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The university reforms, the re-election of Vladimir Putin, and the current situation in North Korea as seen from Japan

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EDITORIAL

The university reforms, the re-election of Vladimir Putin, and the current situation in North Korea as seen from Japan

This issue N°26 of *Japan Analysis* focuses on the reactions of the Japanese government to the new international situation, marked by the passing of Kim Jong-Il's leadership of North Korea with its strident displays of power to accompany the installation of Kim Jong-Un, as well as by the contested election of Vladimir Putin to the presidency, a post which he had previously held between 1999 and 2008. The effects of these reactions on the possibility of settling, or failing to settle, certain long-running conflicts are studied by Yann Favennec, and they are approached from the viewpoint of Japan's national dailies by César Castellvi.

The "Points of News" section of this issue no. 26 contains a part of the dossier published in the February 2012 issue of the monthly *Chûô Kôron*, in which different experts are invited to discuss all the issues involved in the need to reform Japan's universities. The announcement

made some time earlier by Tokyo University, of its intention to break from the traditional calendar – in which the academic year starts in April – and to carry the beginning over to September, in order to match the calendar of Japan's most prestigious university with that of North American and European institutions, has given rise to numerous reactions. These show how much the implementation of this change by all the universities would lead to a complete reshaping of the way Japanese graduates are recruited by the major enterprises. The discussions, translated by Amélie Corbel and Adrienne Sala, hark back to the main criticisms already made a few years ago about the way Japanese universities currently operate. These criticisms cover the universities' low levels of international contact (both in the enrolment of foreign students and in sending Japanese students overseas), their excessive bureaucracy and internal separatism, the dependence of their course schedules on the methods of recruitment by the large companies (with their negative effects on the quality of course contents and the length of the teaching periods), the ways

their students are graded and the workload imposed on their teaching staff. Seen against the backdrop of the difficulties faced by higher education establishments in France, these questions reveal certain similarities within the globalising context where the norms for academic and scientific competition are set by the assessment criteria of the Anglo-Saxon world. In fact, the old “imperial universities” set up early in the Meiji period also modelled themselves on Anglo-Saxon and Prussian institutions, precisely in order to train an elite which would eventually be capable of standing up to the foreign powers who had forced their way into the Japanese archipelago.

Sophie Buhnik

CLOSE UP ON THE NEWS

1. Japanese perceptions of the re-election of Vladimir Putin

- *Yann Favennec*

On March 1st 2012 Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister and candidate for election as President of the Russian Federation, held a lengthy question and answer session with the chief editors of some of the leading international media organisations in his residency at Novo-Ogarevo, just outside Moscow. In the course of this exchange, Wakamiya Yoshibumi who represented the Japanese daily *Asahi shimbun*, asked him if there might be a resumption of negotiations over the “Northern Territories”¹ in the event of his election to the presidency.

¹ The Japanese term for the four islands (Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and Habomai) which make up the southern part of the Kuril archipelago. These islands are claimed by Japan on the basis of the 1855 treaty on trade and national boundaries, which recognises Japanese sovereignty over them. The Northern Territories were occupied by the Soviet Union in 1945, and were inherited by Russia after the fall of the USSR.

Vladimir Putin’s response was unexpected, to say the least: “We truly wish for a definite settlement of this territorial issue ... As judo practitioners, each side must take a bold step forward. A judo practitioner must always aim at victory, not defeat: so that is no cause for surprise. However, in the present case, we must not seek to carry off some sort kind of victory. In the present situation, what is needed is a compromise that is acceptable to the two sides. Something, in fact, that would resemble a *hikiwake* [a judo term meaning “equality”] ... The dispute can only be resolved through strengthening the co-operation between our two countries. We must look upon each other as neighbours, and moreover as sincere friends ... so I believe that we will end up by finding a way to reach a compromise ...”

The Russian Prime Minister then expressed his wish to return to the 1956 joint Japanese-Soviet declaration² as the legal basis for

² This agreement, reached between Japan and the Soviet Union in 1956 provided for the return of two of the disputed islands (Shikotan and Habomai) to Japan after the conclusion of a peace treaty between the two countries. This agreement was signed by the

negotiations. At that point, the chief editor of *Asahi shimbun* replied that if Russia and Japan wished to reach a *hikiwake* situation the return of two of the former four islands claimed by Japan would be insufficient. Putin's reply was: "You are not a member of the Japanese Department of Foreign Affairs and I am not yet President. Here is what I propose: After I take office, I will gather the MID³ and Japanese minister around a table and give the command: *Hajime* (Begin!)"⁴.

Vladimir Putin's statements were widely reported by the Japanese media, which saw in them an unexpected opportunity to restart the territorial negotiations which had got nowhere since the Koizumi government came to power in 2001. Would these "ten empty years" (*Kûhaku no jûnen*), as the Japanese call them, soon become nothing but a bad memory? Nothing is less certain. Japan's official position in the dispute with Russia remains unchanged: the conclusion of a peace treaty between the two countries will only be possible when Japanese sovereignty over the four islands is recognised⁵. But the terms of the 1956 joint declaration, to which Putin referred, state that Russia would agree to give up only two of the islands (Shikotan and Habomai), and only after the signing of a peace treaty between the two countries. In the face of such a gap between the two positions, it would be over-optimistic to believe that the negotiations could lead to any kind of agreement. In Japan, one section

respective Foreign Ministers of the time, Hatoyama Ichirô and Nikolai Bulganin. When Japan sign the Japanese-American security treaty in 1960, the USSR withdrew unilaterally from negotiations aimed at reaching a Japanese-Soviet peace treaty, and the 1956 joint declaration fell into abeyance.

³ Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

⁴ According to the Interfax press agency, March 2nd 2012.

⁵ See the website of Gaimushô (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs): <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/hoppo/hoppo.html>.

of public opinion has begun to distance itself from the official government line (calling for the immediate return of the four islands), in favour of a more flexible step-by-step approach, which would consist in recovering the two islands offered by Russia (Shikotan and Habomai) on the basis of the 1956 joint declaration, before entering into negotiations over the ownership of the two remaining islands (Kunashiri and Etorofu). This "2 + 2" formula proposed by some academics and politicians (like Satô Masaru, a writer and former official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁶, and Suzuki Muneo⁷) or the alternative which proposes a "2 + alpha" resolution (Shikotan and Habomai first, followed by more on the basis of progress in the negotiations) do not have unanimous support, especially among Japanese academics. Some university professors and experts in international relations are unconvinced over the relevance of such an approach, because they are still not persuaded that Vladimir Putin's third term as leader of the Russian Federation will help to take the negotiations over the Northern Territories any further.

Hakamada Shigeki, a professor at the University of Niigata prefecture and expert in Russian foreign policy, is among those who are doubtful about the settling of the territorial dispute, at least in the short term. He has set out his views in a series of articles published

⁶ A writer and former official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁷ Japanese politician, former member of the Diet, and head of the Hokkaidô regional party, the Shintô Daichi Shin-Menshu. He is known for his commitment to strengthening ties between Japan and Russia, both at the national level (as Secretary of State he contributed notably to the holding of the informal summit meeting in Krasnoyarsk in November 1997, between Hashimoto Ryûtarô and Boris Yeltsin) or at the local level (he initiated the building of a reception centre called the Friendship House on Kunashiri island, to accommodate the Russian victims of a powerful earthquake which hit the island in 1994).

by the economic daily *Nikkei Bijinesu*. In his opinion, the Japanese media gave a poor interpretation of Vladimir Putin's statements on March 1st 2012. Thus, they completely missed the essence of the matter, and allowed themselves to be led astray by his use of judo terms⁸, like *hikiwake* and *hajime*, aimed at flattering the pride which the Japanese take in their culture⁹.

According to Professor Hakamada, Putin's tone was in reality much harsher than the reports in the media suggest. If the statements are reread in their original version, one can see that in fact Putin used a rather unusual term when he said that he wanted to "settle the territorial problem". Normally, the verb for "to settle" is a translation of the Russian *reshit'* (to decide, to resolve). But the verb which he actually used, *zakryt'* (to close), has far harsher connotations. Consequently, the expression for "settling the territorial problem" is no longer as neutral as it appeared at first. Rather, by his use of this verb, Vladimir Putin would seem to have expressed his desire to be finished once and for all with the masquerade (for which Japan is largely responsible) represented by the Southern Kuril Islands question. However, this momentary harshness itself needs measured consideration: if the sentence is taken in its context, we might surmise that Putin instinctively reacted quite rudely to Wakamiya

⁸ It is widely known that Putin is a judo enthusiast.

⁹ "Soshia Kōkan go odoraita Nihon no naibusu. Hoppō ryōdo ni kansuru Putin hatsugen no shin-i to Nihon no gokai" ("The gullibility of the Japanese which surprises leading Russian dignitaries. The real meaning of Putin's declarations on the Northern Territories and the mistaken interpretation placed on them by Japan") *Nikkei Bijinesu online*, March 8th 2012; "Putin go daitōryō ni natte mo ryōdo mondai ha kaiketsu dekinai" ("The election of Putin will not pave the way to resolving the territorial issue") *Nikkei Bijinesu online*, April 26th 2012: <http://business.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/topics/20120307/229577>, <http://business.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/opinion/20120424/231349/?=nocnt>.

Yoshihumi's rather too direct allusion to the Northern Territories. We can easily understand that at that particular moment the Russian Premier was a little irritated by the way this interminable issue was dragged out again.

Professor Hakamada adds that the media expectations arising from Putin's declaration can only result in even greater disappointments for Japan, given the huge gap separating Japan's desire to recover the four islands and the Russian government's intransigence over the matter¹⁰. There is a real risk here: by bringing up the 1956 joint declaration, the Russian Prime Minister was reminding his interviewer that it was originally Japan who wished to take that agreement as the basis for negotiations over territorial sovereignty¹¹, and who, by again making the conclusion of a peace treaty conditional upon the return of all four of the islands (a claim contrary to the spirit of the 1956 joint declaration) had put an end to any possible discussion. He added that the conclusion of a peace treaty meant a *de facto* final settlement of the territorial dispute, and that no further claims could be made. He went on to emphasise that, at the time of its signature, the 1956 joint declaration had not clearly stated whether the handover of the islands would mean a "transfer of sovereignty", or what would be the exact procedures for its implementation. This clarification of Putin's standpoint suggests that the only conceivable outcome of the territorial dispute would be, at best, the ceding of two of the islands to Japan. This conclusion is shared by Tampa Minoru,

¹⁰ *Nikkei Bujinesu Online*, March 8th and April 26th 2012.

¹¹ This wish was conveyed to Vladimir Putin by the Japanese Prime Minister, Mori Yoshirō, at the bilateral summit talks in Irkutsk (in March 2001). In the same year, shortly after the formation of the Koizumi administration (whose foreign policy was centred around the Japanese-American alliance), Japan reversed its policy and returned to its original stance, namely the immediate return of all four islands being claimed.

the former Japanese ambassador to Russia (1999-2002). At a seminar held in Sapporo¹², this former official of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that the return of Vladimir Putin as President of the Russian Federation has put an end to all hopes that Japan might recover full sovereignty over the islands which it claims. Tampa Minoru, like Hakamada Shigeru¹³, is persuaded that the current Kremlin leaders have never envisaged such an outcome, and he thinks that Japan missed a historic opportunity for it during the Yeltsin period, when Russia was still politically and economically weakened. The Russian media have recently reported anonymous statements from within the Kremlin whose tone supports the opinions of the former ambassador¹⁴. Tampa Minoru also takes issue with those Japanese intellectuals and politicians who obstinately insist that Putin's return to the leadership of Russia gives an opportunity, which Japan must seize, to negotiate a return of the Northern Territories. In his opinion, such people who mostly favour the "2 + alpha" negotiating strategy, are harbouring illusions. Worse than that, they are endangering Japan's national credibility by supporting a policy which he considers similar to "the behaviour of a banana salesman" (*Banana no tataki-un*)¹⁵.

Hakamada Shigeru, Tampa Minoru, and others are calling for Japan to return to a firm and intransigent position in talks over the Northern Territories. Of course, that would not "get back" the four islands in the near future,

¹² Seminar addressed by Tampa Minoru, held by the city of Sapporo's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and entitled "What future is possible for a Japan without a strategic policy?", Sapporo (Hokkaidô, Japan), May 2012.

¹³ *Nikkei Bijinesu Online*, March 8th 2012.

¹⁴ "No president will give up the Kuril islands to Tokyo" (Kremlin source), *RIA Novosti*, May 3rd 2012: <http://fr.rian.ru/world/20120503/194530390.html>.

¹⁵ An expression previously used by him in an interview with *Yomiuri shinbun* (May 24th 2011).

but it would still be better than "selling off on the cheap" those "territories which are an integral part of Japan" (*Nippon koyû no ryôdo*). In their view it would be better to wait patiently for the end of Putin's term of office, and then to watch for an opportune moment more politically favourable to Japan, so as to restart the negotiations in conditions offering the best chances for the return of all the islands.

The supporters of the wait-and-see policy are most likely going to have to be patient for a long time. When Dmitri Medvedev was still President of the Russian Federation, he carefully altered the Russian Constitution in order to lengthen the presidential term of office from four to six years. That implies that Vladimir Putin will certainly be President for six years, and since he has not excluded the possibility of seeking a fourth term, he will probably be at the helm for another twelve years. During that period, it is quite possible that Russia may pursue its own development programme for the Kuril Islands (initiated in 2005), so that it will strengthen its grip on those islands claimed by Japan, while also attracting overseas investors¹⁶. The presence of foreign companies would mean the implicit recognition of Russian sovereignty over the Northern Territories. By adopting a passive stance, Japan faces the risk of finding it more and more difficult to assert its sovereignty over the islands in the eyes of the international community. Moreover Japan's waiting policy already showed its limitations during the "empty decade" after 2001. The actual outcome was that in November 2011, President Dmitri Medvedev visited the island of Kunashiri to oversee its infrastructural modernisation, provoking Japanese anger (the Prime Minister Naoto Kan described the visit as an "unforgivable outrage") and plunging Russo-Japanese relations into a diplomatic crisis unknown since the Cold War period.

¹⁶ "Kuril Islands: Japanese hostility to Russian investment plans", *RIA Novosti*, February 2nd 2011: <http://fr.rian.ru/world/20110202/188514503.html>.

Are the “2 + 2” and the “2 + alpha” strategies realistic?

Satō Masaru, the political analyst who formerly acted for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he was known as the “Gaimshō Rasputin” (on account of his involvement in Russo-Japanese relations along with the politician Suzuki Muneo), is extremely critical of the supporters of the wait-and-see strategy. He accuses them, or at least some of them, of being willing to sabotage the territorial negotiations in advance, in order to defend their own interests¹⁷. According to this former member of the Ministry there is a real possibility of seeing the islands revert to Japanese sovereignty one day. In support of this conviction, Satō Masaru refers to the Irkutsk declaration of 2001. And indeed the statement issued at the end of that summit provides for a return to the 1956 Japanese-Soviet joint declaration as the legal basis for the negotiations to take place. Yet, on the other hand, it is clearly spelt out in that declaration that Japan and Russia would continue to discuss the future of the two remaining islands (Kunashiri and Etorofu). During a cultural radio broadcast, Satō Masaru declared that an insistence on recovering the four islands together would lead nowhere, and

¹⁷ For some time now, Satō Masaru and Suzuki Muneo have been denouncing a phenomenon which they call “the Northern Territories business” (*Hoppō Ryōdo bijinesu*). In their view, some experts and activists have been taking advantage of the territorial dispute by profiting from the funds allocated by the Japanese government for seminars, gatherings, and other promotional events in support of the recovery of the four islands. The settlement of the dispute would mean the end of this flow of funds: some of these alleged “profiteers” would therefore like to maintain the privileges which they enjoy, so they demand that Japan take a firm and radical position on the territorial question in order to make any settlement of the matter impossible. These are serious accusations, and they accurately reflect the palpable tension between the “hardliners” and the supporters of the “flexible” approach.

that the ineffectiveness of that approach had been shown during the empty decade which followed the beginning of the Koizumi period. In his view there is a need for pragmatism, that is to say, the adoption of a step-by-step strategy. He underlined the importance of finding a way of reconciling the spirit of the 1956 joint declaration with Japan’s official position on the Northern Territories, because there is a real contradiction over the matter of the timing of the signing of a peace treaty. In his view the ideal solution would be to reach an agreement over the return of Kunashiri and Habomai after an agreement with Russia that, instead of the peace treaty there would be a bridging agreement which would provide for further discussions over Kunashiri and Etorofu. At all events, that is the signal which Gemba Kōichiro sent to the Russians last September at a press conference to mark his appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs¹⁸. He is reported to have said: “Of course, Russia will make every effort to achieve a peace treaty in order to end the dispute, and it will be up to the Gaimushō negotiators to show their tenacity. Vladimir Putin is quite aware that Japan will not be satisfied with the return of two islands. He was able to grasp that during his conversation with Wakamiya Yoshibumi in Moscow. Contrary to the unbending hard image that he displays in the media, Putin is a politician who knows how to be flexible. Moreover, unlike his predecessor, he is in favour of a rapprochement with Japan within the overall framework of Russian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region”.

Satō Masaru also gives us an interesting analysis of the recent declarations by a high official in the Kremlin who declared that Russia would never give up the Northern Territories to Japan. For him they were just evidence of

¹⁸ “Putin no kaerisaki ha kōnki: imakoso Hoppō ryōdo henkan wo nerae” (“The Putin comeback is an unexpected opportunity: let us seize it to win the return of the Northern Territories!”), *Chūō Kōron*, N° 11, November 2011.

a fierce internal struggle within the Kremlin between the supporters of a rapprochement with Japan and those in favour of a hard line towards the Japanese government¹⁹. He considers the latter to be led by Sergei Prikhodzhko, a former presidential adviser under Medvedev. He argues that, in reaction to Vladimir Putin's expressed wish to settle the territorial dispute, Prikhodzhko, or at least one of his close associates within the Kremlin, tried to dampen the optimism aroused in the Japanese camp. By way of proof, Satō Masaru, points to the fact that the high official behind the statements given to the *Novosti* Press Agency had insisted on remaining anonymous. Satō Masaru is well acquainted with the practice of this sort of anonymous verbal warfare conducted through the media, since he seems to have participated in a similar scenario within the Gaimushō, between the officials of the American School (those in favour of unconditional support for the United States) and those of the Russian School (those in favour of a rapprochement with Russia).

According to Suzuki Muneo²⁰, the victorious camp in the Kremlin battle was those officials in favour of strengthening the ties with Japan. Accordingly Anton Vaino, the Russian diplomat of Estonian origin and former follower of Alexander Panov (the Russian ambassador to Tokyo in the Yeltsin era), was appointed as assistant director of the President's office in the Kremlin. Vaino is well known for his close ties to Japan, having lived there for a long time in his youth. In addition, Viktor Ishayev, the former governor of the Khabarovsk region, has been appointed as Minister for the Development of the Russian Far-East²¹ within

the new government under Vladimir Putin. This ministry was established with a view to the forthcoming APEC summit to be held in the city of Vladivostok in the autumn of 2012. The principal concern of this summit will be the modernisation of the region, which is of capital importance for Russia, because the Russian Far-East is virtually deserted, both economically and demographically. Whereas the total population of Russia is about 140 million (comparable to Japan) the Russian Far-East has only 6.5 million inhabitants (i.e. 4.5% of the total population), mostly located in the Pacific coastal region because of the extremely difficult living conditions in the interior. These "Russians from the East", who formerly enjoyed privileged status under the Soviet authorities, have seen their standard of living fall below the Federation average since the fall of the USSR, with the consequent disappearance of the principal motivation attaching them to the Russian state on the borders of China and the Pacific rim. For the Russian Federation, the question of developing the area is now more pressing than ever, in order to retain (and even attract) a population whose presence in the Far-East is vital for its geostrategic interests²². At the APEC summit in Vladivostok, the Russian Minister for the Development of the Far-East will have the task of convincing Russia's Asian neighbours to contribute to the modernisation of the region. So the appointment of a supporter of Russo-Japanese rapprochement to this position in the Russian government is far from being insignificant.

[politique/20120521/194783510.html](http://www.politique/20120521/194783510.html).

¹⁹ "Tainich gaikō wo meguru Kuremurin-nai deno tsuna-hiki" ("Internal struggle within the Kremlin to decide on the policy towards Japan"), *Sankei Express*, May 12th 2012.

²⁰ Suzuki Muneo's official website: http://www.muneo.gr.jp/diary/diary_2012_o5.html.

²¹ *RIA Novosti*, May 21st 2012: <http://fr.rian.ru/>

²² Indeed, in contrast with the steady decline of the Russian population in the Far-East, the Chinese population is continually increasing in the border areas, and this is perceived as a threat by the local Russians who are fearful of the possible consequences of a massive inflow of Chinese immigrants into the region.

By contrast, Iwashita Akihiro, a professor at Hokkaidô University specialising in Russian foreign policy and cross-border relations between Russia and China, has expressed scepticism over the “2 + 2” approach. And more generally, he questions whether Japan really needs to claim sovereignty over the islands of Kunashiri and Etorofu. In his view, the national interest would be better served by giving consideration to the intractability of the regional problems arising from the territorial dispute. Here Iwashita Akihiro is referring to the fishermen from the port of Nemuro (located about 4 km from Habomai) in eastern Hokkaidô, who are having real difficulties in making a living. Being unable to fish freely in the waters off the Northern Territories, they fear the approaching end of Japanese trawling in the area, unless a resolution of the territorial dispute is reached soon. Professor Iwashita therefore recommends a strategy along “2 = alpha” lines, aimed at recovering the islands of Habomai and Shikotan in the first instance, followed by negotiations with the Russian government over sharing Kunashiri between the two countries²³. He has drawn his ideas for this approach from the settlement of the Sino-Russian border dispute, which led to the sharing of some of the islands along the Amur River. Significantly, this resolution gave rise to the joint exploitation of certain stretches of the Amur by the Russian and Chinese trawlers from the area. In Iwashita Akihiro’s view, although this approach may be seen as serving the minority self-interests of the fishermen, they are the ones who are really suffering from the current situation, unlike the city dwellers calling for the return of all four islands. So the best solution would amount to getting Russia to agree that all the fishermen could have unlimited access to the fishing grounds off the Northern Territories.

²³ In his work “Hoppô Ryôdo Mondai: yon demo, zero demo, ni demo naku” (“The problem of the Northern Territories: neither four islands nor none, nor even two”), 2005, Chûô Kôron Publications.

Conclusion

The territorial dispute between Russia and Japan, which has been going on for over sixty-five years, always gives rise to different opinions, and now there is a recurrence of certain tensions between the partisans of the different approaches. Whichever side may be right, the Noda government has taken note of Vladimir Putin’s declarations and seems determined to put all of its efforts into the fray. The day after Putin won the Presidential election, the Japanese Prime Minister was among the first of the heads of state to telephone his congratulations, and to inform him of his willingness to find a solution “full of wisdom” to the territorial dispute²⁴. Previously, the Prime Minister’s reaction to Putin’s declarations had been that, since Habomai and Shikotan represented only 7% of the total area of the Northern Territories, the return of just those two islands could not be considered an outcome comparable to *hikiwake*²⁵. But now the government has sent Maehara Seiji, chairman of the Democratic Party foreign affairs committee, as a special envoy to Moscow to hold talks with the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov²⁶. The outcome of these talks is an agreement between the two men on “the need to settle the territorial dispute in a spirit of calm in order to conclude a peace treaty, allowing further strengthening of

²⁴ “Ryôdo: eichi aru kaiketsu wo. Shoshô, Putin-shi to denwa kaidan” (“The Territories: Let us reach a solution full of wisdom. Telephone exchange between the Prime Minister and Mr. Putin”), *Sankei shimbun*, May 12th 2012.

²⁵ “Shushô: Nitô deha Hikiwake denai. Putin hatsugen ni gengkyû” (“The Prime Minister reacts to Putin’s declarations: two islands are not enough to reach a situation of Hikiwake”), *Sankei shimbun*, March 9th 2012.

²⁶ “Maehara-shi, Roshia gaishô to kaidan. Ryôdo mondai, ken-an kaiketsu wo” (“Meeting between Mr. Maehara and the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister: finding a solution to the persistent problem of the Territories”), *Asahi shimbun*, May 3rd 2012.

Russo-Japanese relations”. In addition, the Japanese JDP and LDP seem to have agreed to set their differences aside in order to work together towards a recovery of the Northern Territories. It is agreed that Mori Yoshirō, the former Japanese Prime Minister who signed the 2001 Irkutsk declaration with Vladimir Putin, will shortly make a visit to Moscow to hold talks with the Russian President²⁷. It should be emphasised that these two men have remained on close terms since 2001, even using the familiar Russian *ty* in their conversations (this relationship is similar to the one between Hashimoto Ryūtarō and Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s). It would seem that, by sending Mori Yoshirō to Russia, the intention of the Noda government is to remind Putin of the terms of the Irkutsk declaration, which provided for a return to the joint Japanese-Soviet declaration as a basis for negotiations, and for further talks concerning ownership of the islands of Kunashiri and Etoforu. It can reasonably be inferred that for Japan things are becoming serious. The question is whether the Noda government will be able to bend Russia’s determination to give up only two of the islands. For Russia, there are the following major strategic matters at stake in Kunashiri and Etoforu:

- From the military standpoint, the channel between the islands of Etoforu and Urup is the only area in the Kuril archipelago not to freeze over in Winter, thus giving submarines from Kamchatka or Vladivostok access to the Pacific;
- The waters around the southern Kuril islands are the richest fishing grounds in the Okhotsk maritime region, giving Russian large profits from their trawling exports to meet the market demands

from countries like Japan, China, and South Korea;

- According to officials in the Russian Ministry of Energy, deposits of rare metals have been discovered on Etoforu. It is reported that a major rhenium deposit²⁸, has been sufficient to meet domestic and even global market demands.

So, to recover these islands, Japan will have to be a tenacious negotiating partner, but that seems very difficult unless Russian interests in the region are guaranteed. In order to reach its goals, Japan will have to make major concessions in the field of the joint exploitation of the islands’ natural resources. But it is still not certain that will be enough to persuade the Russian government to hand them over.

²⁷ “Putin saishūnin: yahari kibishii Hoppō Ryōdo mondai”, (“The re-election of Putin: resolving the Northern Territories problem will be really difficult”), *Wedge*, May 7th 2012.

²⁸ A rare metal used especially in the space industry.



2. North Korea's launch of the Unha-3 rocket in April 2012: the reactions of the Japanese press

- César Castellvi

On April 15th this year, the North Korean regime once again drew attention to itself on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the birth of the founder of the People's Democratic Republic, Kim Il-Sung. This event was prepared well in advance and was marked by a huge parade and the first official speech from the new leader Kim Jong-Un, followed most importantly by a new long-range missile test under the cover of a satellite launch (the third after those of 1998 and 2009) which ended in failure. The decision to go ahead with this new test had been announced by the regime's official press agency²⁹ on March 16th, scarcely two weeks after the United States and North Korea signed a moratorium which called for a halt to research on ballistic missiles and nuclear development.

In exchange for halting these two programmes, the United States had committed itself to providing 240,000 tons of food aid, which was particularly vital in view of the threat of new outbreaks of the famine which recurrently afflict North Korea³⁰. Following the March 16th announcement, this moratorium which had seemed to herald a renewal in the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, was finally broken when the United States decided

to suspend its humanitarian aid on March 28th. The launch which took place during the period planned before the moratorium, on April 13th, finally ended with the explosion of the rocket after two minutes in flight.

This episode, the most recent in a cycle of alternating tensions and relaxations, was surprising because of its closeness in time to North Korea's acceptance of the first moratorium, accompanied by a return of inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to oversee the uranium enrichment at Yongbyon. But much subsequent analysis has shown that this attitude was not unforeseeable, in view of the political transition affecting the country since the death of Kim Jong-Il on December 17th 2011, since his son and successor, Kim Jong-Un must give public proof of his legitimacy.

One of the special features of this new incident lies in the invitation to the foreign press, extended to nearly two hundred journalists from various countries invited to follow the event. From Japan, only the public broadcasting network NHK, and the Kyōdo and Jiji press agencies, were able to send their correspondents to attend. Yet these information sources limit their activities to sending despatches and factual reporting. In this analysis I will follow the reactions and comments in the Japanese national press in Japan, by focusing on the ideas put forward in the editorials of the major dailies³¹.

Since Japan, along with South Korea, is one of the countries most directly affected by the aggressive policies of Pyongyang, the reactions of the Japanese media to the announcement of the proposed missile launch, especially after its failure on April 13th, have been sharp, and they have revived one of the major questions

²⁹ The KCNA or Korean Central News Agency.

³⁰ Out of the 24 million inhabitants of North Korea in 2011, an estimated 3 million were reported to be suffering from malnutrition (Source: Statistics from the World Food Programme and the Fund for Food and Agriculture).

³¹ These are *Asahi shimbun*, *Mainichi shimbun*, *Nikkei shimbun*, and *Yomiuri shimbun*.

causing disturbances in the country's foreign policy since the early years of the Cold War. Unsurprisingly, the editorial columns in the major dailies are in unanimous agreement in criticising North Korea and decrying the absurdity of a country facing a serious food crisis but spending such a disproportionate part of its budget on such a military adventure. All of the editorials are especially critical of its neighbour China's wait-and-see policy.

Asahi shimbun, whose editorial policies are known to be largely in favour of maintaining good relations with the other countries of East Asia, severely criticised Pyongyang. In its editorial of April 14th under the headline "Self defence against this aggressive launch", this morning daily declared that "giving priority to the consolidation of the new power in the hands of Kim Jong-Un, rather than to a population dying of hunger, can only be described as an act of folly". The paper then calls for other countries to pull together: "It is only through the common efforts of the United States, South Korea, and Japan, and including also China and Russia, that a strong message can and must be sent to North Korea." All these countries were participants in the six-sided talks established in 2003 and suspended since 2008. At the same time, *Asahi shimbun* struck a more positive note by pointing to a small development in the announcements made by Pyongyang, noting that for the first time a failure like that of the launch had been recognised as such by the authorities: "It is too much to expect a change in policy, given the way that Kim Jong-Un's rule is in continuity with his predecessors. But the fact of its recognising this failure should not be overlooked, even though there is a risk in seeing it as a sign of real change".

Mainichi shimbun also takes a moderate stance, giving the North Korean regime the benefit of the doubt. In its editorial of April 14th ("In support of balanced measures by the Security Council"), this daily believes that

"we cannot completely rule out the possibility that the rocket was indeed carrying a satellite, as North Korea has repeatedly insisted". But while the two North Korean nuclear tests were officially announced as such by the regime³², both of the other missile launches, in 1998 and 2009, were officially announced as satellite launches. The *Mainichi shimbun* took a much more critical line on the Japanese government's reaction and on its communication system for informing the public in the event of attack. In the event, it seems to have taken the authorities about forty minutes to become aware of the lift-off, whereas the United States, South Korea, and even certain media organisations had already issued their warnings. South Korea, like Japan, gets some of its information from American satellite link-ups³³, but the Japanese Defence Ministry seems to have lost time in verifying the data: "Is it not precisely because it is a matter of information affecting the lives of the whole population that the government, while recognising the weaknesses of the Satellite Early Warning system, should at least have passed on the information and issued a warning?"

In its editorial on April 14th ("Basic precautions in the event of an attack"), *Sankei shimbun* also made strong criticisms of the authorities' failure to react. The paper made the point that the transmission of mistaken information by the SEW system in 2009 certainly led the government to be cautious in interpreting the first incoming data, only confirming the missile launch forty minutes later: "Under the pretext of wishing to remain prudent, the members of the Prime Minister's staff did not act swiftly enough on the basis of information sent out by the United States. If the missile had hit Japan, it is a sure bet that adequate measures could not have been taken without difficulty". *Sankei*

³² They took place on October 9th 2006, and May 25th 2009.

³³ The SEW, or Satellite Early Warning system.

shimbun, being a supporter of close relations with the Americans, makes this a reason for calling for strengthened military co-operation between Japan and America in order to apply pressure on North Korea: "We hope that [this need to take strong measures] will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the defence and security of Japan on the basis of our alliance with the United States". China's tacit support for North Korea is openly condemned, and the paper goes beyond criticising its wait-and-see policy, by asserting without hesitation that "China gave its support to the missile launch [despite warnings from the international community].

In its editorial of April 17th, the conservative daily *Yomiuri shimbun*, likewise known for its largely favourable attitude to the United States, does not dwell much on the aftertaste left by the government's communications under crisis, but it deplors the toothless measures taken up until now by the UN Security Council: "Neither military measures nor serious economic restrictions have been applied. Under these circumstances, North Korea is highly unlikely to feel inconvenienced". The main sanctions against the People's Democratic Republic of Korea go back to 2006, with systematic restrictions imposed mainly on North Korean freight, a freeze on investments intended for weapons of mass destruction, a prohibition on foreign travel by the leaders of the regime, and an embargo on luxury goods³⁴. Of all the dailies, *Yomiuri* is certainly the most alarmist in its response to North Korea, believing that the threat which it poses is steadily increasing: "The threat to Japan from North Korean nuclear bombs and missiles is growing daily The development of nuclear weapons and delivery systems is incompatible with economic development. That is what the international community must get the regime under Kim Jong-Un to understand".

³⁴ UN resolution 1718.

Another paper, the economics daily *Nihon keizai shimbun*, has stated its views in its editorial of April 14th (headlined "How can the dangerous provocations by North Korea be prevented?") where it raises in explicit terms the question of the means to get the provocations from Pyongyang stopped. Unsurprisingly, it also vigorously condemns the actions of its neighbouring country and expresses scepticism over the measures voted through by the Security Council. It emphasises above all the lack of concern by the main nations involved: "The first requirement is that an awareness of their common danger should be shared by Japan, the United States, South Korea, China, and Russia. It is because this has been largely lacking that every attempt at isolating North Korea has failed, and that its provocations have ended up by being accepted". The *Nikkei* differs from the options proposed by the other papers, however, in its insistence that there must be co-operation between Seoul and Tokyo with the goal of finding a solution: "The countries which need to devise the most effective measures are those most directly threatened by Pyongyang, namely Japan and South Korea. Unlike Western countries, these two are within the range of North Korean missiles". North Korea does indeed possess weapons capable of reaching any major city in Japan or South Korea, even if a report by the international Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS) notes a margin of error so large that only 50% of the missiles would reach their target.

On the whole, the Japanese national press, while taking a common hard line towards the North Korean regime, shows nuanced differences over the strategy options which they support on the international diplomatic front, with some of the papers calling for strengthening bi-polar ties with the United States and with South Korea, and others supporting a meeting of all the countries affected by the crisis. As for the role which

might be played by China in the future, that is an object of controversy³⁵. While it might be true that the presence of North Korea on China's border will continue to provide it with a buffer zone against the United States' troops based in South Korea, it is by no means certain that an excessively unstable and bellicose North Korea will not cause it more problems in the near future. The political handover appears not to have really altered North Korean strategy, while the international community is worried by the threat of a further nuclear test by that country, which could undermine the possibility of a peaceful resolution.

My thanks to Adrien Carbonnet (doctoral candidate at the Centre for Japanese Studies/INALCO) for his comments and observations on the topic of this analysis.

³⁵ On June 30th 2012, *Asahi shimbun* reported a possible violation of UN Security Council resolution 1718 by China in October 2011: China is reported to have supplied some missile-launching vehicles to Korea through the intermediary of cargo registered in Cambodia.

POINTS OF NEWS

Yoshimi Shunya and Aoki Tamotsu,

“What is wrong with the Japanese universities?”, [Nihon no daigaku no nani ga mondai ka?], *Chûô kôron*, February 2012, pp. 22-33. (translated from the Japanese source by Amélie Corbel).

Yoshimi Shunya is a sociologist who has been vice-President of Tokyo University since 2011. He is the author of a book in titled “What is the university?”. Aoki Tamotsu is an anthropologist who has been the Director of the Tokyo National Art Centre (Kokuritsu shin bijutsukan) since 2009.

In the following dialogue Mr. Yoshimi and Mr. Aoki discuss the problems facing Japanese universities, particularly the low levels of international recruitment, the internal bureaucratic separatism, and the job-seeking arrangements which eat into the students’ time for studying.

Why does “Tôdai”³⁶ only rank globally at no. 30?

Aoki: In the latest edition of the “global ranking of universities” by the London *Times*, Tôdai was ranked 30th. Every year, its position sinks lower. What do you think of this assessment?

Yoshimi: It is true that our ranking continues to fall. Two years ago we were at no. 22 and went down to no. 26 last year, and then to no. 30 this year. In global ranking, Asian universities are practically all placed in low positions, corresponding to the level of local state universities in America. But if you turn to the assessments of world experts who put their emphasis on “research”, Tôdai stands at no. 8.

³⁶ The accepted abbreviation for the public university of Tokyo, considered to be the best in Japan.

My personal belief is that this gap is caused by the problems related to teaching quality and to internationalisation.

Yoshimi: You mean that if the researchers in Tōdai are brilliant, the teaching provided to the students is poor ...

Aoki: Tōdai is still not very oriented towards the outside world; the lack of means necessary for its internationalisation is a major problem. There are very few foreign professors and students, and very few of our students go overseas. Problems of communicating in English mean that our researchers do not manage to convey the depths of their thinking and the breadth of their knowledge, and this reduces the number of occasions for their work to be quoted in the media and foreign scientific publications. These different reasons explain the fall in our global ranking.

I personally have absolutely no belief in the impartiality of these classification systems. They choose marking systems which favour the Anglo-Saxon universities and they generally under-estimate the strengths of Asian universities. These systems have many other faults besides. However, if we just criticise or ignore them on the grounds that they are unjust, the situation will not change, and Japanese universities will remain in exactly the same position as they are today. The misfortune of the Japanese universities is due partly to the fact that the “old imperial universities” like Tōdai and Kyōto University have indeed not yet completely separated themselves from the imperial university model.

Aoki: The imperial universities were basically “nation-state universities”. Their basic aim was the training of an elite capable of building the foundations of a nation-state. In that respect, they were successful. But in the 21st century, there is no call for such a goal. At a time when we should be working

towards the development of more global universities, we are still yoked, as it were, to the 19th century.

Yoshimi: That is quite true. But a historical perspective reminds us that such disruptions have occurred in the past. For example, the European universities which arose in the 12th and 13th centuries then became distanced from the mainstream of intellectual production and very nearly disappeared in the 16th century, at the very time when the first signs announcing the modern epoch appeared (especially, the development of printing). It was only with the creation of the Humboldt University in Berlin in the 19th century that the universities would succeed in being reborn and regain their prestige. The context for this rebirth was the rapid acceptance of the concept of the nation-state. Yet it is the decline of this very concept which has been occurring on a global scale since the beginning of the 21st century. I believe that the future of Japanese universities will not be prosperous so long as we go on clinging to a model whose foundations have largely disappeared. But it is true that it is not quite clear what will follow next.

Aoki: This may not be the best example, but with the advent of information technologies, the students do not even need to attend their courses, they can listen to them and participate visually from their homes.

Yoshimi: Indeed, our epoch has reached a point where it is only a matter of acquiring information; going to classes is no longer necessary; a simple internet search is enough. In other words, the role of a university as just a means of transmitting knowledge is becoming outworn. However, does that mean that the university has become useless? Personally, I do not believe so. While there is an abundance of information, it is still up to the university to teach the students how to be selective, and above all how to assign a meaning to the

variety of information.

Is university organisation more bureaucratic than the Kasumigaseki quarter³⁷?

Aoki: I would like to raise another point: the bureaucratic aspect of our universities. I have worked for more than two years in the Cultural Affairs Office, and I can tell you that university organisation is more bureaucratic than the ministerial organisations themselves. The number of obligations imposed on us is considerable: we have to take part in all sorts of committees, and the administrative formalities are indescribable. The universities continue to use the kind of formalities which disappeared even from the ministries long ago, that is to say

Yoshimi: I quite agree with you. I myself am caught up in a whirlwind of proper steps and procedures. I know how difficult it is.

Aoki: The government's "bureaucratic separatism"³⁸ is regularly criticised, whereas the separatism which dominates within the universities is far more harmful. Under the legitimate cover of "the autonomy of the faculties"³⁹, a trench has gradually been dug between the different faculties, to an extent that people outside find difficult to imagine. When the time comes to decide on any major direction to be taken by the university, even if meetings between the leaders of the faculties are organised, no new reforming proposals are ever adopted, because everyone seeks above all to maintain the advantages of their own

³⁷ An area of Tokyo which includes a large number of ministries.

³⁸ Aoki speaks literally about the "vertical nature of the administrative hierarchy" or the "top-down workings of the administration".

³⁹ Japanese universities include several faculties, often of law, economics, sociology etc.

faculty. In addition, there is another problem which faces students from one department who wish to follow a course in another one outside their department, even when they have come to the university in order to study a variety of things. I believe that it would be desirable to do away with the "faculty barriers" for the first two years of study and to give students the freedom to choose whatever courses they wish; in that way they will be able to specialise in a fully informed way when they enter their third year.

Yoshimi: The negative effects of this separatism have grown worse over the last ten to twenty years; they are written into the "university reform" which began in the 1990s. In concrete terms, the following three factors have played a major role: the dismantling of the general teaching faculties which was part of the establishment of the autonomous universities, the importance given to Master's degrees, and the way the public universities were made legally responsible. Yet, at the same time, university subsidies were eroded by major changes, such as the contraction of the Japanese economy and the falling numbers of young people of university age. In that increasingly difficult environment, students and lecturers no longer wished to undertake activities outside their faculty, trying to protect their own turf as much as possible; from then on, only profitability mattered. Instead of the hoped for "flexibility", these developments have led, ironically, to stabilise and strengthen the already existing "separatism" between the faculties.

Aoki: I would like to return to the matter of dismantling the faculties. Those courses which are accessible to all students, whatever the faculty they are enrolled in, are in the process of disappearing from Japanese universities. A few years ago, I had a discussion with the parent of a son who had gone to study for his

Master's degree at MIT40. He told me that over there, arts courses were compulsory for all students, whatever their specialisation might be; his son told him ... that he had to study piano and drawing. So the MIT research strategy is to oblige its pupils to undergo training in artistic creation in order that their creativity, essential for any scientific discovery or invention, could be developed. That was an excellent initiative.

Yoshimi: Please excuse my digressing a bit, but when I was still a student in the 1970s, student clubs, extra-curricular activities, and student movements were all very active. I personally was involved in drama, and I think that the number of hours I spent performing on stage nearly surpassed the ones I spent in class. That experience was really very helpful to me later. It is truly depressing nowadays to see how the "time for cultural activity" has disappeared from the lives of many students. That is why it is necessary, as you say, to consciously create within the university some kind of shared courses in art and culture.

Is the Japanese university system a "on year's study system"?

Yoshimi: Every year at Tōdai, we conduct an opinion survey under the heading "Enquiry into the state of student life". Recently there has been a marked trend: students appear to be more and more satisfied with the teaching they receive.

Aoki: Is that true?

Yoshimi: It is. But in reply to the question, "Did you wish to enter Tōdai at any cost?", the percentage of "yes" answers is rising constantly. By way of contrast, in reply to the question "Had you already decided what you wished to study?", those answering "no" are

⁴⁰ Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

increasing. So student satisfaction arises from the single fact that they had won "the entrance examinations competition" and that they had therefore been able to enrol in Tōdai.

Aoki: Only aiming at Tōdai and never calling the teaching contents into question indicates a very impoverished way of thinking ... We are in a serious situation.

Yoshimi: The competition does not stop with the entrance exam. Whether it is a question of the choice of specialisation in the third year, or of the firm where they hope to gain employment, the competition is endlessly repeated. The meaning of student life should not be summed up by a feeling of satisfaction at having got through the various stages in the competition. What is important is the content of what one has learnt over those years. It is really disastrous that the students do not realise that.

Aoki: I completely agree with you. But at the same time, I think it is necessary to pay attention to the external factors leading us to this situation. You have already partly brought them up by mentioning the problem of the methods required to search for employment⁴¹. The *Nippon Keidanren* (Japanese Federation of Economic Organisations) states that these start in December of the third year of study; but in principle, it would be more logical for them to start in December of the fourth year; a delay of about a year and a half before taking up employment is far too long a wait. It would be logical for the students to find an employer four months before the end of their course, and give more of their third year and beginning of

⁴¹ The Japanese term *shūshoku katsudō* (literally "activities for gaining employment") is difficult to translate because the search for employment is different in Japan, being restricted to a particular time of the year. Thus, Japanese firms promise to take on those third year students who have applied and been selected, and who then join the firm in April of the following year, right after the end of their studies.

the fourth to their university studies. Moreover, the rule is really only a formality: as soon as the students reach their third year, they cannot manage to settle in properly and, from the summer onwards, they turn up on campus wearing a suit and tie which shows they are seeking employment⁴². For that reason, third-year teaching has no real substance: the students are too preoccupied with looking for a job. Those in the fourth year who have been promised a job simply take no further interest in their studies. So why hang on to our four-year higher education system? Since the real length of study is only two years, why not change the university structure to make it “fit in” with the real world?

Yoshimi: It would even be only a slight exaggeration to say that Japanese university education consists of just one year of study. This is the price paid for the intense study over several years in order to get into “the” good university: the pupils then spend their first year of study having a good time. More and more students nowadays only study a little bit during the short period between the hell of the entrance exams and the search for employment.

Aoki: If the companies’ system of recruitment⁴³ is open to criticism, the attitude of the universities who conform to their demands is just as deplorable. Japanese universities ought to stand up to such moves and create a time and a space given entirely to study. They ought not to “let go” of their students before having taught them for four years, not less. The aim of the university should be to bring up competent young people, with a solid grounding in their own specialism, and able to speak fluently in

⁴² Certain rules govern this mode of dress (regular black suit or dress etc.). It is quite specific to the search for work, and does not conform to other circumstances, like daily life within the enterprise.

⁴³ This is otherwise known as *aoda kai*, or “buying the rice seedlings”.

at least two languages. Failing that, our current four-year system has no reason to continue.

Yoshimi: So the ideal should not be “controlling entry” to the university but “controlling the output”. However, such a change could not be put in place without difficulty in contemporary Japan. The teaching staff would also have to think about revising their own marking assessments, which are very – excessively – “lax”.

The advantages of beginning the academic year in September

Aoki: Among the controversies over the future of Japanese universities, the one currently causing the greatest uproar concerns shifting the beginning of the academic year from April (the current practice) to September. The main issue addressed by this change is the need to adjust to international norms, particularly those of the Anglo-Saxon institutions. The ultimate goal is to promote international exchange programmes and, in broader terms, to “internationalise” our universities. Personally, I believe that this reshaping of the academic year has something else in its favour too. To hark back to our earlier discussion, it could also provide an opportunity to change the way in which students seek employment. If the period of studies ends in June, and supposing that the employers arrange for the date of their “yearly intake” to be in September, the students would have the summer months free to look for employment. Such a change would also have considerable advantages for the big companies, since their future employees would all have received high quality teaching over four whole years. With a bit of effort, such a system sooner or later could see the light of day.

Yoshimi: As you know, on the initiative of our director, Tōdai has taken decisive steps

towards a swift overall shift of the opening of the academic year from April to September. We have already reached the phase of examining its actual implementation.

Aoki: Will such a change affect all the new students?

Yoshimi: Yes, absolutely all of them. This new direction has not been adopted in the interests of Tōdai alone. In the light of the potential advantages for all the Japanese universities, for education and society as a whole, we owe it to ourselves to take the initiative. Tōdai has gone as far as it can go within the current situation and its confinement within national boundaries. Of course, it is not at all certain that plunging into the field of global competition will necessarily bring success. Yet, a day will come when the decision must be taken. Given that fact, rather than waiting for a change to be imposed on us from outside, it is better for us to act swiftly on our own.

Aoki: In actual fact, I believe that if Tōdai implements this new academic calendar, all Japanese universities will sooner or later be forced to change.

Yoshimi: One of the big advantages of starting the academic year in September is that it gives the pupils the chance to make use of a gap year. Before going to university, and after gaining their degree⁴⁴, the students will have two six-month intervals at their disposal. Making good use of these “gap periods” provides an opportunity to bridge the chasm between high school and university, and likewise

⁴⁴ With high school education ending in March, and the new university year beginning in September, there would be six months free. Later, another free six months would be made available between the conferment of the degrees in June and the graduates' entry into employment (for those who have been offered employment, and provided that there is no change in the employers' “yearly enrolment”).

between university and the world of work.

Aoki: We expect the “September enrolment” to trigger a change, but we need a real strategy to get the university reforms up and running. Looking back at the problem of separatism, have you any interesting proposals which would permit us to envisage rebuilding the whole system?

Yoshimi: Personally, I believe that it is impossible to eradicate our entrenched separatism. That is why, in the first instance, we should avoid drastic changes and aim rather at “palliative measures” for university teaching. Briefly, in our situation where university teaching is concentrated on the study of a single specialism, we ought to move towards a system where the students would have the chance to take courses in another field [ed: that is a system along American lines, with its “major” and “minor” subjects].

Let us take advantage of Japan's strong points

Aoki: Turning back again to one of our earlier discussions, we can see clearly that the end of the epoch of the “omnipresent nation-state” is raising the question of the goals and objectives of our universities. While the American and European universities have their own clearly defined cultural and intellectual foundations, such as the Greco-Roman or Christian heritages, the traditions and forms of knowledge on which the Japanese universities are based are less clear. The result is our hesitation over the ways our students are to be taught.

For my part, I am in favour of teaching Asian cultural traditions, Japanese culture, the religious thinking arising out of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Islam, as well as modern Asian thought. The international environment

is changing, and although Asian GDP now represents more than 40% of global GDP, Japanese students know practically nothing about China or the rest of Asia ... one can even assert that they do not know the culture of their own country.

Yoshimi: I am completely in agreement with you over the importance of studying Asia more. If we do not create in East Asia ... sufficiently firm intellectual bases to rival the United States, Japanese universities run the risk of collapsing under the pressure of global competition. To bring about co-operation with the rest of Asia, our young Japanese elite must become aware of the need work together with their Chinese and Korean counterparts.

Aoki: Until now, our universities have focused on Europe and the United States, taking no interest in what their neighbours might be thinking. But, I repeat, our environment has changed. Nowadays, Asia offers the essential way towards commercial success. The time when the United States was the sole consumer market which settled the fate of every trend is over. Now, it is Asia's turn to play that role.

Every year I visit several Asian universities and see how remarkably strong they have grown. One day, clever and ambitious Japanese high school students will wonder whether it would be better to enrol in Tōdai or Beijing University to expand their future opportunities. For the moment Japanese universities enjoy a favourable position on the Asian university scene. They benefit from an assured status and, above all, from the guarantee of their freedom of opinion and research.

Yoshimi: That is why international competition is not a bad thing in itself. When Japanese high school graduates start choosing outside Japanese universities, the latter will be deeply disturbed ... At that moment, it will be time to start wondering what the real strengths of

Japanese universities are, and what Japanese and Asian universities can offer which might differ from American and European universities.



Kariya Takehiko,

“Can the ‘small state’ be reconciled with the demands of a higher education system?” [“Chisai na seifu” ni kôtô kyôiku ha ka nô ka. Igrisu kara mita Nippon no daigaku no mondaiten]. The problems of Japanese universities as seen from the United Kingdom” [“Chisai na seifu” ni kôtô kyôiku ha ka nô ka. Igrisu kara mita Nippon no daigaku no mondaiten] *Chûô Kôron*, February 2012, pp. 76-85. (translated from the Japanese source by Adrienne Sala).

Kariya Takehiko is a Professor of Sociology and Director of Graduate Studies in modern and contemporary Japanese culture at the Oxford University Nissan Institute. His article is based on the proceedings of a conference held at the Institute in March 2011 on the role of the State in higher education.

Structural changes in the role of the State

The development of higher education in Europe, centred mainly on the publicly funded universities, is now at a crossroads. Educational opportunities are simultaneously in full expansion and subjected to major changes, owing mainly to the heavy economic burden they impose on State finances.

The question of knowing whether public investments in support of university budgets has borne fruit is bringing about a strong demand for taxpayers’ access to the accounts showing the use of public funds (the total amounts, every tax detail etc.). In turn, this question raises that of assessing the levels of research and teaching in every university, and there are moves to demand that the funds

distributed to the universities should depend upon the outcomes of these assessments.

In fact, just as I write this article, the United Kingdom is undergoing a fierce polemic arising from the government’s decision to raise university tuition fees. The relationship between the State and the universities is undergoing a big change. Within this context, the aim of our conference was to compare Japan with other countries in Europe – the United Kingdom, France, and Italy among others – in order to analyse the different higher education systems and the role of the State.

The reason for choosing this topic which is crucial for European countries, is simple. For many years, in most European countries the fees for entering higher education establishments were kept low. As I have already mentioned, most European universities are publicly funded. This system has been maintained over all these years without causing any problems because the university was both a source of knowledge production and a centre for training human resources. As these human resources became sources of social profit, they were considered as a form of

“public patrimony”. This attitude was backed by the fact that only a limited number of people used to continue their studies up to university level.

Unlike Japan and the United States, not everyone in Europe feels an intense pressure to attend university. The university is an educational structure which offers higher education to a limited number of people and, at the same time, it is a research organisation which produces knowledge. So, as a backcloth, a “class” wall has grown up, but from both a social and an economic point of view, the system has endured without the need for a large number of graduates to keep it going.

However, over the last twenty to thirty years, the situation in Europe has undergone deep changes ... Each country is faced with the difficulty of maintaining a “Welfare State” whose economic burden now falls on the implementation of new measures. For example, redundancy payments to unemployed youth have been difficult to maintain as the weight of debt increases. Consequently, just as the Blair government foresaw, there is now a pressing need to enact measures to replace universal unemployment benefits with protective measures covering particular types of employment. In this situation, the expansion of higher education ought to be a priority.

But, before turning university education into a source of opportunity, there is a major problem demanding a solution, namely the State's budget deficit. If the balance on its books were to be put into question, the universities which until then depended on State financing would still continue to exist, but it would become unacceptable to go on pouring public funds into them ...

The Japanese universities: dependence on family budgets and private university education

A survey of the largely publicly funded European university system throws a clear light onto the specificities of the Japanese system. On the one hand, compared with European countries, the numbers enrolled in higher education rapidly increased at a much earlier date. In the late 1970s, the number of university students was already over 30% of the total, whereas in the United Kingdom at the same time the total figure was only about 10%. Compared with European countries where the State played a major role in bearing the costs of higher education, Japan, out of all the advanced countries, was the one where the State bore the lowest cost. In other words, from an economic point of view, the role played by the State has been historically that of “small government”. Paradoxically, the fact that private universities are predominant in Japanese higher education has not prevented the rising number of enrolments in that sector. Enrolment fees in the publicly funded universities, starting in the 1980s, have also continually risen ...

In reality, the fees for enrolment in higher education are borne by the parents and not the students, as is the case in the United Kingdom. Here one of the major social issues is the rise in tuition fees, to the point where it is possible to wonder whether there is a risk of it having an effect on university education itself. The government has passed a law allowing the English universities, whose tuition fees were previously subject to a ceiling of £3,290, to decide freely on the level of their fees up to a limit of £9,000 per year (until 1998, public university education was free).

These measures, which were said to be aimed at lightening the burden of the growing national debt, triggered the first major student

demonstrations in London in 2010. This direct reaction on the part of the British students is necessarily different from that of the Japanese, insofar as tuition fees in the United Kingdom are borne by the beneficiaries, namely the students themselves. In fact, the payment of tuition fees is deducted from the future salary of the graduate in proportion to his/her earnings. University education is therefore comparable to a loan automatically granted by the State, to be repaid by the beneficiary. That is why the British youth who will later become students demonstrated to show their dissatisfaction.

In Japan, in most cases the expenses needed to pursue a university education are not borne by the student but by the parents. So it is not rare for students to make use of funds released by their parents in the form of a loan to pay their university fees, and ... it would be more accurate to consider them a part of their inheritance advanced by the parents to their children. From the student's point of view, it is not a matter of his own investment in his future, but of his dependency on his parents which obliges him to pursue his university studies. In fact it is probably not false to see a relationship between this structure of parental responsibility for fees and the low level of awareness by students of what is actually learnt at university. This structure has given birth to its being called a "benevolent structure".

Moreover, in Japan the private sector enrolls more than 80% of the total number of students. Most of these institutions are facing economic difficulties because they are heavily dependent on enrolment and tuition fees. So the fact that the private universities and their students depend on family budgets as a result of the "small state" is a basic defining feature of the structure of university education in Japan, while being also the cause of the different problems arising from it. Even though there is a desire to increase the opportunities for access to higher education, the economic situation in

each household will continue to perpetuate the current forms of inequality. Most of the discussions addressing the topic of raising the quality of education come up against this latter problem.

There is certainly a historical explanation for the way higher education in Japan has developed, providing opportunities for access to such education while having to take account of a State with a restricted economic role. In effect Japan is paying the price for being the first country in the world of higher education to establish a system of "small government" which strives to keep the expansion of the education system within the confines of the market economy, and to minimise the financial burden on the State.

However, now that the training of highly qualified human resources is being developed in the light of the need to globalise, overcoming any of the problems encountered in the Japanese education system often stops short at simply identifying such problems, being held back by a lack of willingness to solve them.

New problems which are actually quite old

So, let us now set out the problems facing university education in Japan.

1. Strategies for finding employment

That is the first problem: the four years devoted to higher education are not sufficiently supported.

Starting from December in their third year, students give their main attention to seeking a job, and that search generally lasts until the following autumn. It has been acknowledged that during this period academic instruction is inadequate. Yet, nothing has been done

to solve the problem. That is mainly because the universities' basic criterion for attracting students is their promise of future employment. The universities could not afford the risk of forcing students to attend their courses by restricting their opportunities for seeking a job.

2. *The Curriculum*

The second problem relates to the difficulty of organising courses because of the frequently superficial level of teaching.

The general assumption is that a university teacher gives 90 minutes of coursework once a week and that a very wide range of courses is on offer. As the students try to achieve adequate grades in only three years, the number of courses and of enrolments in them each week is very high. That is why most courses have no prerequisites, and their requirements could be summed up as: "Listen to what the professor says, and you will pass the exam". In addition to this, in the private universities there are many Master's courses, and the teachers' workload needs to be taken into account. So it is clear, as comments from the teachers affirm, that close assessment of the students' work is problematical ...

3. *Added value*

Consequently, we might well wonder about the level of added value after four years of instruction. In the current situation, that is difficult to assess, especially since the students are guaranteed to get a degree, unless something extremely serious occurs. As long as no questions are raised over what the students have really learnt, and over the way they have gained their knowledge, the added value is determined more by the job which they have managed to acquire, and this is an expression of Japanese society's failure to recognise the value of the contents of a university education.

4. The Master's Degree as a solid asset⁴⁵

Another point is that, although university attendance lasts for basically three years, it is striking that in Japan, unlike in other countries, and especially in view of the importance attached to the knowledge economy in the current situation, the entry into higher education does not involve a real transition.

One of the reasons for this problem is the low value attached, in the labour market, to the Master's degrees in disciplines related to culture or civilisation. In other words the market controls the threshold of a world where doors do not readily open on the sole grounds that the applicant holds a Master's degree. This is also explicable by the low value attached by the labour market to a Doctorate, which occupies a position distinct from the opportunities which a Master's might open up ...

The reasons behind the inertia

These problems were identified long ago, and yet they have not been solved. There are several reasons for this.

Formerly, a good many big companies did not have many expectations from higher education, but those which they did have were specific and were easily met by the university structures in place. At the job interview, the university awarding the degree was not a decisive factor, and in extreme cases, instead of choosing a candidate for his assiduity in his studies, the companies opted for those playing an active role in sports clubs or their university student associations [ed., such people were considered to have a sense of discipline, being able to obey the instructions of their "seniors" and possessing a reliable outlook]. The knowledge and skills necessary for the position were learnt on the spot by doing the job.

⁴⁵ Literally, in the Japanese text, a "premium" or "winning ticket".

Thus, the role of the universities was to tell the employers which students could be easily trained. At the university admission ceremonies, the publication of exam or even sports results still plays the role of sending out these signals. This system allows for the recognition of the students' commitment and capacity to make an effort, as well as their ability to fit in.

That is why, over a certain period of time, the large majority of university graduates had no difficulty in becoming regular employees (*seishain*) by acquiring the knowledge and the skills required by the position being offered to them. This system also explains why it was often said that Japanese firms did not worry about what the students had learnt in university. Ironically, it also characterised a time when university entrance exams were decisive ...

This system is practically unchanged, but with the changes in employment policies and the state of the job market, the proportion of the *seishain* (regular employees) from the universities has fallen, and the firms have noticed that they no longer manage to train their new recruits in the time available.

Under these circumstances, it would be useful to question the value added by the universities; yet the companies are doing exactly the opposite. In the overall situation of in-house competition, they have absolutely no incentive to change their practices if they do so alone. But ... outside Japan wide-ranging changes are taking place. The process of swift and dynamic globalisation is also changing both the modalities of university teaching and the companies' ways of recruiting their human resources.

So the universities put under the spotlight, at the time of growing global competition in the training of human resources. In other words,

the world-class universities are fighting to cut out their own share of this market.

And only Japan still has to join in

Standing out starkly against this global background, in the closed space of Japan there is the intrinsic problem of competition linked to the system of waiting in line to join a company, and to the companies' failure to enquire into the added value brought to them by the universities.

The companies act as though they wished to anticipate the recruitment of the graduates, by shortening the period of their induction. This causes an interruption of the teaching given at the university, which therefore affects its quality. If the companies give no importance to Master's degrees in the social sciences but insist on four-year university courses, it is because they act as though they were still competing in a closed space.

The Japanese language clearly constitutes yet another barrier in the way that recruitment exercises are conducted, just as much in the companies as in the universities and in the new graduates' access to employment. The OECD has carried out a survey of the inward and outward movements of qualified foreigners employed in Japan. The survey shows that Japan is the country where the inward movement is the lowest among all the countries being surveyed, not rising above 0.7%. Compared with certain Western countries, where this flow is above 10%, Japanese society can be judged to have failed to attract top quality human resources⁴⁶. According to another interpretation of the figures, however, it might be thought that highly qualified Japanese human resources have escaped from competing against their

⁴⁶ METI globalisation index, 2009; keizaisangyôshô "kokusaika shihyô" kentôinkai hôkokusho, 2009.

foreign counterparts ...

With regard to Japanese firms active in foreign markets, it is noticeable that the latter no longer give preference to graduates from Japanese universities and give equal employment to graduates from foreign universities by recruiting them on the spot. So, the subsidiaries of Japanese firms abroad no longer a need to send for Japanese personnel to fill their managerial positions. However, it appears that this is not sufficient to have a direct influence on the teaching in Japanese universities and on the labour market.

Admittedly, there have been some steps taken towards a strategy for internationalisation within Japanese universities, but they are only at their early stages. MEXT has initiated various programmes in the framework of the *gurobaru 30*; and the promotion of teaching in English in some private universities is also part of these initiatives. But, seen within an international perspective, this organisational structure is still at an early stage.

Furthermore the level of financial support from the State and the big companies does not amount to much. Neither the State, nor the universities, nor the companies show any sign that Japan as a whole is seriously committed to the task of creating a new structure for the universities. Moreover, both the universities and the companies seem to consider the strategy for internationalising a useless and excessive expense, with the exception of the training of human resources in the hard sciences. If the internationalisation strategy is established without the release of the necessary funding, it would lead to a step backwards.

While Japan behaves in this manner, in the outside world the internationalisation of the training of human resources in higher education continues apace. What will be the outcome?

A Japanese market that will not stand up to international competition, with limited reach but protected behind the language barrier. And this applies not only to the universities. [...]

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