

# The Post-Pandemic University in Japan and the UK: A project proposal

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Roger Goodman\*

## **Futao Huang**

I'd like to invite our third speaker to give a talk. Our third speaker is Professor Roger Goodman. Roger Goodman is a Nissan professor of modern Japanese studies and warden of St Antony's College in the University of Oxford in the UK. Roger has just published a new book about Family-Run Universities in Japan. Roger, are you there?

## **Roger Goodman**

Let me start with a photograph. This is an event that took place exactly 2 weeks ago today on a Saturday morning. It is what we call in Oxford a 'matriculation ceremony' for students who are just beginning their degree course. What is strange about this photograph is that these are all students who have actually already *graduated* from Oxford. But, because of 'lock down' in the UK the previous autumn, they were unable to do this matriculation ceremony. They demanded that we put it on for them, even though they had left the university.

As an anthropologist, I was fascinated by the request from the students to do this. It made me realize that students also can be quite conservative. I say that because the general view of universities in the pre-pandemic phase was that they

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\* Roger Goodman is Nissan Professor of Modern Japanese Studies and Warden of St Antony's College at the University of Oxford. He was previously Dean of Social Sciences at Oxford (2008-17) and Chair and President of the UK Academy of Social Sciences (2015-21). In 2020-21, he was the co-chair of the University of Oxford committee charged with co-ordinating the university's response to the Coronavirus pandemic. His most recent book is: (with Jeremy Breaden), *Family-run universities in Japan*, Oxford University Press, 2020 (Japanese translation: *日本の私立大学はなぜ生き残るのか*, 中央公論, 2021).

themselves were remarkably resistant to change. They were very good at seeing off external challenges to the way that they had always done things.

There's a very famous quote, which I suspect many of you already know, by Clark Kerr, who said that of 75 institutions founded before 1520 which are still doing much the same things in much the same ways and under the same names as when they were established about 60 are universities. The in-person lecture format that we still operate in most universities is a relic from the medieval period. The word 'lecturer' literally means a reader. They were the only person who had access in the preprinting age to written text. They would distill that knowledge and share it with an audience. That is why they were called a lecturer. But we still operate in most universities with that form of teaching. In the mid-2000s, there was the sudden rise of what were known as MOOCs: massive, open online courses. There were many books that were written to suggest that these would be a direct threat to campus-based institutions because they offered online education, often free, through what were high-quality portals of institutions, such as Harvard and Yale. The business study scholar, Clayton Christensen, said that these MOOCs would turn out to be examples of what he called 'disruptive technologies' in the field of higher education, which would change universities forever.

But the interesting thing is that it is the MOOCs themselves which have mostly disappeared, which raises really important research questions about why did so many people assume 10 years ago that they would be more successful than they were? What were the assumptions that led to those wrong predictions? So, how has the pandemic challenged our assumptions about how universities should operate? My observations on this topic come from my own experience as the co-chair of my university's pandemic response committee.

What we discovered was that Oxford, which has been around for 900 years, could change its practices remarkably quickly. It could literally pivot while retaining its underlying rituals, symbols, and most importantly, its governance practices. The libraries, within a week or two, changed the way that they operated to become socially-distanced study areas rather than book storage spaces. We discovered there were platforms for not just journal articles, but also books which were available in digital form in almost all languages that allowed people to do online research as easily as if they were on campus. The way our staff operated changed dramatically as working from home became standardized.

All of those practices changed pretty much overnight.

The biggest changes were in teaching practice and I think teaching in universities will never be quite the same as before. We learned a great deal about teaching groups using breakout groups and getting students to make their own responses to materials online. We changed the way we examined students. We went from closed book examinations where students sat in an examination hall without access to external materials and had to use handwriting for 3 hours to open book exams where they could access online resources and write their answers on computers. We discovered this was a very effective way of examining students: it assessed how they thought rather than how much they could remember; it tested how much they were able to apply the knowledge that they had learned as opposed to simply how much they could repeat facts.

We are just beginning to get some research about the effect of the changes that we made during the pandemic and see data that suggests that there may have been a positive impact for students from lower socioeconomic or more disadvantaged backgrounds. These positive impacts are rather surprising because when we started to go online and use more digital education, the big debate was about what was called ‘digital poverty’, meaning that people from lower social economic backgrounds would not have access to the digital resources of people from more advantaged backgrounds. It is interesting therefore that some recent UK data shows that, in terms of final degree results, the female to male gap in winning higher awards reduced from 4% to 2.7% points; the gap between students with a disability in relation to students with no disability, reduced from 2.8% to 1.4% response; and the huge gap between white and black students reduced by about 15%. It appears that being able to access content online when it suits them has reduced barriers for some students, whether they are commuter students, disabled students, or students with caring duties; the move to digital has given people flexibility, allowing them to learn at their own pace, to revisit materials and to fit their education around their other responsibilities.

In mid-2021, Futao Huang, Akira Yonezawa and I put together a research proposal for funding to look at what happened in higher education in Japan and the UK during the pandemic and what lessons could be learned from this experience. We were particularly interested about the link between resilience and flexibility.

The project proposed to look holistically at a range of changes which had taken place across the whole of higher education in the UK and Japan. The idea was to be to provide a mirror for each to examine and challenge fundamental questions about the underlying taken for granted assumptions that have underpinned their systems. Both systems of higher education were hit by the same external shock, COVID-19, at exactly the same time. So, our research question was: what were the source of resilience and flexibility in HEIs during this period? Were some institutions better prepared to deal with external impacts than others? We designed the project to look at the full range of higher education institution — in terms of ownership, in terms of mission and in terms of governance — in both Japan and the UK. This proposal was built to some extent on a book (published in Japanese and English) which I recently co-authored with a colleague of mine from Monash University, Jeremy Breden, which is a case study of resilience and governance in private, higher education institutions in Japan. I am sorry to say our application for research funding was unsuccessful. So, if anybody has got any research funding that they would like to invest in this project, please, let us know!

### **Futao Huang**

Thank you very much, Roger. Shall we take any questions or comments for Roger's talk? Roger, can I ask a short and quick question? Any changes occurred in the process of recruiting and selecting international students who are not staying in the UK? Because we are facing the problem. We are asked to change the way of recruiting and selecting international students who are not living in Japan. We are asked to only make an oral examination on them instead of carrying out the normal written entrance examination for international students who have not come to Japan yet.

### **Roger Goodman**

No, we've carried on recruiting exactly the way that we recruited before. Our application rates are still very high. Last year, we basically gave the option to students overseas who could not travel to the UK to do the whole of their degree from overseas online. For some students, this was very popular. At the end of the year, we discovered that around 25% to 30 % of our international students would like that option in future because it was much cheaper for them. They could live in their home country and didn't have to pay the high cost of living in Oxford. But the vast majority were the other way around. They would much rather come to Oxford and have the full Oxford experience. Our application rates from

overseas have gone up except for those from Europe, because now, as a result of Brexit, European students have to pay international student fees if they come any UK university, which is much higher than it was previously when they were coming as European Union students.

**Futao Huang**

Thank you very much. As we shall have a panel discussion, I hope there will be more questions and comments on your insightful talk. Thank you very much, Roger.

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UK:  
A Project Proposal

Roger Goodman (University of Oxford)

10 December 2021

The importance (and invention) of ritual in the post-pandemic university



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## Reflections on the Post-Pandemic University

- Universities have often demonstrated remarkable *resistance* to change and an ability to ‘see off’ external challenges. For example:
- - In-person lecture format itself relic from the medieval period where lecturer (literally meaning ‘reader’) only person with access to written texts which they would distil and share with an audience.
- - Mid-2000s saw rise of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) assumed to be direct threat to campus-based, in-person teaching model, offering (often free) online education through high quality portals. Example of ‘disruptive technology’? Mostly disappeared.

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## Reflections on the Post-Pandemic University

- Observations as co-chair of Oxford University's pandemic response co-ordinating committee 2020-21 (30 work streams covering everything from libraries, IT, teaching, examining, research,...)
- Discovered Oxford *could* change its practices very quickly while retaining its underlying rituals, symbols and governance practices.

Examples:

- - changes in role of *libraries*: becoming study spaces rather than book storage spaces as almost all resources went online in digital form;
- - homeworking;
- - changes in *teaching practice*: online teaching lead to real examples of the flipped classroom, breakout groups, student-led teaching
- - changes in *examining*: from closed book to open book, from what you can remember to how you think, from learning facts to applying knowledge.

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## Reflections on the Post-Pandemic University

- Throughout process, key narrative has been that changes which institutions established to deal with crisis were *temporary* and that everything should 'return to normal' as soon as threat of pandemic sufficiently reduced. But what is 'normal' – and why should universities return to it?
- Project proposal to look holistically at range of changes which have taken place across higher education sectors in Japan and UK; provide a mirror for each to examine and challenge fundamental questions about the underlying taken-for-granted assumptions that have underpinned their systems for past few decades since both have been hit by same 'external shock' (COVID-19) at same time.

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## Reflections on the Post-Pandemic University

What is clear is that institutions, as well as stakeholders (students, staff, owners, funders) shown remarkable *resilience* in the face of great challenges. What lessons can be learned from this experience, in particular about *university governance*?

- national, local and private universities?
- top-down management?
- faculty-led management?
- family-run universities

Builds on recent co-authored book which was a case study of *resilience and governance* of a sector of Japanese higher education – *private universities*.

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