

Public Good of Higher Education in Japan:

The changing perceptions of three actors in the post-war era

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Research purpose

This study explores three actors' transformation of perceptions of the public good of higher education in post-war Japan.

The three actors refer to *the central government, economic organizations, and associations of universities*.

Research method

This research is based on discourse analysis of three actors' official documents. As an analytical framework, we present on a horizontal axis the timeline from the end of WWII to the present, divided into five distinct periods of around 15 years

Research method

Horizontal axis

Periods	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Years	1945 - 1959	1960 - 1974	1975 - 1989	1990 - 2004	2005 - 2020

Rate of
university
entrance

below 10%

10→38%

35→36%

36→49%

50→54%

Research method

Vertical axis

Actors

Government

Economic
Organizations

University
Associations

Items for analysis

Three Public Functions of HE

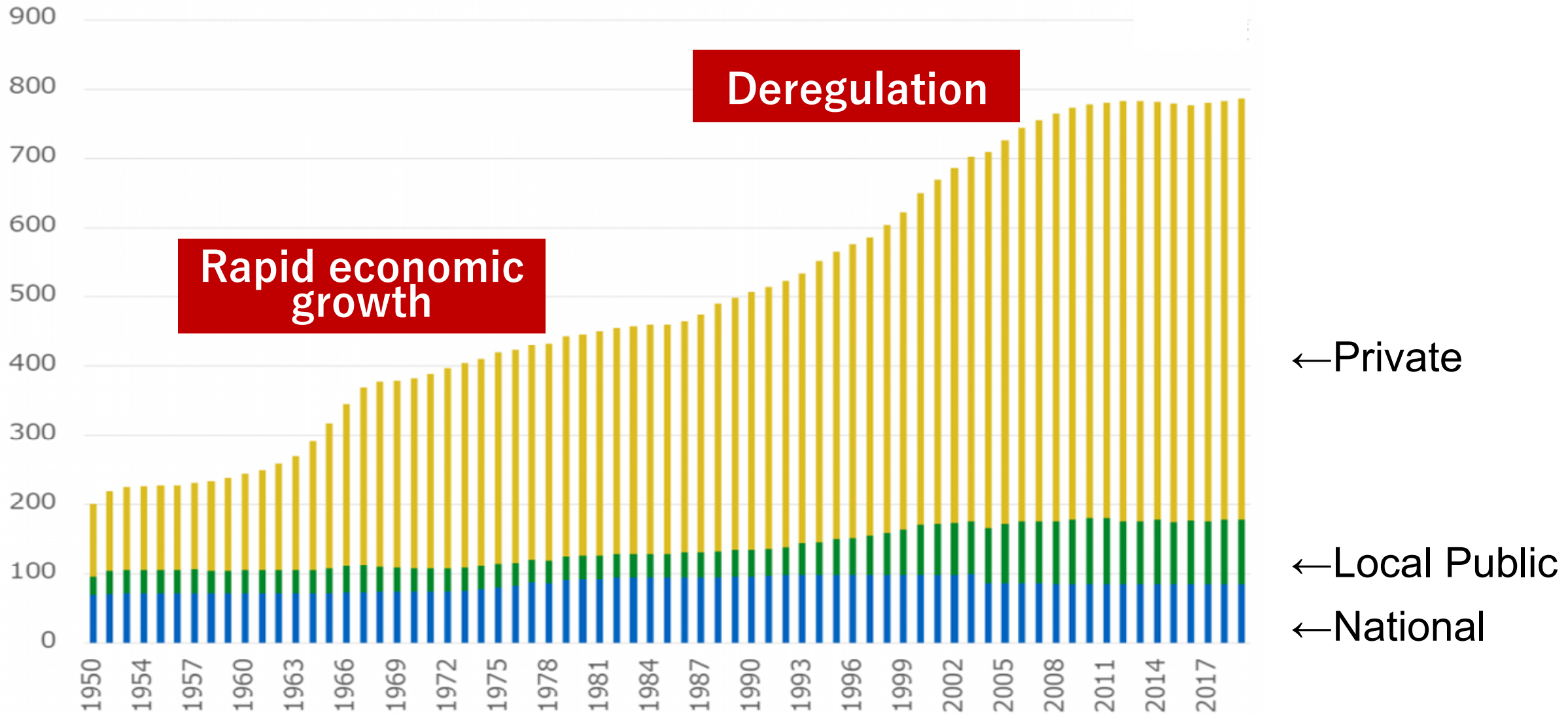
Knowledge Creation and
Dissemination

Human Resource
Development

Social / Community
Contribution

Perceptions of
Public good

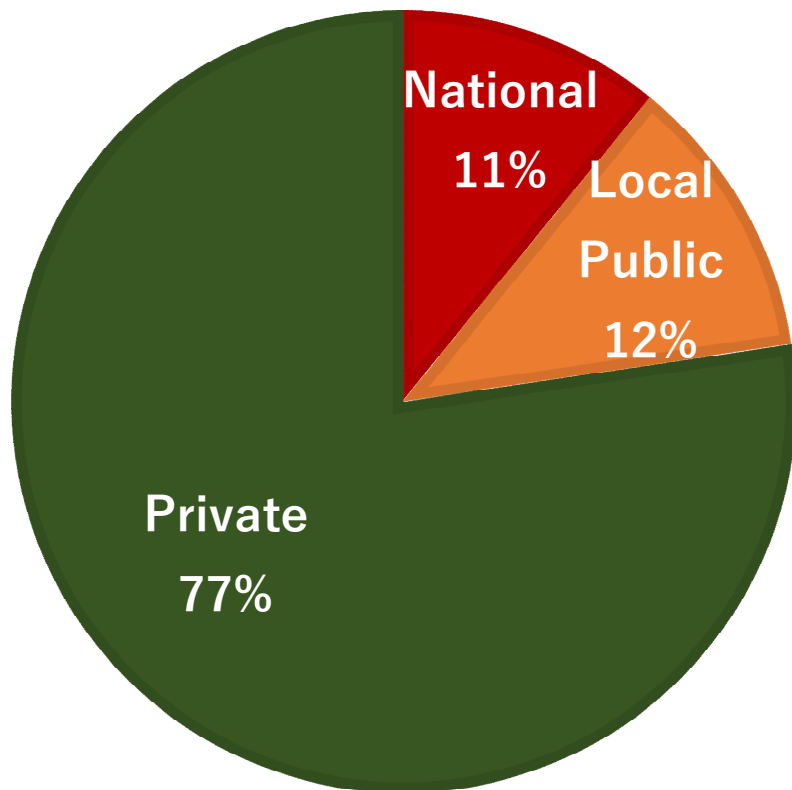
Changes in the Number of Universities



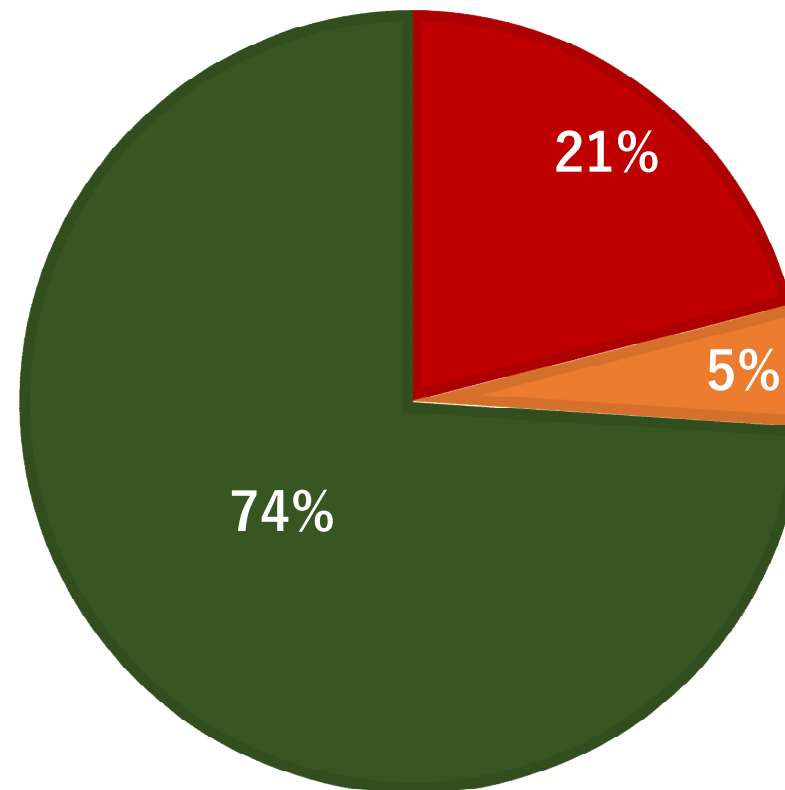
Source: MEXT, 2020

Three sectors of HEIs in Japan

NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY



STUDENT RATIO



■ 795 universities: 86 National, 94 Local Public, 615 Private

Source: MEXT, 2020

Terminology issue

Public good(s)

“Kōkyō-zai” (公共財) in Japanese

CiNii (Citation information by National Institute of Informatics)

Keywords search

“higher education” & “public goods” ▶ **6 articles (only 1 JPN HE)**

“高等教育” & “公共財” ▶ **4 articles (only 1 JPN HE)**



Discussion of public good(s) of HE in Japan has not developed enough.

Findings: **Outline**

Public good

Knowledge creation

- No major conflict among actors through 5 periods.

Human resource development

- Gov. and Econ Org. stressed skills for future job since 2nd period.
- National Uni Assoc. resisted until 4th period.

Social contribution

- Emergence of perception was later than other two.
- National Uni Assoc. resisted until 4th period.

Periods	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Years	1945 - 1959	1960 - 1974	1975 - 1989	1990 - 2004	2005 - 2020

Findings: Knowledge Creation

- **No major conflict among actors through 5 periods.**

“University’s supreme mission has been the contribution to succession, criticism, and creation of culture through advanced academic research and education.”

Government (Central Committee for Education), 1971

“The intrinsic nature of university is pursuing truth by research and education based on it.”

Japan Association of National Universities, 1971

Periods	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Years	1945 - 1959	1960 - 1974	1975 - 1989	1990 - 2004	2005 – 2020

Findings: **Human Resource Development**

- **National universities' association resisted until 4th period.**
 - Since the 2nd period, **government** and **economic organization** have emphasized the necessity for vocational education and students' skills for future occupation.
 - **Private universities' association** responded cooperatively toward “social needs” of human resources proposed by government and economic organizations.

Periods	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Years	1945 - 1959	1960 - 1974	1975 - 1989	1990 - 2004	2005 – 2020

Findings: Human Resource Development

“The social responsibility university education ought to take is not the fostering of white-collar workers but the transmission of knowledge.”

Japan Association of National Universities, 1971

“Education and research at university should not be easily affected by social trend of the times. It is reasonable that HE keeps a moderate distance from society.”

Japan Association of National Universities, 1986

Periods	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Years	1945 - 1959	1960 - 1974	1975 - 1989	1990 - 2004	2005 - 2020

Findings: **Social Contribution**

- **Emergence of perception is **later** than other two functions**
 - During 1st and 2nd periods, government and economic organization criticized closed nature of university and requested the provision of life-long learning.
 - Perceptions relating to universities' role in regional issues started to be found in the government discourse in 3rd period, then grown to the expectation “university should be a center for the next generation’s regional vitalization” in 4th and 5th.

Periods	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Years	1945 - 1959	1960 - 1974	1975 - 1989	1990 - 2004	2005 – 2020

Findings: **Social Contribution**

■ National universities' association resisted until 4th period.

“Universities should cooperate with local communities and be open to the public in a number of ways such as ... promoting regional planning, activating local industries.”

Government (Ad Hoc Council on Education), 1987

“Social contribution of university is not accepting all requests from society but pursuing truth and contributing to healthy social development by returning research profits to society.”

Japan Association of National Universities, 1971

Periods	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Years	1945 - 1959	1960 - 1974	1975 - 1989	1990 - 2004	2005 - 2020

Discussion & Conclusion

- The investigation of historical transition of actors' discourse suggests that factors yielding the discussion of the public good of HE in Japan include:
 - National universities' passive attitude toward social / community contribution until recently
 - The contrasting views between the national and private universities

Discussion & Conclusion

- All actors' views on public function of HE have rapidly converged into the same in 5th period.

Contextual changes

- **Incorporation of national universities (2004)**
 - forced to gain more competitive funds and external revenue as autonomous institution
- **Amendments to Fundamental Law of Education (2006) and School Education Law (2007)**
 - added “social contribution” as purposes of universities
- Possibilities to hide the true intentions by university assoc.