

What are public goods of Japan's higher education?

Based on literature review and interviews

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Literature review (1)

Public good(s) ▶ Kōkyōzai / 公共財 (in Japanese)

In Western countries, “public good” is generally defined as a benefit to or the well-being of society (Collins, 2017), the term in Japanese is “kōkyōzai” which conveys only economics’ nuance based on Samuelson’s (1954) definition.

Western countries

Not only views of economics, but also broader perspectives have been discussed (ex: public nature of HE, the role as public sphere etc.).

In Japan

Very little discussion about if HE could be defined as public good(s) on economics’ definition (Ichikawa, 2000; Yano, 1996, 2015).
→ defined HE as quasi public good(s).

Literature review (2)

Comparing to other developed countries, not many people think that government should take responsibility for HE. Therefore its public value or goods has been underestimated in Japan (Nakazawa, 2014).

Why:

Strength of economic policy

Since the post-war era, policy of economic growth has been over-emphasized. As a result, HE has been mainly regarded as a tool of developing human resource especially for industry and business (Hata, 1999; Hawkins, 2006).

Dual structure of public and private institutions

The share of private universities account for nearly 80% of the total (782 universities). Since the quality of private universities varies considerably, the general public has difficulty in perceiving “publicness” in overall HEIs (Kurobane, 2002; Maruyama, 2002).

Emphasis on entrance exam

There is a strong belief that career opportunities largely depend on the specific university one is admitted, instead of what one learns there. Public interest directs to entrance exam over other social functions of HEIs (Teichler, 1997).

Interviews

Table 1 Outline of interviewees

	Affiliation	Title	Discipline	Gender	Date
A	MEXT	Director	N.A.	M	6 Feb, 2018
B	MEXT	Senior Officer	N.A.	M	4 Jun, 2018
C	Star Univ.	Vice President	Science	M	30 Oct, 2018
D	Star Univ.	Dean	Language and Culture	M	8 Aug, 2017
E	Star Univ.	Director	Education	F	10 Oct, 2018
F	Star Univ.	Dean	Engineering	M	12 Feb, 2019
G	Star Univ.	Director	Economics	M	12 Feb, 2019
H	Moon Univ.	Vice President	Education	M	15 Jan, 2019
I	Moon Univ.	Dean	Engineering	M	31 Jan, 2019
J	Moon Univ.	Dean	Economics	M	6 Feb, 2019

1. MEXT refers to Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-apan
2. Star Univ. is one of top universities being established in the late 19th century.
3. Moon Univ. is a comprehensive university being founded after WWII.

Main findings (1)

What do you understand by the term 'public good'?

•Different views:

- Compulsory education creates public goods while HE produces more private goods (A & B).
- Undergraduate studies lead to more private goods because university graduates benefit more from them. In contrast, especially doctoral education creates more public goods (G).
- Good* should not be understood as profit or benefit, but should be interpreted as happiness of human being, a sort of foundation on which sustainable development of human beings could be made and the betterment of society (E & C).

•Common points

- University research activities are directly concerned with public goods and social benefits, which are not only limited at a national level, but at a global level by almost all interviewees.

Main findings (2)

What does higher education contribute to the public good, or public goods?

-Fostering talents for the next generation, producing knowledge for the welfare of human beings, and undertaking intellectual activities of pursuing truth (E).

-One of the important missions of our comprehensive universities is to preserve and transmit knowledge which might not be popular for the moment or among students, because these knowledge might become useful in 30 years or the future. This is just HE could contribute to the public good of public goods (J).

Main findings (3)

Can we measure that contribution?

- Government officials emphasized the necessity and importance of measuring that contribution as because HE is expected to be accountable and transparent (A & B) .
- Institutional leaders believed that numbers of research papers or research grant could be measured, but it is impossible or extremely difficult to measure its social, moral and ethical contributions to the society. More importantly, it should be measured in a long term and pay more attention to the quality rather than quantity of that contribution (D, F, G & H).

Main findings (4)

Can HE create private goods as well as public goods and both kinds of good grow together?

-All interviewees claim that both kinds of good could grow together. For example,

I don't think it is a sum-zero relationship because HE could make both private and public goods despite differences in its degree, aspects, or educational levels (A).

Even if the operation of most of Japanese private universities rely significantly on tuition fees, they all their missions of contributing to cities, regions, citizenship, the betterment and welfare, as well as equity of the society (E & E).

Concluding remarks

- Due to a powerful influence from industry and business on HE, less discussion on public goods of HE has been made in Japan, and also less attention has been devoted to public goods of HE, compared to many Western countries.
- While remarkable differences were found in understanding the public good or goods of HE between government officials, institutional leaders, and deans, common points were also be confirmed between them.
- Clear differences exist in their views between institutional leaders and deans by discipline.
- Typically, government officials understand the term of public good, contribution of HE for public good, and measurement of its contribution from a political standpoint while institutional leaders and deans emphasize the importance of interpreting these phrases and HE contributions for public goods in a long term and in a broader sense.

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