Exploratory Committee (ELEC) and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Fries Oral Approach to language learning (Henrichsen 1989).

The persistence of GT methodology in spite of these efforts at reform suggests the pernicious strength and perceived efficacy of this tradition of teaching in Japan
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and supports the argument that implementation of change in ELT must be predominately an indigenous effort. In fact, Japanese ELT experts themselves have developed two voices in English-language education, the GT and the “communicative,” “one saying that cultural enrichment through reading is important in the traditional manner, the other saying that English is needed for international communication” (Wada & McCarty 1984, p. 28). This latter group, though again using theories from abroad, provided the impetus for a second wave of ELT reform at universities in Japan, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach.

Tsuda Yukio, Suzuki Takao and other Japanese sociolinguists have emphasized the need for local, Japanese answers to questions of language learning and teaching methodology. Though Aspinall (2003) does suggest that Tsuda and Suzuki’s arguments may be used for certain political agendas, he also points out that, taken at face value, there is a good degree of relevancy to their claims. I agree that, for the most part, “attempts in the past to superimpose methods from overseas have generally been a failure not only because of the lack of appropriate training and shortage of materials, but also because of the existing approach to university education” (Terauchi 2001, p. 52). This failure of properly contextualizing the method of learning with the learning environment has been the plague of ELT worldwide, not only in Japan. In North America and the British Commonwealth as well, there has arisen an unavoidable “gap” between ELT theory in the literature and actual practice in the classroom. Through twenty years of observation of language classrooms and teacher training programs in the U.S., Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, Thornbury (1998) concludes that the so-called communicative language teaching (CLT) method of ELT “has never been anything but direct and that strong CLT—apart from its one moment of glory in Bangalore (Prabhu 1987)—has been and remains a chimera” (Thornbury 1998, p. 110). ELT teachers, whether in London, Cairo, or Tokyo, are not convinced by research findings, rather they are much more concerned with whether or not the method is easily understood and adapted to their local situation (Whitley 1993, p. 147).

The reason for the general perceived “failure” of communicative approaches to language teaching in Asia is often defined as the result of insensitivity to the cultural realities of the region. The influence of Confucianism in Asian education is often emphasized in these discussions (Cortazzi & Jin 1996; Ellis 1994; Flowerdew 1998; Kelly & Adachi 1993; Oxford et al. 1992; Stapleton 1995). Partly because of these warnings and criticisms, teacher trainers in the communicative approach are certainly aware of the challenges and dangers of exporting western methodologies in situ, without considering the cultural and social milieu of the education environment (Holliday 1994; Kramsch 1998).

However, as mentioned above, though the so called cultural explanations in the recent literature are at first convincing, some observers (Cheng 2000; Kubota 1999; Littlewood 2000) have warned that overemphasizing these factors when explaining challenges to teaching methodology risks a simplistic, cultural-deterministic argumentation that is not necessarily “grounded” in reality.
Holliday’s (1999) proposal of a “small culture” model is one pertinent approach to analyzing social factors in language teaching in a more situationally specific manner. Many of the practical challenges to the adoption in Asia of a “strong” version of communicative language teaching methodology (Howatt 1984) are not terribly different from the challenges that exist in the west, as Holliday (1994) has pointed out in his TESEP model mentioned above.

CURRICULUM REFORM—LITERACY AND KYŌIku SYSTEM

Moving from a macroanalysis of reform within one discipline in Japan—ELT—to a more micro-examination of reform of the curriculum at one institution—EUC—it is important to state at the outset that traditionally each professor at the majority of the private and public colleges and universities throughout Japan has had nearly total autonomy in teaching. In most cases individual faculty members decide what and how they will teach, set their own syllabus, teach the course, design their own exams, and then mark the exams and assign grades. Until very recently there has been no external assessment of teaching, let alone formal discussion among professors within a department. Usually this is very surprising to colleagues involved in HE institutions in North America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. Given this precedent, then, there appears to be two basic models regarding reform of the curriculum and faculty at private universities (Goodman, personal communication). Many university presidents are asking whether they will 1) try to reform the practice of the current teaching staff or 2) bypass them altogether through the development of programs external to the faculty.

Many private university administrators and presidents have taken this second path and given up trying to reform a recalcitrant staff disinterested in reforming their practice and bent on maintaining an autonomy that was granted to them as part of the academic freedom instituted in postwar Japan, a process well documented in work by historian Byron Marshall (1994). Reformers frustrated with professors who think their only role is that of researcher have in some institutions openly given up on changing these faculty members into teachers. Instead, these administrators are working hard to develop extracurricular projects to recruit and retain students, developing a sort of “practical university” of credentialism—extension programs, international exchanges, and certification courses—that exists on the same campus alongside the more traditional “academic university” (Goodman, personal communication). Faced with a shrinking student base, Japanese universities are increasingly in search of new markets into which they expand, often competing directly with vocational colleges for working students who also hold jobs (shakaijin).

However, a few private universities have decided to reform the teaching at the academic university by encouraging faculty to reform the curriculum, improve and update their syllabuses, evaluate their own teaching, and take seriously the students’ academic and personal concerns (Musselwhite 2003). This is the case at EUC.
EUC appears to be focusing its survival efforts predominately on the first of the two routes outlined above—reforming the curriculum. Although much of the discussion of FD and curriculum change is just that, discussion, there has been some real change in an attempt to rectify the problems facing HE. I observed curriculum changes largely in three areas: 1) the institution of a quasisemester system; 2) standardization of the syllabuses for the core curriculum, especially the first-year seminar (zemi ichi; homeroom and freshmen orientation) and foreign language courses; and 3) review of the study abroad and international students programs. All of these changes challenge the commitment of professors to the pedagogical process. This section will both detail these changes themselves as well as the debates that surround them.

The Schoolwide EUC Curriculum

The undergraduate division at EUC, which comprises over 95 percent of enrollment, is divided into eight courses of study, four each in the two faculties—Faculty of Commerce (shōgakubu) and Faculty of Management (kei'eigakubu). Students apply to, sit exams for, and are accepted into one or the other faculty. Usually undergraduates decide their own course of study (major) during or after their first year at EUC. In the Faculty of Commerce, students can choose between the marketing course, finance course, accounting course, and consumer science course. The Faculty of Management offers four different majors—the business management course, the business communication course, the entrepreneurship course, and the management environment course. Additionally, there are teacher education classes, along with a student teaching practicum component, required by those students who wish to gain a teaching license to teach either social studies at junior high schools or commerce, geography and history, civics, or information science at high schools.

All students in both faculties, and in all eight courses of study, are required to take five of the same compulsory classes in their first year—first-year seminar (zemi ichi), bookkeeping, basic computing, and English as a Foreign Language A & B (ECA & ECB). In addition, there are a number of required electives to be chosen from different clusters in the liberal arts and business fields, and the remaining credits for graduation are comprised of required classes for the individual majors, as well as elective classes chosen according to individual interest.

Curriculum Reforms

Between 1998 and 2005 the foreign language and first-year seminar curriculum underwent substantial changes. These changes initially focused on 1) better integrating the curriculum and 2) streaming or tracking the students according to level, in the case of the language program, and interest, in the case of the first-year seminar. These reforms are not insignificant if one considers the fact that 1)
traditionally each professor at the majority of the private and public colleges and universities throughout Japan has had nearly total autonomy in teaching and 2) that tracking has taken place historically only during the entrance examination process—once at a particular university all students are effectively lumped into the same classes regardless of ability or interest. In Japan egalitarianism is a strong social more in educational circles.

The impetus for these reforms was multifaceted. The introduction of a new faculty, a school of management, necessitated a schoolwide reform of the curriculum. The process was decentralized, since all the departments were asked by the committee for academic affairs to rethink and adjust their individual curricula. This included the FLG. In addition, there was dissatisfaction with the school curriculum in general. In particular, the foreign language program was exposed as failing in its mission. Partly this was because of the sheer size and visibility of ELT at EUC, by far the largest department in terms of number of classes on offer and number of professors employed. This visibility was boosted by the presence of foreign, “native English” professors on campus. In terms of the FLG, the third facet of this drive for changing the curriculum was the willingness among the full-time professors to look for creative solutions, though this willingness also involved self-serving reasons. Before the 2001 school year, neither the ELT nor the first-year seminar curriculum and class syllabi were decided institutionally; individual professors, not academic affairs committees or subject departments, were given total responsibility for both the planning and content of these classes. However, such a laissez-faire approach changed, since the department (in the case of the EFL classes) and the academic affairs committee (in the case of the first-year seminar) decided to take control and revamp the curriculum for these two freshman courses.

A change in the language curriculum was the first attempt to adjust for a perceived decline in student ability. Palfreyman (2001) discusses this phenomenon in the context of HE in Britain, disparagingly labeling it as “dumbing down,” while Kariya (2002, 2003) argues that the decline in academic ability in Japan is not only exaggerated but the concern is misplaced. The result was that coursework and assessment more “appropriate” to the learners’ ability and needs was offered. In the English foreign language curriculum, the two required EFL classes had been taught by non-Japanese instructors (“natives”), while the few elective classes were taught by Japanese professors. These EFL classes were taught primarily by part-time faculty. Although in the new curriculum most classes were still being taught by part-timers, the ratio was changed. The FLG decided that incoming freshmen could not handle the required first-year EC classes taught exclusively by native speakers. The curriculum was therefore changed so that Japanese English professors would be responsible for all first-year students, and the foreign staff would teach only second-year or above. Significantly, in terms of their self-importance, full-time Japanese English professors teach compulsory classes that are core (compulsory) not merely peripheral (electives) to the ELT and EUC curriculum.
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Full-time Japanese professors are also intensively involved in the curriculum (tracking the incoming freshman class into different levels) and the syllabuses (designing the wide range of elective classes now on offer). To adjust to the increasing need for EUC students to possess more and more “qualifications” and “certificates” to list on their resumes when job-hunting, the first-year ELT syllabus was adjusted to help students attain a better score on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) exam. Furthermore, using a standardized testing instrument, incoming students were streamed according to ability, a change that affected the classroom culture of the various student level groups. From the Japanese professors’ perspective, these reforms resulted in substantially more work than they were accustomed to; most teach seven credit hours (koma) as well as spend considerable time in curriculum planning and program development. As a result, a few dedicated part-time lecturers were enlisted to help ease the workload of the full-time professors, chafing under what they perceived as a new, busy schedule.

The first-year seminar, since it is a homeroom class, was always taught exclusively by full-time faculty members. However, in the past, before the reforms, there had never been a common syllabus or even a common objective for this course. Professors had total freedom in doing as much, or as little, in the way of teaching, counseling, lecturing, and leading student research projects. There was no direction for new professors. Even as a new foreign professor I was given no official guidance. An entirely new first-year seminar was implemented at the beginning of the 2002 school year, however. Not only was there a common syllabus, but all students were assigned the same textbook as well (Sumiya 1981). There was a clear objective and both the first-year seminar program as well as the individual professors were given full support of the academic affairs committee and administrative staff.

In addition, as part of the new first-year seminar curriculum, the institution decided (at the considerable expense of several million yen) that all first-year students and first-year seminar faculty would participate in a two-day freshman orientation in the Izu Peninsula, a famous resort area in Shizuoka Prefecture, west of Tokyo. This was well planned in advance, of course, and executed smoothly in a regimented fashion typical of such institutional outings in Japan. The feeling was that incoming students needed more practice in basic study and research skills, and, to help them adjust to the academic demands and freedoms of a university, the first-year seminar was redesigned as a sort of remedial class, with practice in reading, writing, summarizing, discussion, presentation, and even etiquette, all part of the syllabus, where before professors were allowed to lecture on anything they wanted (or not, as a very few were accused of).

Implementing a Semester System

The Japanese school year begins in April and ends the following March, and at universities, classes usually end in January, with a long spring break during
February and March (though the school offices themselves are not closed, and faculty and staff are quite busy with entrance exams during this time). Though many universities have changed to a semester-based school calendar, university classes in Japan still often meet once a week for the entire school year. At EUC, though there is a first and second “semester,” the classes themselves continue after the summer break, meeting about 25 times over the year, once a week for 90 minutes. The first and second “semesters” are semesters or terms only in an administrative sense. Professors do administer midyear tests, but much of the final grade for large lecture classes is dependent on the yearend tests given in January.

With pressure to liberalize the university curriculum in an effort to allow for students to both transfer to other institutions midway through a course and also cross-register for classes among the numerous university consortia that have been cropping up in different regions, a “modular” syllabus, modeled on American colleges, is being introduced at many campuses around Japan, a trend that has hit most British universities as well (besides Oxford and Cambridge).

In 1999, EUC joined a consortium of universities in western Tokyo (Shutoken nishibu daigaku, “West Tokyo Universities”) that have agreed to allow an exchange of modular credits for coursework, and which increased the pressure to institute a semester system. There are numerous problems with such a drastic change to the university calendar, however. Of course in order for a course with the same credit weight to be offered on a semester calendar, 90 minutes of class time per week must be effectively doubled, so the class must meet two or three times a week rather than once a week. This was discussed at EUC, but only briefly.

The university employs over 100 part-time lecturers. While many of these hold permanent positions at other universities, a fair number make a living on part-time work alone. In actuality, part-time lecturing is quite stable, since hiring and firing is done with great reluctance—though the academic affairs committee began to administer questionnaires to students in 2001, there are no objective standards upon which to assess either part-time or full-time faculty members (no tenure process either), and so it is nearly impossible to fire a professor. Though the process to hire a permanent faculty member can be quite convoluted, among overworked full-time faculty members, the general perception regarding part-time faculty hiring is that there need not be the same serious attention paid to the time-intensive job of advertising, short-listing, and interviewing candidates.

The existence of this semipermanent cadre of part-time workers, then, becomes a major issue when implementing a new school calendar. For example, in 2002, because of the number of national holidays that fall on a Monday (the “Happy Monday” syndrome, as it is called at many campuses in Japan), the university decided to compensate by adding extra “Monday” classes on different days of the week. Of course the part-time professors simply cancelled their EUC classes on these extra days, since they already had other commitments at different universities. Likewise, if required to teach two or three times a week in a semester system, it was feared that many part-timers might quit and find work elsewhere in Tokyo at universities that have not yet changed to a semester system. Full-time
professors as well would not welcome the introduction of a four- or five-day teaching schedule, since this would eliminate their income from part-time teaching at other universities, not a small amount of money in some cases. Though very much the exception, one full-time language professor juggles a schedule that includes more than 10 part-time classes a week in addition to his full-time teaching and administrative responsibilities at EUC, an additional ¥200,000–300,000 a month.

At one of the largest universities in Japan, the administrative offices wield considerable power and so were able to ignore opposition and implement a faculty-wide semester system, a change that ended up being short-lived since neither the students nor the faculty and administrative offices themselves could handle the new calendar. The university quickly reverted back to year-long classes. At EUC, the president insisted that such a decision be made with the consent, and consensus, of the faculty senate. For this reason, after five years of deliberations, a compromise was reached whereby the university adopted a “quasi-semester system” from 2005. Courses were still a year long, but split into two parts. Students registered for classes only once a year, as they did before. They received half of the credit hours for the course after the first semester, and the remaining credits after successful completion of the second semester.

Practically, the academic affairs committee hopes that this would help with keeping students enrolled. If a student fails “half a course,” he/she need only to register and pass the remaining “half” in order to gain a year of credit hours. Though certainly a reality at some struggling institutions, EUC does not overtly cajole professors to pass students undeservedly, inflating grades so as to better retain and graduate students in a timely fashion. In fact, the university administration and president supported Professor Wakai, a lecturer in economic history, in his decision to refuse to pass a student in one of his classes. The ideology of “family-like education” (kazoku kyōiku) also supports the adoption of a semester or quasi-semester system. In the new calendar, professors must set exams and papers, assess students, and assign grades after each semester. Professors have more classroom administration, and in a sense, more teaching to do than before the implementation of the semester system. Students, and professors, have less time to “relax,” since the semester system is inherently busy; the syllabus is set at a faster pace and time on task necessarily increased to accommodate both lectures and preparation for exams and papers. This forces students to participate more in the academic process, if nothing else than by involving them in more hours of classroom education.

Many large lecture courses are plagued by the phenomenon of students chatting in class (Shimada 2002; Uta 2005). In an effort to curtail the practice, professors will often not require attendance in hopes that their class will then be attended only by the most motivated students. Rates of attendance, therefore, vary between classes considerably. One professor estimated that 10 percent of the student body rarely show their face on campus, sitting the year-end exams alone to try to gain the credit hours needed for graduation. The Academic Affairs Committee and
president saw the semester system as a way of forcing students to attend more classes and generally be more involved in classroom education. It is thought that the semester calendar was a first step towards facilitating the standardization of the various course syllabuses by effectively breaking each course into two halves. Overall, the semester system effectively increases the amount of professorial “guidance of students” (gakusei shidō), which supports the ideology of a warm “family-like” educational experience, more than it does the number of classroom contact hours.

**Standardizing the Syllabus**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there are very few standardized syllabuses among the EUC departments. Most professors are able to teach what, when, and how much they like in terms of course and subject content. With an eye toward reform of teaching practice, however, there were various moves, with varying degrees of success, towards standardizing the courses on offer at EUC. This fit with the EUC ideology of “family-like education” (kazoku kyōiku), as was being advertised in the glossy admissions office bulletins, which holds dear the notion of small classes, first-year seminars, and a core curriculum of computing, bookkeeping, and “communicative English” classes required of all first-years.

One of the first steps toward standardization was a presidential purge of the overall university curriculum, at a macro level. With pressure from the board to reduce the number of part-time lecturers in a cost-cutting effort, President Asakubo took a top-down approach to streamlining the curriculum, announcing his moves with much fanfare and posturing at the faculty senate. He deliberately tried to leave little room in which the various departments especially the Liberal Arts Faculty, could maneuver.

At the level of the syllabus, the academic affairs committee, with the help of the president and the President’s Office committee, made some reforms to standardize the content of certain classes. The first-year seminar and EC were prime examples. Although both of these courses had been key components in the EUC core curriculum, because there was little coordination, let alone standardization, students taking the same class were getting course credits for wildly different content.

**Reassessing the Study Abroad Program**

A twentieth anniversary report on the study abroad program at EUC starts with the following introduction:

Education of any kind is ideally a broadening experience, one that acquaints us with new ideas, concepts and cultures. The perfect complement to any education is a period of study in another country, where one is immersed in the unfamiliar. An old adage holds that those who “travel much, know
much.” The founder of Edo Gakuen, Kawada Tetsuya, urged students to pursue a goal of becoming “peaceful and internationally minded citizens.” Following these words of encouragement, in 1984, eighty years after its establishment, EUC instituted an international study abroad program—the International Student Exchange Program, or INSTEP. Since then nearly 600 students have participated in and benefited from this program of study in the United States and Taiwan.

The first fifteen years of the program were run largely by the administrative staff from the academic affairs division, with minimal committee involvement. This is significant because INSTEP includes course credits and is therefore an academic program and would normally have been administered very tightly by a group of faculty members appointed to the International Programs Committee. The study abroad program, however, had always been firmly rooted in the liberal arts, not in either of the business faculties, and thus was located peripherally, not centrally, to the academic curriculum. From about 2000, however, there had been a conscious attempt to shift the program toward the center of the business curriculum. This was fraught with difficulty, largely because of resistance from both those in the administration and those academics who had a vested interest in keeping the program under their watch.

First-Year Seminar and the Freshman Orientation

All incoming freshman are placed into first-year seminar classes. Though there is some semblance of choice for the students, for all intents and purposes it is a rather random assignment into these “homerooms.” As a rule, there are twenty students per seminar. The professor is assigned a random cohort of twenty students and decides the basic theme depending on his/her research interests. These themes traditionally were open-ended (i.e., anything goes), but in 2001 it was decided to group the seminars into six different areas of study—“Morality/Logic/Philosophy,” “History,” “Contemporary Society,” “Healthy Body and Mind,” “Communication & Culture,” and “Science in Society.” The 36 professors involved in this program were asked to develop the class themes within these groupings, and students chose one of the six groupings and were assigned a class accordingly. In actuality, although the process was smoothed logistically, and students were given a better chance of being assigned an area of study closest to their interest, the change appeared to have little affect on the actual content of the seminars themselves.

The result is that there is a wide variation in the first-year seminar curriculum with very little consistency, corresponding to the “academic freedom” (maybe carrying over into a “pedagogic freedom” of sorts) held so dear to professors in Japan. Each class very much depends on the style of the professor, as well as, to a lesser extent, the “chemistry” of the students in the class that year. Some professors focus on fundamental writing and research skills within the chosen topic. Others prefer to lecture to the small class (a more captive audience than the larger lecture
classes). A few professors take advantage of an opportunity to involve students in their own ongoing research (something that also happens in the second- and third-year seminar courses). And there is the occasional professor who uses the small class as a healthy “excuse” to relax and chat with students in a collegiate, friendly fashion, hoping to close the distance between student and professor. This is not always deemed appropriate, however, and such professors are occasionally labeled as lazy because they are “shirking their responsibility to teach.” To say that someone is “lazy” (namakemono) in a work environment is one of the worst accusations that can be made about a co-worker in Japan. There is such a strong rhetoric of always being “busy” (isogashii), one that is ubiquitous in any work environment (indeed, any social environment) in Japan, that although a co-worker may be labeled incompetent, “lazy” is usually avoided. Even so, there is little or no action taken against such inappropriate teaching behavior, not least because there is no formal recourse and no precedent to engage in such teaching assessment in anything other than a passive form of data collection (student questionnaires, formal and informal student complaints, teacher room and after hours “talk,” though such data is not necessarily discounted).

Seminar Classes

The second and third-year seminar classes, or zemi, are, unlike the first-year seminars, perhaps the most interesting pedagogically. The professors are free to teach however they see fit, and the focus of the seminars is a general theme that is usually decided by the professor, as in the first-year seminar. There is great variation—some professors decide to lecture just as they would in a regular course, others mix lecturing with discussion and research projects, and still other seminars resemble an “Oxford seminar” or tutorial in that the students decide on specific topics to research within the overall theme and present these papers in groups, pairs, or individually to the rest of the class.

At most universities in Japan, seminars are difficult to gain admittance to. They often represent an esteemed membership experience that adds a certain punch to one’s resume, not without value when job-hunting begins in the junior year. At EUC the percentage of participation in seminars is somewhat larger than other universities—about 80 percent of all EUC students elect to enroll in a seminar class. I am not sure of the reason for this. It could be because the EUC seminar environment is less competitive than at other universities, or it could be because of a higher teacher/student ratio than at other institutions, or perhaps because students have less involvement in the more traditional university clubs and so have less extracurricular commitments, leaving more time for involvement in seminars.

These seminars take on a social function as well, and many students end up making good friends (or consolidating friendships, as often a pair or group of friends will enroll in a seminar together). There is sometimes a fraternity/sorority/club type of element, which becomes intrinsic to these seminar groups. The most popular seminars have an enrollment limit (often set by the
Upperclassmen, third- and fourth-year students, either together with the professor or independently, will admit prospective students to “their” seminar based on short essays and interviews. Some of these seminars have a very strong tradition of “senior-junior” (senpai-kōhai) continuity. There is a socialization into the world, by the planning of functions at fancy hotels, for example, similar to corporate functions that employees would be expected to organize. This seminar, Washiyama-zemi, although perhaps the strictest at EUC, seems to be one of the most popular choices among students, and students relate to me that it is rather competitive to enter. Being accepted into the seminar group, though linked to the “objective” interview and essay, may depend ultimately on who you know—a “senior” friend in the seminar may be all that is needed to guarantee your acceptance. On the other hand, the dislike of an upperclassman with power could prevent you from acceptance into the group.

A strong element of collaborative learning seems to be an essential element in the seminar class. Groups of seminar students present their research “findings” at the annual seminar presentation event. Participation in this event is not mandatory, and some seminars elect not to be involved (a strong freedom of choice is given to students by some professors—others take a more coercive approach). Within the groups, as well, there is a certain security in numbers, which can work either as a motivator for good performance or as a shield to divert responsibility and be lazy, though peer pressure often results in the former. This collaborative model is one that is used in Japanese primary and secondary school as well, a mode of learning that most students are quite familiar with. The professor delegates responsibility to group leaders. This is also a modus operandi at many corporations, perhaps justifying the use of such a method at schools and universities to prepare students for the working world. Such a collaborative model of learning is not without advocates amongst western educational experts (Debski 1997; Nunan 1992; Van Lier 1996), especially for classes of mixed levels, like in Japan, where setting or tracking students into levels is not often done (cf., Whitburn 2003). Though collaboration is not always overtly encouraged throughout Japanese schooling, the idea of students helping one another during class is not considered unfair in Japan and is common practice from an early age. Interdependence has a positive connotation in Japanese society, and this is no exception in the classroom. Non-Japanese teachers in HE often have great difficulty understanding why when called upon in class students invariably consult with their neighbor instead of responding directly to the teacher. Of course while this is tolerated by Japanese teachers who consider it “normal” classroom behavior, it irks the foreign teachers to no end.

PROCESS OF CHANGE

The declining birthrate in post-baby-boom Japan is perceived by some professors as being the impetus behind these curriculum reforms, but this does not seem to be as direct a relationship as I had originally thought. As two professors told me, “Curriculum and teaching reform will not necessarily impact the number of
applicants, since this is usually determined by the name of the school and its location. By giving more support to first-year students, these changes might help to retain students already enrolled.” In other words, the implicit understanding among some faculty is that this may be a strategy to gain control over the educational process in hopes that “better” schooling may diminish attrition, a topic that the president spent considerable time addressing at both the entrance ceremony and the overnight seminar. The dropout rate at EUC reached an alarming rate of over 10 percent over four years. Though North American HEIs often have considerable rates of attrition, at Japanese universities the norm is different. Usually every effort is made to “help” the student to graduate. This means that this rate of attrition must be estimated, as exact figures are difficult to derive because of the practice of ryūnen, studying beyond the normal four years. Though some students do eventually graduate after five or six years, often with much “assistance” from the university faculty and administration, many are enrolled on paper only, paying tuition but not showing up on campus.

Through my observation and conversations with professors I realize that the foreign language and first-year seminar changes were implemented partly to gain more control over practice—an attempt to reform practice among instructors (and thus to more effectively train students). This control is multifaceted. For the foreign language courses, it involved the following considerations: 1) the L2 teaching-style of foreign instructors was considered by Japanese professors to be too much of a “culture shock” for first-year students; 2) normally the firing of professors is difficult, so the curriculum change gave a ready excuse for terminating the contracts of a few part-time professors, with curriculum changes being implemented with full-time professors using the excuse of MEXT; 3) a curriculum change was a less radical choice than the proposal that one full-time language professor was strongly advocating—outsourcing the entire ELT program to a private educational corporation; 4) previously, Japanese English professors were not directly involved in the compulsory classes of the core curriculum, and they felt concerned that their role in the university may become marginalized.

Since there was (and is) considerable and open opposition to change in the first-year seminar curriculum, the process was accomplished in two steps. First, the selection process by which the freshmen chose their respective first-year seminar classes was changed. Then, a few years later there was a reform of the entire syllabus. There was the feeling among many business professors, explained to me directly in conversation and argued indirectly in the faculty senate, that more control is needed over the first-year seminar classes because: 1) there is a need to institute a better advisory system to help students adjust to college life and 2) it is important to help students with writing and self-presentation skills so they may have a head start in job hunting preparation. The administrative staff echoed these rationalizations for change. The head of the student affairs office in detailed explanation to me about the freshman orientation emphasized that the purpose of the program was: 1) for students to learn college study skills and 2) for an EUC Orientation.
CHAPTER 2

An interesting tangential development to curriculum reforms was an increased interest in faculty development (FD) workshops among the FLG professors. Two seminars were conducted, one in each semester, the first on computer-assisted language learning and the second on project-based language learning. Though arranged and organized by the full-time staff, both workshops were conducted by part-time professors who volunteered to share their expertise and their time. Regardless of effect on the actual quality of teaching practice, these events certainly added an air of professionalism, helped to bridge the divide recently between part and full-time professors, and raised the status of the FLG within the EUC community.

CONCLUSION

Responses to external reform pressures involve institutional, disciplinary, and curriculum changes. The pressures of a declining birthrate, national politics, and decreased funding have introduced a survival of the fittest mentality into the higher education sector, which has been followed by the introduction of neoliberal reform measures and deregulation. In the literature on HE reform in Japan, some authors take a positive position regarding the reform measures, while others are much more pessimistic about the quality and speed of change.

Not surprisingly, these pressures are affecting EUC. Not only has there been the obvious drive to recruit more students, but also more interest in practices that are aimed at improving the rate of retaining students through graduation. Also, influence on disciplinary practices is revealed through an account of English-language teaching reforms in Japan in general and at EUC specifically, practices such as the consolidation of the curriculum and the tracking of students based on ability. Another change was the “construction” at EUC by the leadership of an institutional history that emphasizes the founder’s purported belief in a “family-like education” (kazoku kyoiku). The president has then coopted the professoriate into this ideology in order to bring about curricular reforms in literacy, a semester system, student guidance, and other changes to the daigaku. Even in the face of such bureaucratic hegemony—the license for reform given to the president, and the absence of absolute power or influence of individual professors—the autonomy of the professoriate affords certain members a tremendous veto power, which can effectively impede, though not always stop, implementation of change.