

New Philosophy of Liberal Arts Education in Japan and beyond

A prototype of liberal arts education in Japan emerged when the modern university system was founded in the late 19th century. Under this system almost all universities consisted of *yoka*, which was a general education course, and *honka*, a specialist course. The curricula of *yoka* were close to those of modern-day liberal arts colleges, though their heavy emphasis was on modern European languages and philosophy. The development of the Japanese version of liberal arts education historically coincided with the spread of the educational and humanist ideal of 教養 (*kyoyo*), a concept close to *Paideia* in Greek, Culture in English and *Bildung* in German. This two-tier system survived the postwar university reformations, though *yoka* was replaced by *kyoyo* course (general education course) and *honka* by specialist course. In general the postwar *kyoyo* course did not work as well as it had been expected, because of the decline of the ideal of *kyoyo*, the advancement of specialist and more vocational education, and the great expansion of the student population. Most of universities quickly got rid of *kyoyo* courses after 1991 when the university regulations were liberalized by the Ministry of Education and the universities were no longer obliged to offer the general education course. *Kyoyo* was intricately connected with the tradition of high culture and high humanist principles and was not suitable in practice for the mass education. The lack of *kyoyo* - general knowledge, learnedness, intellectual curiosity, cultural diversity and flexibility, etc. - among university graduates, soon came to be noticed by the end of the 1990s and alarmed people in older generations, particularly those in the business circle, as they were the first people to contact with new graduates at work place and had gone through *kyoyo* education themselves at universities. Partly in response to this, a few liberal arts schools were newly established in the early 21st century and their number has been steadily increasing ever since. School of International Liberal Studies at Waseda University is one of such institutions but their first kind. New liberal arts schools were, however, neither created to bring back the older *kyoyo* education nor based on the older principles of the Japanese version of liberal arts education.

Their curricula are designed to keep in steps with the development of new knowledge and the diversification of culture and values. One of the challenges for the new liberal arts education in Japan and Asia is to provide a new alternative model to more traditional and Western dominated ones.