

# Rankings as a part of enriched university information: Challenges of Japanese Media

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# introduction

# Shanshiro's experience in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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- 'Shanshiro' is a novel by Soseki Natsume describing a student life of the University of Tokyo, the only university at that time established borrowing the models of German and other European and North American universities.
- Leaving his mother at a country side, he started his life in Tokyo, with high motivation based on hard study for entering the university.
- At that time, the government invested a lot to establish a flagship university, inviting foreign scholars and introducing a progressive curriculum..

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- He came on the first day in the term on time, and found out nobody (neither teachers nor students) were coming.
  - Next day, the same..
  - 10 days later, students were gathering, and a professor appeared with delay, and Sanshiro made a perfect note and made review in the evening, just as a high school student.

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- Sanshiro attended classes as many as he could, and became tired! A classmate teased at him and recommended to be in the library rather than attending classes, but Sanshiro never found the classmate in the library.
  - He did not know how to use the library, and anyway started to read something there..
  - In the end, he decided to attend some classes, play a bit, and read what he wanted..
- ...Lack of Information and Instruction on how to survive as a university student!!

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## Background of the emergence of Japanese-type rankings

# After 'Sanshiro'

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- Continuous shortage of higher education provision, esp. among prestigious national universities
- Employers have utilized a ranking order among universities for a screening device or a signal which indicates general ability and 'trainability' of a student rather than his/her knowledge and expertise.
- Development of in-house training in enterprises linked with life-time employment, and the emergence of an indicator called 'Hensachi' which shows a selectivity of admitted students accelerated this tendency.

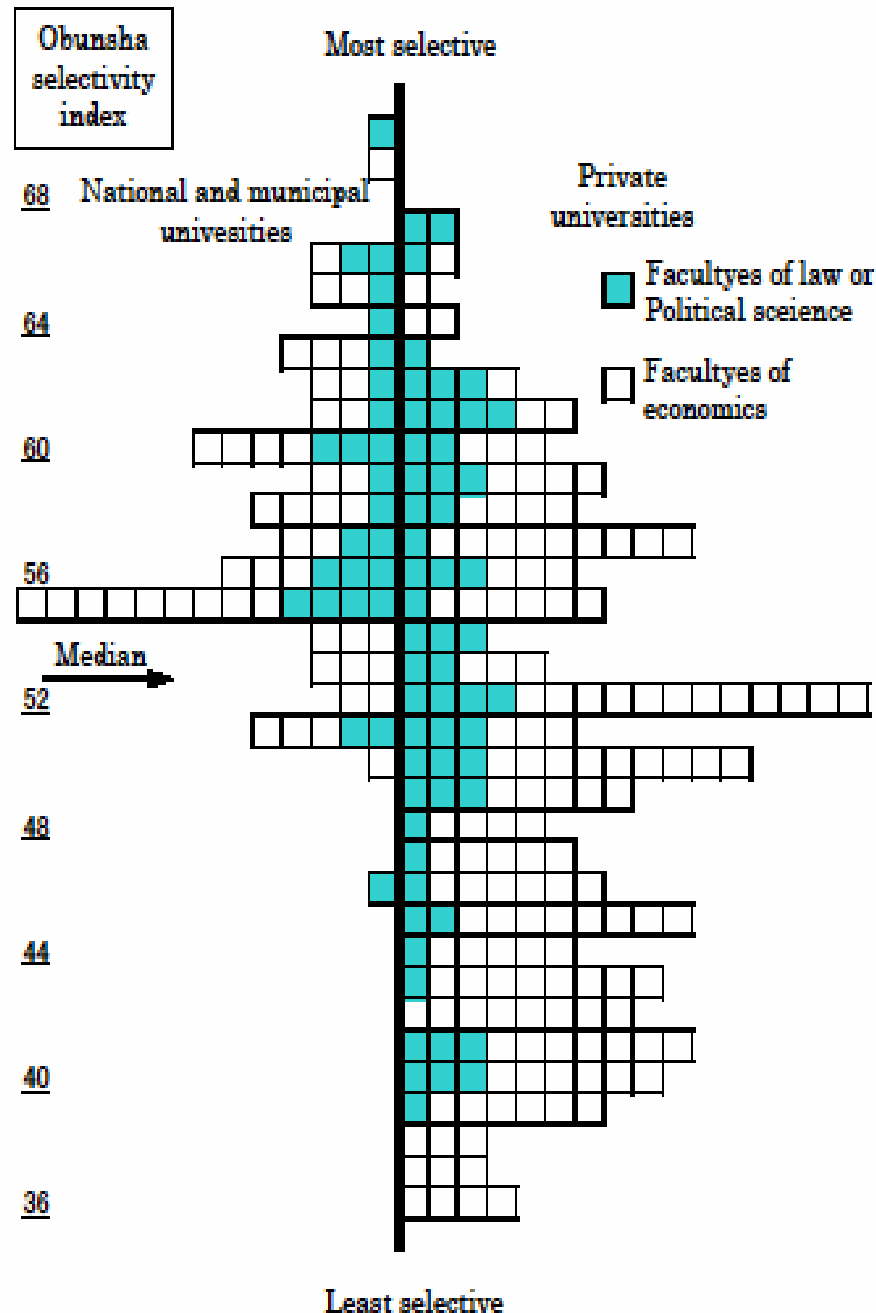
# Development of the media tools for university entrance

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- Magazines which provide information for university and other school applicants started very early (before WWII)
- Adding to the information on entrance examination, those magazines have provided basic and brief information on the curriculum, the student life, some voice of the students and graduates
- As to the ranking, the information on the applicants' behavior (patterns of the choice of applying universities, and which universities were typically chosen when more than one universities accept him/her), and then, the indicator of selectivity based on the trial test data was provided.



# Geiger's Chart (Obunsha data 1980)



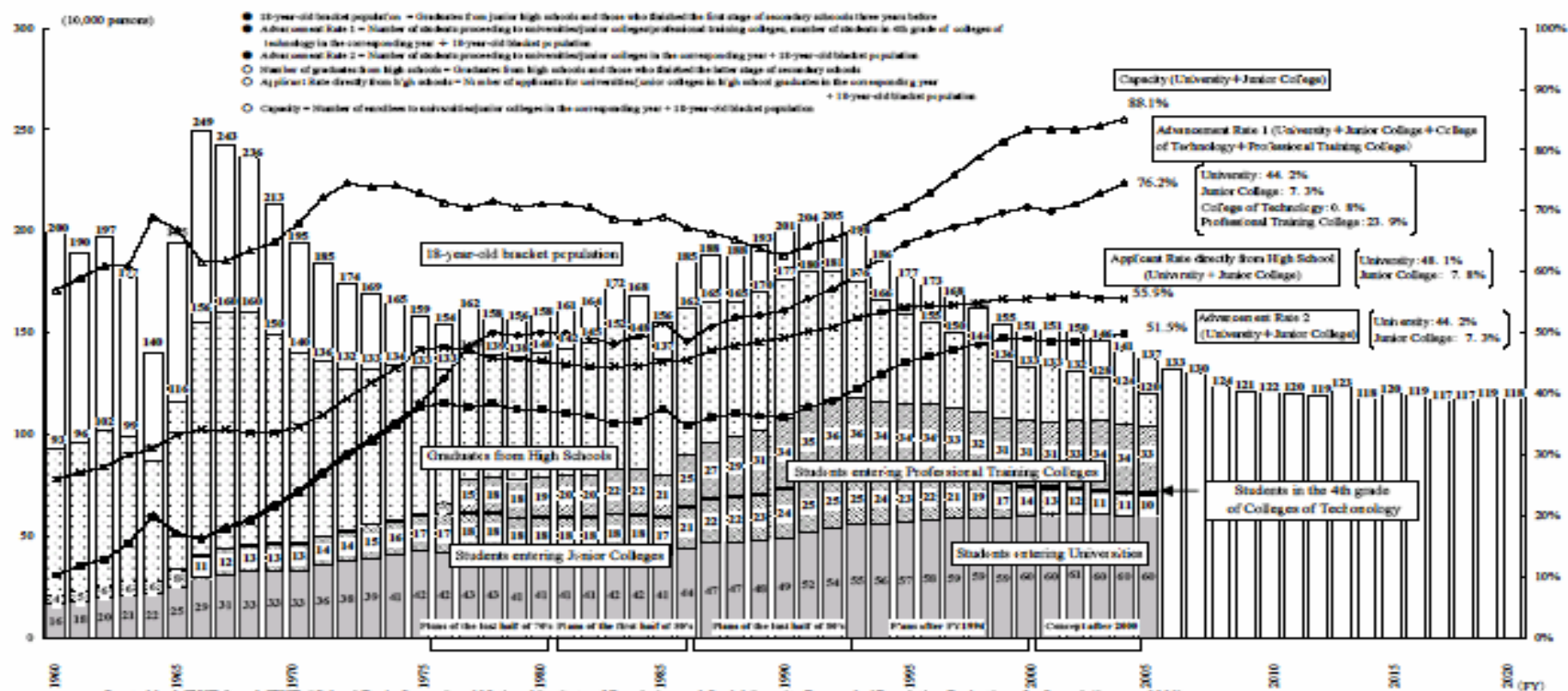
# Pressures for university reform

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- Japanese society realized the necessity of transformation into post-industrial society in 1980s.
- New types of university graduates, with problem solving and communication (both in computer and international) skills became desirable..
- The exodus from paper-test based 'screening device' function became hot issues. The universities introduced 'Admission Office' selection system (individually customized selection based on documents, essays and interviews).

# Population trend and HE participation

**Figure 6-1 Change in 18-year-old Bracket Population and Number/Rate of Students Proceeding to Higher Education Institution**



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- The necessity of university reform has been argued in the National Council for Education Reform, etc. from 1980s.
  - The idea of 'student consumerism' and the expected decrease of young population also stimulated the movements of university reform.
  - In 1991, Standards for University Establishment were deregulated, and the government required universities and colleges to implement self-monitoring and self-evaluation, following the model of American 'self-study' as a part of accreditation.

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- Most of the Japanese universities were, of course, very sensitive on their positions in rankings by the selectivity indicator, rather than the education contents themselves. However, the university people, especially in engineering and natural science fields, started to aware that the university education should be reformed and improved in order to survive in the global knowledge economy,.

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- The 18-year-old population started to decline from 1993, and the participation rate to higher education continued to expand.
  - The academic standard of university entrants became lower, and the job-possibility also decreased especially among graduates from less prestigious universities and colleges.

- In 1994, Asahi Shimbun Started 'University Ranking', aiming to propose enriched perspectives to recognize the value of the universities, other than single selectivity indicators.
- Recruit Co. Ltd. and others started student satisfaction surveys, putting a more importance on showing a portfolio diagram, rather than an integrated comprehensive ranking, and have continues similar ranking surveys but not in a regular base in most cases.
- *Diamond* and *Toyo Keizai* (business magazines) also started rankings but more for business people, such as financial condition of universities, or 'usefulness' of graduates in the business world, etc.
- Kawaijuku made detailed rankings (or mapping) of individual researchers and research units, but not in a regular base.

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## Asahi Shimbun's Challenges in 13 Years and Changing Reactions from Universities and Others



# Structure of *University Rankings 2006* by Asahi Shimbun

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- 953 pages including advertisements by universities
- 72 rankings from various aspects: or **collections of available rankings and data**
- An article by experts on 'how to use and interpret the meanings of the ranking' or information of university life in general is attached to each 72 ranking.
- Information of individual universities (a half to 2 pages each) with 3 basic rating (A, B, C) in education (student/teacher ratio), facility (space/students), library (books/students), and other basic information
- **Most of the information are collected from questionnaire surveys conducted by Ashahi Shimbun itself: Others are from many surveys conducted by other collaborators:**
- **Collaboration by the universities and other stakeholders are inevitable!**

# 1994-1997: strong refusal

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- Visited Ministry of Education (MEXT) and universities for getting basic data
- Jan 1994: An official of MEXT (Ministry of Education) recommended no to publish a book of university rankings;
  - University rankings which put ranking order among university will eliminate the incentives of university reform
  - It is out of question to use MEXT data (number of students and teachers) to university rankings

- After the first issue was published, around 60% of university people criticized Asahi Shimbun's *University Rankings*.
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- Media's curiosity-oriented rankings have labeling effects to the lower ranked universities, and have negative effects to higher education as a whole (a comment by a professor of private universities)
- Still 40% supported; almost all are natural scientists
  - Japanese university teachers should be more internationally competitive, and should be stimulated through rankings of citation and research grants. (a professor of a faculty of natural sciences of a national university)

- Not a small number of universities refused or did not open the data (number of students, teachers, space, etc.) collected through questionnaire surveys by Ashahi Shimbun University Ranking Editorial Office
  - Especially, national universities were cold-hearted: 'unprecedented' on issuing detailed data such as female teachers, foreign teachers, space of facilities.
  - Some private universities also refused collaboration: no incentive for issuing data, since the ranking may work negatively to my university if low-ranked; we can not open private information.

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- However, these were not the criticisms on accuracy or mistakes, but the denial of the idea of 'rankings' themselves.
  - Reaction from Ashahi Shimbun:
    - Ranking is not for determining better or inferior, but could be utilized for benchmarking (know their own position) among universities with similar size; could be referred for university management by knowing strong points and weak points of their own

# 1998-2001: the tide turned

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- Universities started to welcome the visiting of the editors.
  - Consulted how to be ranked higher, given some idea on better rankings
  - Used as benchmarking indicators for reviewing last 10 years' university reform
  - Asked ranking position from those who are not ranked in the top league table, including ones of their competitors
  - Self-monitoring and self-evaluation of universities started to refer the data of Ashahi Shimbun rankings: 'we aim top..in citation, external fund' etc..

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- Those new trends fit for the original aims of Asahi Shimbun;
    - to suggest various ways of evaluating universities adding to the existing student selectivity indicator
    - Stimulate competition for quality improvement of teaching, learning and research

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## ■ Unexpected way of usage

- A university used its ranking position of 'publication in international economic journals' for appealing for governmental authorization of a new establishment of doctoral program in economics.
- A professor (natural science, private) used for gaining budget; top rank needs further improvement, low rank needs reinforcement!
- A president's assistant (professor) made a simulation of merger with 5 different types of universities, estimating the ranked position in the number of students, faculties, space, facilities, issuing doctoral degrees, citation, and research fund.. , in order to set up a world class research universities.



## 2002-: Approached by Ministries

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- Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) asked collaboration for data and evaluation methods on university-industry linkage
- MEXT also asked for opinions and comments, recognizing the role of university rankings by media in stimulating competition for quality improvement of university education and research
  - After that, MEXT started targeted project fund programs such as Centers of Excellence in research and teaching.

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## ■ Background of changing attitudes:

- Severe market condition under decreasing young population, especially for less prestigious private universities
- Incorporation of national universities in 2004 stimulated further competition
- Universities strengthened their publicity for appearing distinctiveness and uniqueness for the survival

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## ■ New types of refusals in collaboration

- Most of the universities became highly collaborative: Tokyo University once denied the value of university ranking (then President Hasumi), but now very collaborative for providing any data such as share of doctoral degree holders among university professors, inbreeding of faculty members, number of computers, etc.
- Some collaborative universities suddenly started to refuse to provide data which are disadvantageous for them; such as shortage of applicants, indicators concerning admissions indicating actual open entry..etc.

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- Universities actively used the ranking result for advertisements and websites
    - A university staff printed 'we are top ?? In Asahi Shimbun university rankings' in his/her name card.

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## Impact of rankings for university reforms in 13 years

# Teaching and learning

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- Ranking in teaching and learning by university presidents on 'universities worthwhile to pay attention'
  - 1990s: universities with innovative curriculum focusing languages and ICT based communication skills ranked higher
  - 2000s: language and ICT became common, and then, universities with good practices in support for student learning ranked highly
  - A traditional American-type liberal arts college continued to gain high ranking, considering the mal-functioning general education in most of Japanese universities

# Research

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- 1990s: Universities with strong institutional initiatives for gaining Grant in Aid (public project fund for research from JSPS <research council>) ranked at the top (Kyoto, Osaka) for the amount of Grant in Aid per Faculty
- 2000s: Tokyo universities monopolized top ranking; Same tendencies in the amount of gained external research funds.. Tokyo University became aggressive for getting funds
- Citation: existence of a super-star professor decides a ranking position

# Third-stream (contribution to the society)

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- Domination by top universities: Tokyo University increased its strength in top rankings in contribution to the society, in appearance in media, books for general public, etc.
- Waseda scouted star professors for strengthening their positions in media appearance
- Rankings of committee members of governments.. Specific universities with faculty members with strong political influences in law, family issues and economics tend to be ranked highly



# Conclusion

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- A unique development of Japanese rankings as a part of wider development of information support for enriching study life and other activities in universities
- The information-enrichment movement is highly related the change of higher education market and realisation of universal access to higher education in Japan
- Japanese rankers provided various data and resources for showing directions and new trials for university reform

# Open Questions

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- From 2005, the reports of certified evaluation (accreditation) became published from accreditation agencies/associations...
- Government is thinking about establishing a public database on basic information of HEIs
- What would be the future in university information in Japan? Who do what? Collaboration or competition?