# From Education to Learning Outcomes: How can academia show the evidence to stakeholders?

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Abstract. The neoliberalism aim of this paper is to examine how and internationalization/globalization have emerged in higher education policy in Japan, and to examine whether this situation is real or imaginary, by analyzing the transformation of higher education policy from the 1980s to the present. Both types of reform began to formulate and be implemented since the 1980s, and then changed their aims in the mid-2000s to prioritize inviting foreign students to Japan in order for capacity building. However, subsequently this policy has differentiated into two pathways. One is to invite foreign students in order to foster the future talented labor force in Japan, and the second is to send Japanese students overseas to cultivate them as global human resources. Similarly, neoliberal policies which started in the 1980s came into full swing in the early 2000s. In both domains, under the name of deregulation, educational reform has accelerated since the 1990s.

**Keywords:** Japan, higher education, learning outcomes, neoliberal reform, internationalization/globalization, Ad Hoc Education Council, University Council

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper to examine how higher education policy in Japan has been influenced by globalization and neoliberalism from the 1980s to the present. Through globalization policies, students and faculty who cross national borders have increased, and the provision of educational content from other countries has also become more common in the form of branch campuses and e-learning. Neoliberal policy has been employed in many countries in multiple public sectors including education. Under neoliberal ideals, deregulation and privatization have accelerated in order to revitalize organizations, and showing accountability to tax payers has become increasingly necessary. Deregulation and accountability have synthesized and global competition in higher education has been promoted.

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In light of this storyline, two research questions are raised. First, how have these phenomena developed in Japan? The concept of neoliberal policy first emerged in Anglo-Saxon countries. It is evident that Japan has been influenced by these policies in the age of globalization, but is the implementation process the same as witnessed in Anglo-Saxon countries? This is yet to be examined in detail.

The second question is to examine the extent to which this situation is real or imaginary. According to Furlong (2013), globalization is not necessarily a reality and may contain a degree of imagination. This means that stakeholders have discussed globalization of higher education from various angles, and these discourses have gradually become stronger and integrated into one dominant narrative of the conditions of globalization. To examine the emergence and appropriateness of this narrative in the case of Japan is the second research question.

The first wave of neoliberal policy in Japan started in 1980s at the time of the Nakasone regime (Ohtake, 1984), occurring almost concurrently with Thatcherism in the UK and the Reaganism in the US. Nakasone set a national goal to develop "An Inventory of Post WWII Politics." In addition to this conservative rhetoric, he promoted neoliberal policies such as privatization or separation (from the Government sector) of the Japan Monopoly Corporation in 1985 and Japan National Railways in 1987.

In the field of education, the Prime Minister Nakasone also led the Ad Hoc Council on Education from 1984 to 1987. Although the education council is usually led by the Ministry of Education, this Ad Hoc council was unusually chaired directly by the Prime Minister and continued for four years. In this council two major topics, internationalization and liberalization/individualization, were discussed in reference to higher education.

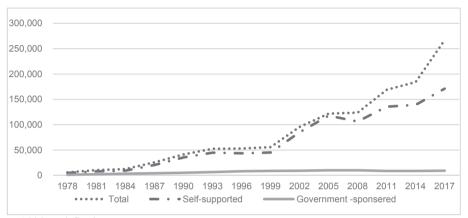
The result of these and their subsequent emergence in policy is to be examined in detail. Ichikawa has suggested that policy transformations in the ten years after the Ad Hoc Council on Education are best characterized by liberalization and deregulation (1995). Amano also discussed university reform since 1990 as the demise of planning policy and the start of deregulation policy (2006, 2013). However, neither considered the relationship between internationalization/globalization and neoliberalism in these perspectives. I will discuss policy transformation from 1980s to the present from the view point of internationalization/globalization and neoliberalism.

#### 2. Internationalization to inward-looking globalization

Prime Minister Nakasone established the "100,000 Foreign Students Plan" in 1983, representing the first time that the internationalization of education was employed as a policy agenda. The purpose was to invite 100,000 foreign students to Japanese higher education by the year of 2000, particularly targeting students in China, Indonesia, Malaysia and other Asian countries. In official statements the

goal of this policy was to help developing these countries to nurture human resources, while also showing repentance for wartime aggression. In reality it was also a demonstration that Japan possessed the same status as developed countries such as the US or Europe (Yoshida, 2015=2016a).

As shown in Figure 1, the number of foreign students to study in Japanese higher education institutions did not increase rapidly until the middle of 1990s. However, as the government admitted self-supporting students and Asian countries began to experience a higher level of economic development, its number has drastically increased.



Source: JASSO, each fiscal year

https://www.jasso.go.jp/about/statistics/intl\_student\_e/index.html

Figure 1. Number of foreign students

The target of Prime Minister Nakasone was achieved in 2003. In 2008, the government established a second internationalization policy known as the "300,000 Foreign Students Plan (Study in Japan)". While this may appear to be a continuation of Nakasone's plan from 1983, in reality it was totally different. The purpose of the new plan was not to develop international exchange, but rather to contribute to a global strategy for the future Japan<sup>1</sup>. After the burst of the bubble economy and a long economic depression since 1990s, the Japanese government and industry felt a sense of crisis in the future Japanese economy. In order to solve this problem, it was seen as important to attract talented foreign students to bolster the future professional labor force in Japan. Universities have thus been required to establish degree programs or courses taught only in English in order to attract foreign students not only from Asia but from all over the world. The Ministry of Education selected thirteen universities to promote this project called the "Global 30."

In another shift, internationalization/globalization policies have changed since the middle of 2000s. There were two key contextual factors in this process. The first was the strong demand from industry to nurture "global human resources" who are Japanese and who work at manufacturing branches overseas. The second one was concern that English competency such as TOEFL had

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The term "internationalization" used since 1980s to 2000s and "globalization" has been used interchangeably since around 1990. "Globalization" has become more often used than "internationalization" since 2000s. The nuance of these two terms is slightly different, but we do not discuss this difference in detail in this paper.

become lower in the global rankings, linked to a decrease in the number of students who pursued degrees in the US. For these reasons, the Japanese government gave universities the role of fostering global human resources who were able to speak English by making competitive funding available for projects in this endeavor, which it called the "University Globalization Plan" (Yoshida, 2015=2016a).

Table 1 shows the budget plan for university globalization projects by the Ministry of Education. Although the budget has decreased since 2015, the Ministry continues to emphasize the importance these projects. The most recent, named "Top Global University Project," is very ambitious. The target is to have 10 universities enter the top 100 in the World University Rankings of Times Higher Education.

Table 2 shows the budget for inviting foreign students to Japan and sending Japanese students abroad. The budget for inviting students is still huge, but has decreased in recent years. Conversely, the sending budget has gradually increased since 2012.

Table 1. Budget plan for university globalization projects (¥100million)<sup>1</sup>

Project/ Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Global 30	41	33	29	26	23					
Development of Highly-Specialized Professionals		5								
Re-Inventing Japan			22	27	28	28	24	16	17	15
Promotion of Global Human Resources Development				50	45					
Top Global University						90	87	77	63	40
Total	41	38	52	103	97	127	110	93	90	55

Source: MEXT, each fiscal year

http://www.mext.go.jp/a\_menu/kaikei/index.htm <sup>2</sup>

Table 2. Budget plan for foreign and Japanese students (¥100million)

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Foreign Students	397	396	420	342	324	306	294	269	260	260	263	264
Japanese Students	9	11	6	8	19	36	41	86	92	88	81	81
Total	406	407	426	350	342	342	335	355	353	348	345	345

Source: MEXT, each fiscal year

http://www.mext.go.jp/a\_menu/kaikei/index.htm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The sum of each project may not be equal to the numerical value of the total because of rounding off them to the nearest 100 million. The same is true in Table 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Three steps are needed to reach budget plan of each year in Table 1 and 2 from this URL. In the case of 2018, 1. move to 2018 budget page (http://www.mext.go.jp/a\_menu/yosan/h30/1394803.htm), 2. A list of budget plan per bureau and department in 2018 (http://www.mext.go.jp/a\_menu/yosan/h30/1400421.htm), 3. Main Issues of budget plan of Higher Education Bureau in 2018

<sup>(</sup>http://www.mext.go.jp/component/b\_menu/other/\_\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2018/01/16/1400425\_1.pdf).

As a result, internationalization/globalization policy shifts since the 1980s could be summarized in the following three points.

The first shift is that from international exchange to global strategy. The second is that from inviting foreign students to sending Japanese students overseas. The third is that from student exchange to university-level projects. The turning point appears to have been the middle or late-2000s. The strong call from industry to nurture global human resources became a driver to change policy. Government, not only the Ministry of Education but also the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Finance, have backed industry's demands. These three (stakeholders, industry, government, and universities), have gradually formed a single unit, the All Japan System, and cooperated in an attempt to produce global human resources (Yoshida, 2014=2017).

It seems that the current globalization discourse has been crafted among these stakeholders and has become normative. It focusses on only the Japanese and is very inward-looking. However, according to an interesting survey of Japanese companies approximately 60% of Japanese companies responded that they do not need "global human resources" in their workplace (Yoshida, 2015). Regardless of the perception of a strong voice from industry, Japanese companies themselves do not necessarily have a demand for global human resources. This is one piece of evidence of imaginary globalization.

## 3. From the first wave to the second wave of neoliberalism

The first wave of neoliberal policy occurred during Prime Minister Nakasone's Ad Hoc Council on Education. Liberalization/individualization of higher education meant that regulation for higher education was eased and higher education institutions were able to freely manage their activities. Liberalization/individualization could be interpreted as deregulation. However, this was not formulated in policy during this period. Rather, it became a feature of the policy agenda since the 1990s. The epochal shift occurred in 1991 when the Standards for the Establishment of Universities was deregulated on the basis of a report published by the University Council. Put simply, general education was abolished and universities were allowed to choose the name of faculties and degrees, and universities were given a degree of freedom to manage their education independently. In exchange for this deregulation/liberalization, universities also had to independently assure their quality. For instance, self-study and self-evaluation were recommended in 1991 in order to maintain and strengthen the quality of education, and such self-evaluation measures became an obligation in 1998, the first step towards the accreditation system in place since 2004. A characteristic of this period of deregulation is a focus on education, and education reforms have become a keyword of policymaking since. It was the first time that education in universities became the subject of particular attention in Japan since WWII.

There were two reasons of this deregulation. The first one was to abolish the "Higher Education Plan," and the second, and a driver of the former, was the structural transformation of the higher education system. The Ministry of Education established the "Higher Education Plan" in 1976 in order to raise the quality of education. Although the enrollment ratio had increased throughout the 1960s, it became stable between the 1970s and 1980s due to this plan. It was 1992 that the peak of the second baby boomers came to universities, and since this zenith the 18-year-old population has declined steeply. The Ministry thus abolished quotas in higher education and left the future of each institution to its individually desired direction. The discourses of neoliberalism and deregulation policies suited this situation.

The structural transformation of the higher education system was centered upon reconfiguring the transition between universities and high schools, and between universities and the labor market. Figure 2 illustrates this change. Before 1990, entrance exams into higher education were competitive and functioned as a quality assurance device. Thus, when entering the labor market, many higher education graduates were regarded as candidates for executive positions in companies. However, after 1990, the situation completely reversed. Due to the increasing capacity of universities as a result of deregulation and the decreasing number of 18-year-olds, entrance exams ceased to function as a gate keeper of students' academic ability. In the context of the long economic depression in 1990s after the bubble economy, Japanese companies refrained from employing graduates from universities. For these reasons, quality assurance of higher education became fundamentally a task for the universities themselves.



Figure 2. Image of the relationship between high schools, universities, and labor market

In these circumstances, the second wave of neoliberalism started under the auspices of Prime Minister Koizumi in 2000s. The keyword of this policy was a transition "From ex-ante regulation to ex post facto checks." He privatized the National Postal Service and also reformed the higher education system. In 2004 a revolutionary recategorization of higher education institutions was enacted. Two types of institutions were established, one designed to be market-driven and the second to be less responsible to market forces. As an example of market-driven institutions, for the first time professional schools such as law schools, business schools, and for-profit universities were approved and accredited. On the non-market side of the equation, national universities were incorporated to privatize and revitalize. An accreditation system was also introduced to ensure quality since 2004. However, after ten years, it was clear that these market-driven reforms failed.

While non-market institutions have survived under the control of the Ministry of Education, the number of applicants for law school decreased to one ninth of its pre-2004 levels and many law schools have closed. Business schools also struggle to attract students, and most for-profit universities have closed.

How can we make sense of neoliberal higher education policy in Japan? So-called neoliberal policies introduced under the Koizumi regime did not elicit an effect. According to a textbook definition, when we introduce marketization in the public sector, it is anticipated that competition among participants occurs and the principle of the survival of the fittest increases the overall quality of surviving institutions. However, introducing professional schools and for-profit universities under this principle did not produce any effect. Meanwhile, non-market driven reforms such as national university incorporation and the introduction of the accreditation system have survived as the result of deregulation. The Ministry of Education has tried to hold its ground against other ministries such as the METI or the Ministry of Finance. Regardless, it seems that these changes have taken place as an obligation in the name of deregulation. There was no freedom for universities to choose to reform or not based on their own institutional direction. Thus, forced deregulation has led education reform and accountability measures to increase at an accelerating pace.

# 4. Education reform to leaning outcomes

The age of education reform has begun since the deregulation of 1990s, and many terms about teaching were introduced from the US higher education system. For example, self-study, faculty development, syllabus, TA, GPA, semester system, office hour, course evaluation, remedial education, student support, and so on have become familiar within Japanese higher education. They have become known as "teaching props." The background of their introduction was the decline of students' academic achievement concurrent with the increasing enrollment ratio since 1990. The momentum of this reform was not promoted by universities but, rather, demand from the Ministry of Education. Universities were told that they should accelerate educational reforms independently, because it was the age of deregulation. At first this reform was a recommendation and universities formally had a freedom whether or not to implement the reform in earnest. However, after a few years, however, it was stipulated in the Standards for Establishment of Universities that props such as faculty development and syllabus development were mandatory. There is a contradiction inherent within this discourse. Spontaneous reform is forced, but under the name of deregulation.

The Ministry has also adopted a "Carrots and Sticks" policy. The sticks are the shift from providing recommendations to issuing obligations, as noted above. What are carrots? These are the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> In contrast to teaching props, teaching sets are regarded as an aspect of academic management or academic governance. Although it is relatively easy to introduce teaching props, it is not easy to establish academic management or academic governance properly. Learning outcomes of students may be the evidence of how academic management or governance work in institutions.

increase in competitive funding programs associated with education reform, such as the University Globalization Projects, as noted in Section 2. This is an open application system on the basis of specific projects, each of which continuing for only three to five years. There is a screening process by each project committee. The choice whether to apply or not is officially left to each university's discretion, but in reality, the most important thing for universities is applying for each competitive grant for which they are eligible. This is a form of forced competition.

Since the middle of the 2000s, a new wave of education reform has emerged. It has focused on learning outcomes of students as metric upon which to measure accountability, indicating a shift from teaching to learning as a goal. Through this new wave of reform, soft skills or generic skills such as critical thinking, communication skill, team work, ethics, and so on have been emphasized as learning outcomes. Again, two key factors formed the background of these reforms. Firstly, it was revealed that the learning time of Japanese students was much lower than that of US students, which was a great shock for stakeholders trying to foster "global human resources." An argument then emerged about the different ways to increase Japanese students' learning time, and was a major topic at the Central Council for Education. Secondly, because discussions around generic and transferable skills have been in fashion in the UK, the US, and elsewhere in this period, Japan has been influenced by a global trend towards soft skills.

Since the 2000s the Central Council for Education has prioritized setting appropriate learning outcomes. Two kinds of learning outcomes have been established. The first is called "Undergraduate Competence," and was stipulated in 2008 in the Report of the Central Council for Education. It was modeled after the *Essential Learning Outcomes* report published by Association of American College and Universities. At that time, it was believed that Japanese universities needed a common goal that was shared between bachelor's degrees regardless of majors, and this should be a focus on generic skills or soft skills. Eventually, "Undergraduate Competence" came to consist of four skill areas and thirteen items within. The four areas consist of: (1) Knowledge and Understanding, (2) Generic skills, (3) Attitude and Orientation, and (4) Integrated Learning and Experience and Creative Thinking. In this process the concept of accountability shifted from disciplinary knowledge to generic skills, with a focus being moved from what faculty teach students to what students become able to do as a result of learning. This was significant change in direction.

Secondly, a further set of important learning outcomes was set by the Science Council of Japan. After publishing "Undergraduate Competence," it was still necessary to consider how to set disciplinary learning outcomes. The Science Council of Japan was assigned this task by the Ministry of Education. Since 2010, the disciplinary committees have started to create "Disciplinary Reference Points" which describe the essence of each discipline, modeled after "Subject Benchmark Statements" published by the Quality Assurance Agency in the UK. Specific learning outcomes have also been described for each discipline.

These two types of learning outcomes were designed to function as a point of reference, with universities able to freely adopt them based on their own mission, as each university has its own context and its own responsibility for their education.

## 5. Issues of learning outcomes

However, the Ministry of Education and the Central Council for Education criticized universities for the slow speed of reform, and in the 2012 Council Report they advised (or required) universities new methods of teaching and measuring learning outcomes of students.

The following three points are stipulated in the report. The first concerns teaching method in classroom. It should be changed from a reliance on lectures by faculty, to active-learning between students and faculty. Students are thus expected to think and learn subjectively in an active-learning style. The second suggested that universities should encourage students to increase their learning time including preparation and review. The third argued that universities should set objective learning outcomes for students, measure, and show them to the stakeholders. Particularly, formative assessment systems such as learning rubrics or portfolios are recommended (Central Council for Education, 2012).

The next step was the Council Report in 2016 which introduced two more important points. The first stated that each university should establish an internal quality assurance system<sup>4</sup>. According to the report, this should be a continuous process by which each university can enhance the quality of teaching and learning, educational programs, and institutional management. As a result, each university was to visualize how their internal quality assurance system would work. Needless to say, universities have responsibility for their educational programs and teaching and learning. Why did the report feel the need to emphasize this? We can find the answer in the second point.

In addition to internal quality assurance systems, each university was required to manifest "three policies" which cover admissions, curricula, and diplomas. Admission policy refers to the criteria used to measure entrants' attributes. Curriculum policy covers curriculum organization and implementation. Diploma policy codifies degree-granting systems, and each university is now required to show what degree of progress on key learning outcomes is subsequent to confer degrees. The main point of these three policies is to demonstrate that students' learning outcomes are objectively linked to conferring diplomas. The School Education Law and the Ordinance of the Ministry of Education have added them to the obligations of universities (the Central Council for Education, 2016)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The accreditation as quality assurance system has started in 2004. This is an external quality assurance system. In addition to it, universities are now required to activate a PDCA cycle spontaneously to enhance learning outcomes as a measure of quality. This functions as an internal quality assurance system.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Internal quality assurance systems and the "three policies" have been repeatedly recommended in Council Reports since the middle of the 2000s, but it took a long time for both to be stipulated in the law and become obligations of universities.

The Council and the Ministry regularly state that Japanese universities are in crises, and that they had to reform quickly in order to enhance transparency and raise accountability. They have also said that without such reforms they could not compete with foreign universities in the age of globalization. This kind of discourse gathered strength and now is seen as a norm or rule. It is true that Japanese universities have faced difficult issues such as a decline in younger generations and budget shortages. However, the arguments themselves have heightened the sense of crisis, and in this context universities have to follow their advice and obligations without making clear their intentions. This is not neoliberal policy at all, as the role of the government has become stronger.

In the meantime, learning outcomes of students have complex dimensions. We need to understand the structure of these dimensions in our discussions. As shown in Table 3, learning outcomes of students could be illustrated in a four-quadrant arrangement separated by two axes. The horizontal axis represents the measurement method of learning outcomes, which is divided between direct and indirect methods. The vertical axis represents the relationship between education and learning outcomes, divided between direct and indirect relationships. Between these axes are four quadrants representing different learning outcomes.

In the first quadrant, an indicator such as graduation ratio or employment ratio could objectively measure learning outcomes, but this type of indicator is more representative of an output rather than learning outcomes, as it does not directly reflect a relationship between education and learning. In the second quadrant, an indicator such as graduate theses, examinations, or GPA could clarify the relationship between education and learning. Academics have long employed such measures, however, they have been criticized recently for an inability to show value-added on learning outcomes and the development of students' generic skills. Thus, a new method such as a learning rubric or portfolio is recommended. While ideal, it is justifiably difficult for institutions and faculty to develop a rubric for each course and to create portfolio-based system able to evaluate students' learning outcomes.

In the third quadrant, standardized tests are typical. In the US, many types of standardized tests have been developed and employed, specifically for accreditation. They can be used to compare the level of institutions objectively and legitimize the government's budget allocations. In the fourth quadrant, questionnaire surveys for students are often used, sometimes as a feature of Institutional Research. This is a convenient way to measure learning outcomes, but it is subjective and unreliable in terms of objectivity (Yoshida, 2016b).

Table 3. The matrix of leaning outcomes

		Measuring Methods of Learning Outcomes				
		Direct	Indirect			
The Relationship between Education and Learning outcomes	Direct	Graduation Thesis, Graduation Exam, GPA  → do not measure value-added learning outcomes Rubric, Portfolio  → measure value added learning outcomes	Graduation Ratio, Employment Ratio → output, not learning outcomes			
	Indirect	Standardized Test (eg. CLA, MAPP in the U. S.) → ruin diversity of learning outcomes	Questionnaire Survey on Subjective Achievement of Students → unreliable learning outcomes			

Furthermore, regarding the learning outcomes of students, an essential issue should be considered. Students are under pressure to raise their generic or transferable skills in order to meet the demands of an unstable and a fluid labor market. Thus, demand is growing for college education to teach generic skills. However, is it possible for faculty to directly teach generic skills to students, through the transmission of disciplinary knowledge? Further, is it possible to measure generic skills as learning outcomes thorough teaching disciplinary knowledge? The precise nature of the relationship between generic skills and disciplinary knowledge is an issue that still needs to be considered, and the result of this discussion will form the basis for future discussions of the relationship between teaching and learning. If we focus on learning outcomes alone, the teaching responsibilities of faculty are likely to be overlooked and students may have to adopt additional responsibilities of their learning outcomes, such as test scores. While we can measure everything and represent it numerically, this has limited utility if we do not know the meaning of the numerical evidence. This is a challenge for academia and we should consider these issues carefully in future reforms.

## 6. Conclusion

Finally, we need to return to the research questions brought up at the beginning of this paper. The first research question concerns how globalization, deregulation, and accountability policies have taken place in Japan. Regarding globalization, policies have gradually become inward-looking, even though the Ministry of Education is sensitive to the Global University Rankings. Deregulation has been exerted through obligations from the Ministry, and the power of market forces is not particularly strong. Accountability to the taxpayer appears to still be superseded by responsibility to the Ministry. As a whole, competition among universities has not emerged spontaneously but is rather forced by the Ministry.

The implementation of neoliberal policy in Japan is, therefore, different from that of the US, UK or elsewhere in the English-speaking world. The power of the government over universities is strong despite deregulation. This directs us to the second research question: to what extent are the

phenomena of globalization or neoliberalism real or imaginary? Over the past thirty years, the discourses of globalization and so-called neoliberalism have been perpetuated by the Councils and the Ministries themselves, thus becoming a social norm and rule. In this sense, globalization or neoliberalism is imaginary, and we may fear an illusion which we ourselves have created. As academics, we produce this image for ourselves by following the government's requirements. Meanwhile, though it is true that higher education reform projects by the Ministry of Education are an important tool for getting budget allocations from the Ministry of Finance, the span of projects is very short, and it is difficult to demonstrate the effectiveness of these reforms. According to the theory of neoliberalism, the winners become strong by competing each other, but in this context there is not time to identify the winners and losers of policy reforms. Academia thus becomes both the victim and also the victimizer.

In this paper, higher education policy transformations since the 1990s are analyzed in detail. According to existing literature in the US and Europe, globalization and neoliberal policymaking emerged hand-in-hand with marketization. This is, however, different in the case of Japan. The government has led its response to globalization under the principles of neoliberalism alone, with little evidence of marketization. Such variation in neoliberal policymaking is a new finding and we should examine whether it is only the case of Japan, or also emerges elsewhere. Another research agenda is how universities have responded to these policies, and what kind of transformation has emerged in the Japanese higher education system as a result.

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