

Chapter 9

Turtles or Dragons? Academic Freedom in Japanese Universities



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Is academic freedom Japanese? Given the widespread currency of claims for Japan's "uniqueness" on the one hand and for Western exceptionalism on the other (Goody 2006), this seems a pertinent question to ask, perhaps especially so when the analysis is offered, as here, by a Westerner (albeit Japan-based) whose notions of "freedom" might be seen as at odds with a Japanese emphasis on the collectivity. Is it appropriate for someone socialized into what has been dubbed the "Western" ethos of "dominant independent selfhood" to judge academic practice in a society purportedly oriented toward interdependence (Silova et al. 2018)? To what extent are meanings attached to academic freedom in such a context likely to be compatible with those current in the West?

In fact, as this chapter will demonstrate, there is no single, incommensurable, essentially "Japanese" idea of "academic freedom" – just as there is no universally agreed "Western" understanding of this concept. Culturally essentialist assertions of national uniqueness have been deployed with special enthusiasm, in Japan as elsewhere, by those eager to foreclose open debate and deny pluralism (in Japan the term 日本人論/*Nihonjinron*, or "Theory of the Japanese people," has been coined to describe such discourse). But such attempts have been vigorously contested by more liberal Japanese scholars. To cast doubt on the relevance to Japan (or to "Asia" more generally) of the concept of academic freedom would thus, apart from anything else, be a betrayal of those Japanese liberals. And although many in Japan itself, whether chauvinist or liberal (e.g., Yoshimi 2011), see modern higher education as an originally European creation, Goody argues that "universities [along with related notions of higher learning and its animating ideals] were only European from a very narrow point of view, strongly tinged by teleology" (2006: 229).

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Whatever the historical origins of universities as institutions, the struggle for and against academic freedom today cuts across cultural divisions.

This is not to deny the distinctiveness of the Japanese debate over the purpose of universities or the role of the scholar. However, the distinctive features of the Japanese case need to be understood as products not of some ageless cultural essence, but of particular historical conditions. The tension between calls to prioritize learning for its own sake and to produce knowledge deemed socially “useful” is far from unique to Japan. As noted in the introduction to this volume, such tensions are increasingly acute worldwide, as governments seek to control the rising costs of a burgeoning higher education sector while redirecting universities toward the promotion of “innovation” and enhanced economic growth. But the tension is arguably especially severe in societies, such as those of East Asia, where modern universities were founded as part of state-directed projects of self-strengthening” and the pursuit of “catch-up” growth (Kariya 2019).

I begin this chapter with a brief discussion of some of the key themes or issues relating to a consideration of academic freedom in modern and contemporary Japan. This is followed by an attempt to trace the salience of these issues in the history of Japanese universities up to the early twenty-first century. That account provides necessary context for a more in-depth analysis of academic freedom in Japanese universities under the premiership of Abe Shinzo since 2012 – a period that coincides with my own tenure as a professor in one of Japan’s leading national universities (国立大学). Here I consider the implications of various policies pursued by the Abe regime in relation not just to universities but also to education, the media, and public culture more broadly. A particular focus of this section is the position of social science and humanities fields within Japanese academia – a subject around which controversy has swirled during the Abe years. Finally, I home in on a particular area – research on the wartime “comfort women” system – that starkly illustrates some of the challenges to academic freedom that confront scholars in Japan today.

The focus throughout falls primarily on the research function of universities, their governance, and public debate over their purpose as institutions. Teaching is of course central to the mission of a university and certainly relevant to any discussion of academic freedom. Moreover, there is ample evidence of dire problems in the quality of the education that Japanese universities provide (for a forceful and still sadly apposite diatribe, see McVeigh 2002). But since a full consideration of pedagogical issues would take us beyond the specific focus of this volume, I refer to problems with teaching only insofar as they impinge upon, or reflect, problems with freedom to pursue research and to debate and disseminate its findings. It is safe to assume that if, as researchers, scholars are constrained in their exercise of academic freedom, then this will be reflected in interactions with their students.

9.1 Academic Freedom and the Japanese University: Some Key Themes

Nationalism Versus Universalism Assertions of national uniqueness are of course far from uniquely Japanese. Nor are they new, having formed a running theme of intellectual debate since well before the Meiji revolution of the late nineteenth century, when advocates of “national learning” (国学) sought more clearly to delineate Japanese tradition from that of China. But the Meiji period, when Japan experienced a revolutionary transformation inspired by Western models, witnessed new tensions between nationalist and universalist standpoints. Since this was also the period that saw the establishment of modern universities along Western lines, those arguments helped shape the institutional cultures and curricula of the country’s most prestigious institutions of higher learning. Crystalizing these tensions were slogans associated with what some have loosely termed the “Meiji ideology” (Gluck 1987). “Civilization and enlightenment” (文明開化) was favored by Fukuzawa Yukichi, generally seen as a liberal luminary of the early Meiji era, and a fervent advocate of Western-inspired modernization. But even Fukuzawa argued that the strengthening of the Japanese state should take priority over its political liberalization; repelling the real threat of Western colonization was the prime imperative (Craig 2009). This emphasis was encapsulated in another prominent slogan of the time: “a prosperous country with a strong army” (富国強兵). The prioritization of national self-strengthening was something on which many liberals and conservatives could agree. For the latter, however, the ultimate prize was not the freedom to embrace a liberal vision of modernity, but the power emphatically to reject it. In the ascendancy by the 1890s, conservatives promoted the principle of “Japanese spirit” as the core, Western learning for practical use (和魂洋才). Appeals to notions of a unique Japanese “spirit” have remained popular to the present day.

STEM, Technocracy, and a Statist Agenda A heavy focus on the practical uses of Western learning was evident in the emphasis in Japan’s imperial universities on science, technology, and engineering and – in faculties of law and economics – on the training of technocratic administrative elites for service in the state bureaucracy and large commercial concerns. Nevertheless, in the early years after their establishment, scholars at Tokyo Imperial University in particular (and, to a lesser degree, Kyoto) also played important roles in setting the agenda for modernization, rather than simply supplying technical advice on the implementation of pre-determined state goals. As Marshall notes, during the early twentieth century, the state became steadily less reliant on universities for expertise in fields of “modern” knowledge (1992). But technocratic assumptions about the function of higher education have remained prevalent into the twenty-first century, and universities have struggled to recalibrate their relationship with the state.

The Status and Public Role of the Scholar The autonomy and status of Japanese academics is nonetheless buttressed by significant cultural and institutional supports.

Full-time, permanent faculty in national universities enjoy tenure – making it difficult to fire outspoken scholars. And the public status of professors in Japan is high. Marshall, citing Dore, attributes this partly to the “high prestige of the Confucian tradition” with its linking of the roles of “scholar-educator, adviser-official, and moral-cultural arbiter” (1992: 78–79). Though he was writing of the pre-1945 period, the relatively high social prestige academics still enjoy is apparent to anyone moving, like the present author, from British to Japanese academia. Professors feature prominently as media commentators on various issues, and there is a substantial market for cross-over publications authored by high-profile scholars. Examples of the latter include highly critical essays on the role of universities and of the social sciences and humanities within them; some of them cited below. But media freedom in Japan operates within a political climate and institutional-legal context that restricts open discussion of certain controversial issues. And while scholarly prestige affords high-profile individuals the opportunity to offer independent critique, for many more closeness to officialdom is double-edged, conferring a sense of dependency on government that curbs the exercise of autonomy.

The Diversity Deficit Reluctance among scholars to raise their heads above the proverbial parapet tends to be reinforced when the academic community is uniform, closed, and immobile. Uniformity in terms of ethnicity, gender, and educational background is especially pronounced in Japanese academia. Western academics were recruited in the Meiji period to help establish some of the earliest modern universities, but thereafter the sector was rapidly and comprehensively indigenized. While recent decades have witnessed a significant influx of overseas students and a rise in the proportion of female postgraduates, the composition of faculties has remained overwhelmingly Japanese and male (especially at senior levels). In a world dominated by Anglophone universities, and where resort to crude metrics of research performance accentuates pressure to publish in English, the preservation of a Japanese scholarly community operating primarily in Japanese is a crucial precondition for meaningful academic freedom. However, widespread inability or unwillingness to operate in foreign languages, or in non-Japanese contexts, reflects a “closed-shop” mentality associated with chronic reluctance to challenge established norms or procedures. And lack of transnational mobility among Japanese scholars reduces the capacity or willingness to confront authority: those who have nowhere else to go are more likely to keep their heads down.

Governance and the Uses of Freedom Such factors help explain why Japanese academics faced with threats to their autonomy tend to be overwhelmingly defensive. In the words of Tokyo University’s Yoshimi Shunya, social science and humanities faculties are like creatures with “shells,” conditioned to react to external threats not by going on the attack, but by retreating behind prepared fortifications (2016: 152–162). As we shall see, the social sciences and humanities, already severely under-resourced and marginalized, have been subject to intensified attack in recent years. The dominant response to such threats has been to quietly shore up established barricades to outside interference, often under the banner of faculty autonomy,

rather than aggressively to challenge the terms of public debate over higher education. The likelihood of humanities and social science faculties evolving, as Yoshimi puts it, into creatures with “backbones” is constrained by numerous factors which it is the purpose of the remainder of this chapter to analyze.

9.2 Academic Freedom and the Japanese Imperial University

Defensiveness in response to external threats is a long-established pattern in Japan; as Marshall shows (1992), it typified reaction to the severe official assault on university autonomy in the pre-war period. Marshall depicts the Meiji period as one of considerable autonomy for the new imperial universities (especially Tokyo and Kyoto), but attributes this to a fundamental consensus then between the bureaucratic and academic elites. In the early years of modern higher education, academics enjoyed ready access to political decision-makers, with a virtual revolving door between Tokyo Imperial University (Todai) and the Ministry of Education. What tension there was (after 1905) involved attempts by professors to ensure their “independence from the partisan politics of cabinet governments” (187) while retaining their identity as academic civil servants. In 1905, this was successfully achieved through a threat to close the Todai Law Faculty rather than submit to the dismissal of a single professor in the face of demands from politicians. However, the earlier consensus proved highly fragile in inter-war Japan, in ways that “cannot simply be attributed to flaws in the formal structure of universities as originally instituted in the Meiji period” (79).

According to Marshall, the key to the inability of faculties to repel attacks on academic freedom in the 1930s lies in historical developments inside and outside academia during the period after World War I. This was a time when “a substantial minority of a new generation of faculty now accepted political partisanship as a legitimate means of taking part in the struggles of their times” (187). However, a majority of academics remained concerned above all to protect the institutions and practices of faculty self-governance as established during the Meiji era.

The 1920s witnessed increasing clashes between radical scholars and activist students (often inspired by Marxism) and anti-Marxists within and beyond academia. The academic freedom of the Marxists was championed by liberal figures such as Todai Economics professor Kawai Eijiro, an admirer of John Stuart Mill who subsequently became a more outspoken opponent of fascism (138–9). But even Kawai was ambivalent as to how far scholarly political critique might extend to political activism beyond the university gates – arguing that “academics should not play political roles in the larger society” (141). (It was illegal for schoolteachers or students to belong to political organizations.) “The conflation of university autonomy and academic freedom” was, Marshall writes, a dangerous and naïve attitude embraced by many liberal academics in the inter-war period, linked to an “attempt to justify academic freedom at the expense of freedom for the wider populace” (143). When faced with the threat of ministerial interference in the internal

management of universities (to secure the dismissal of critical scholars), this naivety led academics to sacrifice individual dissenters in order to maintain the formal trappings of self-governance. “Although the ‘ideal university’ might have need of academic dissenters, ‘in the actual university’ their presence was too much of a ‘disturbance’” (180).

Marshall argues that the drive to an increasingly activist political role among some academics and students in the 1920s was partly related to a decline in the importance of “the technocratic functions of the academic elite at the imperial universities” (188). As the civil service became more professionalized, those academics “who sought to influence political affairs as ‘public men’” found that they had to do so outside the informal bureaucratic channels that had existed in the Meiji period. And as the higher education system expanded in the 1920s and 1930s, the Ministry also found that old methods of bureaucratic coordination with academia no longer worked (particularly given the decentralized governance structure of universities). What did work, in the late 1930s, was the threat of direct government intervention – ironically leading academics at imperial universities to defend institutional “autonomy” by doing the government’s bidding. One key factor here was that the authorities no longer saw the universities’ expertise as so crucial to the ongoing pursuit of modernization and state power: “the valued knowledge and required techniques had become the common property not only of numerous other universities but also of rival elites outside of academe” (190). As Marshall tells it, then, the story of academic freedom in the Japanese Imperial University is one of scholars under external political pressure surrendering the substance of autonomy to preserve its shadow.

9.3 Japanese Universities in the Era of Postwar Liberal Democracy

The collapse of the militaristic wartime regime brought a rapid relaxation of the academic climate (and the release of a number of imprisoned scholars), but it did not usher in an era of unfettered free speech. The American Occupation authorities instituted an extensive system of censorship, initially with the aim of purging public discourse of vestiges of militarism, fascism, and emperor-worship (as well as suppressing criticism of their own governance), but, with the onset of the Cold War, extending increasingly to suppression of pro-Communist sentiment, as well (Dower 1999). Nevertheless, Marxist scholars quickly gained a strong foothold in university humanities and social sciences faculties.

In a largely symbolic move, “imperial universities” were re-designated “national universities” by the Occupation authorities. However, moves to introduce boards of governors, on the model of American state universities, met strong opposition on the grounds that they threatened faculty self-governance. As a result, these reforms were eventually abandoned, leaving the governance structure of national universities largely unchanged – with a contradiction between the “ultimate

decision-making power” of faculty senates (or “meetings of professors”) and the authority of the Ministry in Tokyo (which held the purse strings) (Kaneko 2013: 174).

What had changed was the political climate within which ministerial authority was exercised. Following the end of the American occupation, the ruling Liberal-Democratic Party, dominated by conservatives of pre-1945 vintage, attempted to claw back control over the ideological content of education in the name of ensuring political “neutrality.” In 1954, laws were enacted to prohibit political activity by university and high school instructors and political advocacy by teachers in the compulsory grades (Ienaga 2001). The 1950s also witnessed the stealthy reintroduction of bureaucratic procedures for censoring school textbooks. But while the conservatives maintained a strong grip over the levers of central power, they now had to contend with lively opposition from leftist political activists (including academics) and the main schoolteachers’ union, who challenged these measures on the ground that they contravened the liberal precepts of the 1946 Fundamental Law of Education.

Meanwhile, the internal faculty structure of the most prestigious national (formerly imperial) universities experienced some alteration. These institutions now acquired distinct Education Departments, newly elevating the status of research into educational (and related social and psychological) issues. Previously, education had been the province of “normal schools” tasked simply with training teachers to government-mandated specifications. But the democratizing postwar reforms to schooling envisaged teachers as autonomous professionals rather than obedient state functionaries. The new recognition of the importance of educational research was a corollary of efforts to raise the status and entrench the autonomy of teaching as a profession. Tokyo University’s Faculty of Education was established in 1949, and those of other former imperial universities at around the same time. Meanwhile, Tokyo’s old Higher Normal School became the Tokyo University of Education.

Nevertheless, the extent of change should not be overstated. Within national universities, the status of social science and humanities departments (including the new departments of education) remained low. The established bias in enrolments and research funding toward science, engineering, agriculture, and medicine remained, as did the dominance of these fields in internal governance. A roll-call of national university presidents and vice-presidents reveals a vanishingly small presence of scholars from the social sciences and humanities; Kyushu University, for example, has never had a president from a non-science background and as of 2019 features not a single non-scientist among its eight vice-presidents (see also the National University presidents featured in the February 2016 issue of *Chuo Koron* / 中央公論, cited below). The overwhelming dominance of “hard” scientists has both reflected official visions of the purpose of higher education and conditioned how universities as institutions respond to challenges to the role and status of social science and humanities fields.

One such challenge came in the 1970s when Tokyo University of Education (TUE) was moved to a remote new site at Tsukuba and simultaneously renamed and restructured as a comprehensive university with stronger science and engineering faculties. TUE had been a hotbed of youthful rebellion in the late 1960s and early

1970s, when Japan – like many Western countries – experienced an upsurge of student radicalism. At TUE, much activism and opposition to the Tsukuba move was centered in the Faculty of Letters. In 1973, a law was rammed through the Diet (Japan’s parliament) mandating the establishment of the new, relocated university. This law neatly sidestepped the issue of faculty self-governance by simply abolishing the Faculty of Letters. Ienaga Saburō (家永三郎), a historian in that faculty and leading critic of the government’s procedures for censoring school textbooks, characterized the Tsukuba move as aiming to “make the production of human talent its main goal, responding in this way to the desires of the financial world; to focus authority in the hands of the president and vice-president; to abolish faculty councils...; [and] to set up in their place an organ whereby outsiders could take part in running the university” (2001: 189).

Ienaga’s fears were not immediately fulfilled as far as the wider university system was concerned. The dominant mood on campuses remained anti-establishment, but the open confrontation of the late 1960s subsided into a tacit truce. The mid-1970s to the mid-1990s were the fat years: the era of “Japan as Number One.” University budgets expanded, and in the public sphere, critical voices were tolerated amidst a mood of vaulting national self-confidence. Conservatives attributed economic success to Japan’s innate cultural superiority, and bookstore shelves groaned under the weight of *Nihonjinron* screeds. At the same time, Ienaga and his leftist supporters pursued their campaign against the Education Ministry’s textbook censorship practices through the courts, and critical debate over the country’s wartime past attracted significant public attention. As East Asia’s Cold War thawed, with first the Sino-Japanese rapprochement of the 1970s–1980s and then the liberalization and dissolution of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, external threats to Japan’s security and prosperity appeared to evaporate – and with them much of the drive to suppress oppositional voices.

This climate of relative tolerance and openness was not destined to last. Since the rise of the nationalist right from the mid-1990s, systemic weaknesses have hampered the capacity of liberals within academia and beyond to mount a robust defense of academic freedom. These frailties have included not only the persistently low status of humanities and social sciences but also weak unionization in the academic profession – a factor of the general weakness of sectoral unions in Japan. Also weak is the collective voice of students: while Japanese academics have sought to preserve faculty self-governance, this involves no role for student representatives. The low priority given to teaching and the lack of effective systems for monitoring its quality, though not the focus of the present paper, arguably further handicap beleaguered social science faculties as they seek to assert their relevance. Most fundamentally, perhaps, the chronic lack of pluralism in Japanese politics complicates the task of mounting a sustained and forceful defense of academic freedom.

9.4 Stagnation, Austerity, and Attempts at Reform Since the 1990s

The rapid expansion of the higher education system from the 1970s was accompanied by a significant splurge of state largesse. The major national universities retained their position at the system's commanding heights, providing a steady supply of scientists and technocrats to staff the laboratories and boardrooms of "Japan Inc." Much of the growing demand for tertiary credentials was met by private universities, where courses in the social sciences and humanities (cheaper to deliver) account for a large proportion of enrolments. Increased government subsidies for private institutions meanwhile brought enhanced public oversight of their operations (Kaneko 2013: 175). But even before the era of rapid growth came to a juddering halt in the early 1990s, calls both to curb spending on higher education and to gear it more effectively toward the needs of the economy were becoming increasingly voluble.

At this point, some comparative perspective on Japanese higher education spending is important. UNESCO's 2010 *World Social Science Report* found that, whereas Germany, America, and Australia devoted between 5.3% and 8.3% of gross research and development spending to the social sciences and humanities, the figure for Japan was 4.6%. Proportionately fewer Japanese students studied social sciences, business, or law than in almost any other OECD country. About 6% of the country's doctoral graduates were conducting research in these fields, compared to 13% in Australia and 18% in Germany, France, Britain, and America. And all this in the context of a level of public spending on higher education which, at 0.5% of GDP, was less than half the OECD average. Even in the natural sciences, then, public spending on research was low by international standards; in Japan, the best talent in these fields has tended to be "snatched up by corporate research centers" with companies taking it upon themselves to both train their own technical staff and provide much of the funding for research with potential industrial applications (Amano and Poole 2005: 695).

Growing calls for austerity in higher education spending from the 1990s thus came in the context of what was already, by international standards, an anemic level of public support for research in general and for social science and humanities work in particular. A sense that the Japanese university was "in crisis" had been building since the 1970s. Academics faced growing criticism from politicians and business leaders impatient to see universities take up more of the responsibility for maintaining the country's competitiveness. These calls intensified from the late 1980s, as economic growth began to slow. At the same time, with the end of the Cold War "universities started to experience a new freedom from previous ideological divisions and changed their, until now, disapproving stance toward industry" (Amano and Poole 2005, 695). But while these changes lent increasing impetus to calls for reform to both teaching and research, especially as economic growth stagnated through the 1990s, opposition to change simultaneously intensified, coalescing around defense of the privileges of faculty self-governance confirmed by the

postwar settlement. “The stronger the pressure for reform and the higher the ‘innovation’ banner is flown,” wrote Amano and Poole in the early 2000s, “the deeper the university crisis will become” (701).

The main thrust of university reform has been to enhance institutional autonomy from direct government regulation on the one hand while on the other deploying mechanisms of accountability to retain or even enhance ministerial control. This approach was epitomized by the “corporatization” (法人化) of national universities, enacted in 2004. Effectively transforming these institutions from wholly owned offshoots of the ministry into independent entities, this legislation was ostensibly liberalizing. However, universities were still required to seek permission from the central bureaucracy to establish new departments or programs, to vary their student quotas, or to increase their fees. From 2004 onward, the core budget allocated to universities by the government was also subjected to an annual cut of 1%, compelling institutions to compete for a greater proportion of their funding – either from industry or from government. In practice, the ministry itself remained overwhelmingly the biggest source of funding, with a steadily growing slice of its budget disbursed through grants awarded on a competitive basis. Corporatization thus meant devolving responsibility, but very little power – and forced universities into ever more intense competition for funding, the vast bulk of it still disbursed by government.

Much of this will sound very familiar to academics who have worked in contemporary Western universities. In some respects, Japan went even further than, say, Britain in implementing the precepts of “New Public Management.” Contract evaluation systems inspired by British practice in the 1990s (where many functions of government were outsourced to “quasi-non-governmental organizations” or QUANGOs) were introduced to institutionalize government oversight, but in Japan these extended to “every aspect of university activities” (Kaneko 2013: 193, emphasis in original). Initially, the fiscal consequences of a poor evaluation were relatively slight, which Kaneko interprets as a strategy for minimizing opposition while entrenching the precedent of detailed and intrusive bureaucratic oversight (179–80). Meanwhile, within institutions, the authority of the president and the central administration has been steadily enhanced, in the face of often dogged resistance from faculty councils (Morozumi 2015).

The advance of New Public Management has implied a search for criteria – or metrics – for evaluating university performance. The supreme metrics onto which politicians, bureaucrats, and administrators have latched since the early 2000s are international university rankings, which rate Japanese universities poorly. This has prompted the adoption of targets that are wholly unrealistic or, if taken seriously, would involve a wholesale de-Japanization of academia. For example, several top universities (including Tokyo and Kyushu Universities) have recently begun using the Scopus database to rate the research performance of their academics. However, since this only rates publications in English, its strict application would disincentivize the publication of work in Japanese while skewing the focus of social or historical research toward topics of interest to predominantly Western-based journal editors. (For a discussion of the deleterious effects of such metrics on academic

research in Taiwan, see Chou and Ching 2012. See also Chaps. 6, 7 and 8 in this book.)

Both the pursuit of rankings and the attempt to enhance the supply of highly skilled talent in a context of demographic shrinkage have meanwhile prompted increasingly ambitious attempts to internationalize universities. However, coming in the context of a top-down drive to impose reforms that many scholars perceive as threatening, these have tended to be resisted or implemented in a tokenistic fashion. Many universities have established international centers or programs that cater to non-Japanese students and employ some non-Japanese faculty, but these are often quarantined from the rest of the institution. Japanese and non-Japanese students in such programs (especially undergraduates) seldom interact, and most non-Japanese faculty are employed at junior levels on non-permanent contracts. Considerable care is thus taken to ensure that centrally imposed, quantitative targets for recruitment of foreign students and faculty, or for overseas exchanges, are met in ways that have a minimal impact on business-as-usual within the wider university (Ishikawa 2011).

Ministry statistics show that the proportion of foreign staff in national universities stood at 3.3% in 2013, up from 2% in 2000, with the vast majority concentrated at junior levels (primarily as non-tenured assistant professors) (MEXT 2013). Fewer than 20% of foreign faculty were full professors (the figure for Japanese staff is over 40%), and while there were two foreign vice-presidents, no foreigner held the presidency of a national university. There is strong resistance among many Japanese faculty to recruiting substantial numbers of foreigners, not all of it due to crude xenophobia. In the absence of meaningful internationalization of university administrations, foreign faculty require considerable fluency in Japanese (very difficult to attain for those not educated in Japan) in order to share fully in the large bureaucratic burden that academics must bear. One reasonable fear is therefore that more foreign faculty mean increased administrative work for their Japanese colleagues. There is also a suspicion that Japanese universities will end up providing “temporary employment for researchers who cannot find jobs in English-speaking countries,” drafted in merely so that their publications and citations will boost the institutional score (Ogawa 2014: 56). Such faculty may leave as soon as an opportunity arises, contributing little to the long-term development of the institution. Nevertheless, in a world where Japanese is not a major language of international scholarly discourse, the chronic lack of diversity on Japanese campuses significantly impairs the meaningful exercise of academic freedom.

The Top Global University (TGU) Program, introduced in 2014, made increasing the recruitment of international faculty one of its prime objectives, especially at the 13 institutions selected by the ministry as the vanguard of the internationalization of higher education. But the factors outlined in the previous paragraph, combined with the unreliability of TGU funding itself (the ministry arbitrarily reduced funding from the levels originally promised), precluded any step change in hiring practices. Figures provided by Kyushu University, for example, show the number of overseas faculty increasing from 109 in 2013 to 149 in 2016 (against a total of about 2040 permanent faculty), before falling back slightly to 142 in 2019. But even some

of that increase is accounted for by very short-term appointments (effectively, visiting professors rebranded as “home” faculty).

The low presence and status of foreigners on campus is not even the most serious aspect of the diversity deficit. In 2013, the proportion of female researchers stood at 14.4% – the lowest proportion in the OECD (the figure for South Korea was 17.3%) (Kyoto University 2014). The proportion of women employed in social science and humanities faculties was relatively high – at 23.4% and 33.9%, respectively. However, most women are concentrated in junior positions, often on precarious contracts. As of 2012, women accounted for only 20.8% of full professors in the humanities and 13.3% in the social sciences, while well over half of junior assistants in both fields were female.

A revealing indicator of the inward-looking culture of universities is the pattern of international exchange. Ministry figures for the 2016 academic year show that 170,000 Japanese researchers went on overseas trips, but only just over 4000 of those visits lasted more than 1 month (MEXT 2018). The figures do not offer a more detailed breakdown, but it is likely that the vast majority of the shorter trips were very short indeed, lasting around one week or less. The rules relating to use of research funding make it very hard for academics to extend trips to attend overseas conferences, for example, beyond the actual dates of the conference itself. Meanwhile, the dominant culture of collective decision-making within universities and individual faculties, with frequent meetings at which attendance is expected or required (as well as collective duties such as entrance examinations), also complicates efforts to arrange extended overseas visits. A telling contrast in the official figures for overseas exchanges is between those for outgoing and incoming researchers, with fully one third of the latter (13,000 out of 39,000) visiting Japan for longer than 1 month. But while the presence of these foreign researchers on campus helps universities meet their targets for internationalization, many do not engage extensively with Japanese academics or students. The overwhelmingly male and Japanese “core” of the university has thus been largely insulated from meaningful change, in the context of what remains a superficial and tokenistic approach to internationalization or the broader pursuit of diversity (see Vickers and Rappleye 2015; Brotherhood et al. 2020 likewise portray “junior international faculty” at Japanese universities as “tokenized symbols of internationalization” (497)).

9.5 The Abe Government and the Social Sciences: A Frontal Assault on Academic Freedom?

Despite various attempts at reform since the 1990s, through the first decade of the twenty-first century, Japan’s universities remained relatively static and insulated from competition. Part of the reason for this related to political instability. The relative stability of the Koizumi premiership (2002–2006) and the first Abe administration (2006–2007) witnessed the corporatization of national universities and the

passage, in 2006, of a revision to the Fundamental Law of Education mandating the teaching of patriotism in schools. But the implications of these significant changes did not immediately become apparent, as political instability between 2007 and 2012 hampered the pursuit of a consistent agenda by government.

However, writing soon after the start of Abe Shinzo's second premiership in 2012, Kaneko noted that "the days of this curious lethargy may... be numbered" (2013: 195). Universities were indeed a key target of the reform agenda projected by the new Abe administration. The intention, wrote another academic observer, was to make universities more responsive to the demands of industry, government and, ultimately, of "global capital," with the effect of transforming them into "factories for the production of human resources" (Ogawa 2014: 48).

Another component of Abe's agenda with profound implications for education and academic freedom is the revision of Japan's postwar "Peace Constitution," a project intertwined with revisionism in public discourse over Japanese identity and history. Abe himself has long been prominently involved in campaigns to excise from history textbooks all acknowledgement of atrocities perpetrated by Japan during the Asia-Pacific War. A prominent slogan of his first premiership was "Japan, the Beautiful Country" (美しい国、日本), while his second period in office has witnessed an officially sponsored "Japan is Great Boom" (Yamaguchi 2017). Most of the current cabinet are members of the Nippon Kaigi (日本会議), a body that lobbies not only for historical revisionism but also for a reversion to features of the pre-1947 imperial constitution, including enhanced status for the emperor himself.

Academic freedom cannot be considered in isolation from the broader political climate, and here there have been significant developments since 2012. A draconian new State Secrets Law enacted in 2013 was calculated, in the words of Jeff Kingston of Tokyo's Temple University, to have "a chilling effect on investigative journalism in a country not known for much investigative zeal" (quoted in Pollmann 2015). According to the head of the Asia-Pacific desk of the organization Reporters Without Borders, Japanese journalists even before the introduction of this law reported "unusually severe self-censorship, corporate and peer pressure (to cover or not to cover certain kinds of stories), and restricted access to information" (Pollmann 2015). In 2014, the government appointed as head of the state broadcaster, NHK, Momii Katsuto, an Abe associate who warned that "We cannot say left when the government says right" – and went on to sack a number of critical reporters. Reforms to the school curriculum and revisions to textbooks have meanwhile reflected the neo-nationalist agenda of the governing LDP's dominant conservative faction (see below). And these shifts have been facilitated by the absence of effective and coherent political opposition – an absence which the lack of media openness has helped to ensure.

The resurgence of nationalism that helped propel Abe back into office in 2012 was largely fueled by fears of Japan's declining competitiveness vis-à-vis an apparently hostile China. Popular resentment and incomprehension of Chinese and Korean anti-Japanese sentiment was fused with anxiety about growing threats to Japan's security. In the LDP narrative, just as restoration of national pride requires educators to tell a "beautiful" story about Japan, national security and prosperity

demands that they devote their energies above all to fostering “innovation.” At an OECD meeting in March 2014, Abe cited research claiming that whereas in America, “15% of patent applications from universities were related to [the establishment of] new businesses, in Japan the figure was only 0.5%.” His reforms to higher education, he went on, would therefore seek “not to deepen academic research but to ensure greater responsiveness to social needs” (quoted in Ogawa 2014: 51). In other words, writes Ogawa, he was explicitly seeking to place universities “at the convenience of economic interests.” The anticipated results would include a reduction or abolition of academic fields “seen [by government or industry] as of little practical use” (52).

To give the government tools to enact this strategy, revisions to the National University Corporation Law were introduced to strengthen non-academic (ministerial and business) representation on university councils, enhance the authority of university presidents, and weaken that of faculty councils (Ogawa 2014: 50). These measures included no steps to represent other stakeholders – students, parents, and local citizens – in bodies tasked with the oversight of public universities. According to Ogawa, the financiers who have been influential in shaping higher education policy under Abe have in mind solely the model of a “private business.”

9.6 The Position of Social Sciences and Humanities

Two official declarations in June 2015 crystallized for many the threat posed by the Abe administration’s agenda on academic autonomy. That month, Education Minister Shimomura Hakubun sent a letter to all presidents of national universities demanding that they “take active steps to abolish [social science and humanities] organizations or convert them to areas that better serve society’s needs” (Grove 2015). He separately issued a statement urging national universities to raise the national flag and sing the national anthem (“Kimigayo”) at entrance and graduation ceremonies (Japan Times 2015). The latter request did not have legal force, but coming as it did from the body with ultimate power over university budgets, it carried considerable weight.

This attack on the role of social science and humanities departments did not come out of a clear blue sky, nor is pressure on these fields from governments and funding agencies peculiar to Japan. Recent developments in Britain, for example, supply ample precedent for politicians elsewhere seeking legitimacy for attempts to curb state support in these areas. However, as demonstrated above, Japan starts from a far lower base in terms of overall state support for higher education and especially for the social sciences and humanities.

A discourse of skepticism regarding the social relevance of these fields had long been building in Japanese society. Nishiyama attributes this partly to developments in neuroscience and the life sciences that have been portrayed as displacing or rendering redundant the traditional mission of the humanities to provide “humanistic enlightenment” (2013: 7). Policymakers and much of the media tend to discuss

education as a technical process, so that issues such as bullying or dropping out from school are portrayed predominantly as problems of individual maladjustment rather than societal dysfunction (Arai 2016; Vickers 2017a). Arai shows how psychologists have gained influence in Japanese education policymaking since the 1990s, in tandem with the growing influence of conservative nationalists. The attraction of psychology to conservatives lies in its aura of scientific objectivity and its abstention from social critique. The more that social problems can be blamed on individual pathologies and then medicalized or micro-managed, the more effectively criticism of the established political and social order is deflected.

At the same time, some Japanese social scientists have reflected critically on very real problems with the current state of teaching and research in their fields. Some of these issues involve shifts in Japanese society to which universities must respond, such as declining student numbers and limited opportunities for new social science and humanities graduates. Demographic shrinkage implies a more challenging environment for those taking higher degrees in these fields, with Minatsuki observing that graduate schools are increasingly churning out “highly qualified working poor” (2009: 265).

But the problems in bringing youngsters and especially those from more diverse backgrounds into the academic profession are exacerbated by factors internal to universities. Among these is the lack of a structured, transparent system for recruitment or promotion – crucial factors in the continued discrimination against women and foreigners. As Yonezawa et al. put it, “the strong decision-making power of the professoriate in recruiting new faculty members has continuously worked more or less in favor of inbreeding and colonization” (2018: 142). In Kyushu University, where inbreeding is perhaps especially severe, around 60–70% of permanent faculty graduated from the institution itself. Regarding what they term “colonization,” a study cited by Yonezawa et al. (op. cit.) found that in 1961, the alumni of 6 out of 250 universities dominated around a half of all full-time university positions in Japan; by 2001, the figures were 12 out of 669. This reflects how “old boys” networks among the professoriate help skew recruitment across the board in favor of graduates of a narrow range of institutions. Such problems are exacerbated by the almost complete lack of any tenure track or habilitation procedure for determining permanent appointments and by the entrenched practice of promotion-by-seniority. Most faculties display an “inverted pyramid” structure, dominated by often unproductive senior professors (Nishiyama 2013: 27). There is some recognition that scholars do need to do more to engage with wider society and prepare their students to do so (Minatsuki 2009: 265), but this has so far spurred little reform.

These self-critical points are amplified by Yoshimi (2016), who portrays social science and humanities departments as inward-looking and barricaded against each other and the outside world by a network of “walls.” These include “inter-departmental walls,” which often serve to actively discourage collaboration with colleagues in other faculties, or make it difficult for students to take courses in other departments. As a result, as Yoshimi puts it, Japanese tertiary institutions resemble loosely federated “united colleges” rather than genuine universities (153). Another crucial barrier is that of language, with academics in social science and humanities

fields typically unwilling or unable to operate in foreign languages; this contributes to what Yoshimi, using a metaphor frequently deployed in Japan, terms the “Galapagos-ization” of Japanese academia. Further “walls” that he identifies relate to entrance examinations (with departments running independent, elaborate, and typically highly labor-intensive systems over which control is fiercely defended); study years (i.e., dividing students strictly by year of entry or seniority); and the enormously time-consuming “job-seeking activities” (就職活動), which consume most of the final year of the 4-year undergraduate degrees. Taken together, these “walls” embody an overwhelmingly defensive academic culture, with “tradition” habitually invoked to repel all forms of outside interference (many similar points are made by Vickers and Rappleye 2015).

The academic response to the attack on the status of the social sciences and humanities has been varied. Tokyo and Kyoto Universities, the country’s most prestigious, rebuffed calls for any major review of their offering in these fields. A number of senior public intellectuals (Yoshimi among them) forcefully defended the value of the social sciences and humanities while also engaging in thoughtful self-criticism (see also Vickers 2016a). Among the most forceful was the President of Shiga University, Sawa Takamitsu, who penned a blistering critique of a country that ever since the pre-war period “has consistently favored the sciences and engineering” (2016: 68). Alluding to Japan’s fascist past, he wrote that it was a “law of history” that “totalitarian countries dismiss (排斥) knowledge in the social sciences and humanities, and countries that dismiss knowledge in the humanities and social sciences will inevitably become totalitarian” (2016: 71). He went on to stress that neglect of these fields was not only wrong, but self-defeating in terms of the Ministry’s own self-declared goals – namely, the pursuit of enhanced international rankings for Japanese institutions.

Elsewhere, however, the response was far less forceful. The journal *Chuo Koron* invited national university presidents to respond to a questionnaire designed to gauge their reaction to the ministry statement on social science and humanities departments. All avowed their support for these fields, but often in rather vague terms. Quizzed on their own expertise, the vast majority turned out to be scientists, engineers, or medics. Meanwhile, at many national universities below the very top tier of Tokyo and Kyoto, senior management has been eager or anxious to demonstrate compliance with the spirit of the ministerial edict. One former imperial university established an interdisciplinary Asian Studies Institute dominated by medics, engineers, architects, and information scientists, marginalizing the study of Asian politics, societies, and cultures. The same institution seriously considered, though eventually abandoned, a proposal to abolish its Department of Education and enfold it within a new “Department of Psychological Science and Education”; many humbler institutions have followed through with similar proposals to merge or abolish their education departments.

A key structural factor inclining institutions to toe the ministerial line is extremely heavy reliance on public funding disbursed by MEXT via the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). Such reliance is especially heavy in the social sciences and humanities, where prospects of attracting funding from business and

industry are comparatively slim. Institutions typically place intense pressure on staff to secure funding through this route, which also pays “overheads” to the university administration. At some institutions, faculties are penalized if in any single year fewer than 90% of their members apply for (or are receiving) JSPS funding. The application process is elaborate, fiendishly bureaucratic, and extremely time-consuming. Since there are no strong incentives for institutions to pre-screen applications, the committees of senior academics tasked with assessing proposals are invariably swamped. But the criteria for assessment are vague and opaque, and – perhaps inevitably, given the volume of proposals – feedback is nugatory, consisting of numerical scores and generic comments. Evidence of concerted discrimination against applications in particular fields is hard to pin down, but confronted with this official “black box,” many institutions and individuals prefer to play safe.

9.7 Controversial Research in a Hostile Climate: The Case of “Comfort Women”

At this point it is pertinent to invoke my own experience of the research environment in Japan, particularly in relation to work on the representation of the wartime past. From 2010 to 2013, I was involved in coordinating an international research network on “East Asian Images of Japan,” funded by the Leverhulme Trust (a private British foundation), and from 2014 was a core member of a related Leverhulme International Network, this time on “War Memoryscapes in Asia” (WARMAP). For the latter project, I conducted research into the commemoration of “comfort women” in museums around East Asia, particularly in China, as well as recent efforts by Chinese, Koreans, and others to gain recognition for an archive of related materials – “Voices of the Comfort Women” – through UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register.

Comfort women were those tricked or coerced into working as prostitutes serving the Japanese military during the Asia-Pacific War, in a system overseen and coordinated by the military itself (in a wider context in which prostitution was legal throughout Japan and its dominions and trafficking in women for sex was thus effectively state sanctioned – see Mamiya 2015). Since the 1980s, this issue has been a significant source of controversy within Japan itself and has bedeviled relations with the country’s neighbors, especially Korea. It is particularly neuralgic for Japanese nationalists, who typically refuse to accept either that Japan ever in fact instituted such a system, or that any of the women were coerced, or that their prostitution was in any way coordinated by the military, or that, if it was, there was anything wrong or unusual about this. The current prime minister, Abe Shinzo, has been particularly prominent among such “denialists.” (See Chap. 1 for a discussion on the research on comfort women in South Korea, which faces the opposite challenge.)

Since Abe's return to the premiership in 2012, his administration has coordinated a worldwide campaign to counter or suppress attempts to draw attention to comfort women. As a leading (now Japanese-owned) British newspaper reported, the Japanese government "insists there is no evidence that the women were 'forcefully taken away' and tries to police discussion, making a formal complaint whenever the *Financial Times* uses the term 'sex slaves'" (Harris and Harding 2018). UNESCO itself has been intimidated by Japan (until recently the organization's largest donor) into changing its own rules in order to block the inscription of a "Voices of the 'Comfort Women'" archive on its Memory of the World Register (Vickers 2017b). Meanwhile, discussion of the comfort women has been almost entirely eliminated from Japanese secondary school history textbooks. Whereas, in the mid-1990s, most texts mentioned the issue, by 2016 it had been expunged from all but one text approved for use in schools.¹ The *Asahi Shimbun*, which played a prominent role in publicizing the comfort women phenomenon in the early 1990s, was in 2014 forced to retract a slew of articles that turned out to have been based on false testimony – thus lending a spurious legitimacy to rightist claims that the entire issue was bogus (for a review of the Japanese-Korean controversy on this matter, see Mamiya 2015).

These developments were among those that prompted around 400 scholars of Japan, mostly based in America, to sign an "Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan," voicing concerns about the intimidation of critical scholars and erosion of media freedom. The letter's publication was timed to coincide with an official visit by Abe to the United States in May 2015. I subsequently added my signature to the letter. Almost immediately, I received an email from several individuals associated with a revisionist group calling itself "The Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact." The mail repeated standard rightist claims regarding the supposed lack of evidence for Japan's wartime atrocities and accused signatories to the open letter of hate speech and racial discrimination.² Some days later, I was contacted by an NHK reporter keen to discuss my reasons for signing the letter – something very few Japan-based academics had done. We subsequently had a lengthy phone conversation, during which she admitted that she was doubtful whether senior editors at NHK would permit dissemination of the story she was compiling. And indeed, her report was never broadcast or published.

One significant Japanese media outlet that then still featured highly critical reporting on the "history wars" and other controversial issues was the English-language *Japan Times*. In late 2016, an essay of mine on the Japanese government's UNESCO diplomacy in the online magazine, *The Diplomat*, was instantly republished in the *Japan Times* as an op-ed (Vickers 2016b). But when I followed this a

¹The Women's Active Museum (WAM) in Tokyo has tracked coverage of the comfort women issue in school textbooks since the 1990s, and the results are displayed in their exhibition.

²This sort of insult is mild by comparison with the sort of harassment some Japanese researchers and campaigners on this issue have experienced. WAM (referenced in the previous footnote) has received bomb threats. Two international conferences on comfort women recently convened in Tokyo (in April 2017 and November 2018) were held in the windowless underground hall of the Korean YMCA in order to prevent rightists with their sound trucks from disrupting proceedings.

year later with another *Diplomat* essay commenting on Japan's successful blocking of the inscription of the Voice of the "Comfort Women" archive (Vickers 2017b), the *Japan Times* did not republish. In the interim, the newspaper had undergone a change in ownership, discontinuing a regular column by the outspoken Tokyo-based American scholar, Jeff Kingston (cited above). Later, in November 2018, it announced a shift in editorial policy whereby the term "forced labor" would no longer be used to describe Koreans and Chinese compelled to work for the Japanese war machine during the Asia-Pacific War, and descriptions of comfort women as "forced" sex workers would also be dropped (McCurry 2018).

How, though, does this political and media environment relate to the state of academic freedom in Japan? On the one hand, as my own experience testifies, no one can prevent a tenured academic in a national university from conducting politically sensitive research. But when the mainstream media ignore findings critical of the government's stance, and when officially approved school history textbooks ignore the scholarly consensus, the significance of the freedom to conduct research is diminished. Attempts by scholars to publicize critical views provoke harassment from the political right that many Japanese academics find intimidating. The response of colleagues with whom I discuss my research has been: maybe you can get away with it because you are not Japanese, but this is an issue we don't dare touch. And the risks incurred by non-tenured, junior scholars who venture into this area are especially acute. I know of one such individual who had her attachment to a research center abruptly terminated when she revealed that she was conducting comfort women-related research. "We don't do that kind of work," she was told.

Nevertheless, even if many scholars assume that applications for official research funding on issues such as the comfort women will be rejected, there is as yet no clear evidence of such systemic bias on the part of the JSPS. In fact, rightists have made the opposite claim. In 2018, a conservative LDP legislator, Sugita Mio, attacked the use of public research funding (*kakenhi* 科研費) for research into "anti-Japanese" topics such as "comfort women", wartime forced labor, and Okinawan Independence (Sankei Shimbun 2018). Her demands that the ministry explain the criteria for its decisions were met with the response that discussing individual cases in this way would be to countenance "political interference in academic freedom."

This seems to indicate a robust defense of the principles of academic freedom on the part of officialdom. However, given the broader political climate, and with financial stringency rendering universities and academics ever more desperate to curry official favor, courting criticism from the nationalist right has come to seem increasingly risky. When senior officials exhort scholars in embattled social science and humanities faculties to demonstrate a commitment to responding to "social needs," many are inclined to second-guess official definitions of what those "needs" might be. In the context of the Abe administration's broader higher education strategy and attempts to police discussion of controversial issues, attacks on researchers

by LDP rightists feed scholarly anxiety in ways that bureaucratic rebuttals cannot easily assuage.³

9.8 Conclusion

Many of the challenges to academic freedom in contemporary Japan are comparable, and indeed related to, those confronting universities in many other societies. The march of New Public Management, with its associated “tyranny of metrics” (Muller 2018); demands from politicians, media, and business for spending on mass higher education to demonstrate a clearer economic return; and growing skepticism concerning the value of funding for the social sciences and humanities – all of these are features of recent debate over the role of universities across the Anglophone world and elsewhere. Moreover, as Lukianoff and Haidt argue (2018), a lack of political diversity on campus and the attendant dangers of groupthink and harassment of dissenting voices have recently posed growing threats to academic freedom in many Western universities.

However, the situation in Japan displays several distinctive features. Here there is a lack of political pluralism not simply on campus, but across society more widely. Added to the weakness of civil society institutions such as trades unions, and the herd-like modus operandi of the mainstream media, this undermines the capacity of academics and of universities as institutions to resist the government’s agenda or shape alternatives. The perception that universities exist not so much to pursue the truth as to serve national ends, defined primarily as enhancing economic competitiveness and fostering “human capital,” is more strongly entrenched and less contested here than in many other societies. Humanities and social sciences may be under attack in the West as well, but in Japan they start from a far weaker position.

For these reasons, the predominantly defensive reaction of Japanese faculty to various reforming initiatives over the past 20 or 30 years is understandable. Lack of capacity to operate in English and other foreign languages certainly contributes to the “Galapagos-izing” tendency that Yoshimi criticizes. However, at the same time, a distinctive Japanese space for academic discourse needs to be preserved in the face of the homogenizing force of Anglophone and Western-centric scholarship and the rankings and metrics that increasingly underpin it. If such distinctiveness were

³In a special issue of *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, my fellow contributors and I further reflect on the politics of comfort women-related heritage in Japan and East Asia. This includes a discussion with the Japanese-American filmmaker Miki Dezaki, whose documentary *Shusenjo: The Real Battleground of the “Comfort Women” Issue* featured interviews with Sugita Mio and other prominent rightists. These figures subsequently sued him, forcing him into a lengthy and potentially expensive process of litigation that is still ongoing. The summer of 2019 also featured an uproar over official censorship when a threat to withdraw official funding led to the removal of a comfort women display from the Aichi Triennale Art Festival in Nagoya (the display was later reinstated, but visitor access was restricted).

lost, that would be to the detriment not just of Japan but of the world in general (Rappleye 2018).

But what sort of academic space is actually being defended today in the name of “faculty autonomy”? University faculties, even in the humanities and social sciences, remain overwhelmingly male and ethnically homogenous. In addition to the chronic lack of diversity among tenured academics, students lack any voice in faculty governance. Rather than actively seeking ways to collaborate across faculty or departmental boundaries, let alone engage more actively with civil society or the political world, academic energies tend to be concentrated on shoring up the defensive “walls” that Yoshimi describes. And behind those barricades, what is often being preserved, among other things, is the freedom to exploit or marginalize – or just ignore and exclude – women and foreigners. If faculty autonomy gives scholars the freedom to embrace diversity and challenge themselves and their students to see the world from different perspectives, they have so far largely failed to use it for such purposes.

This is unfortunate, since now more than ever what Japan needs is scholars committed to pursuing critical research on history, politics, sociology, and culture and to engaging forcefully with those outside the university who are skeptical of the value of such work. The Abe administration’s aspiration to reinstate certain constitutional features of the pre-war period cannot be compared in scope or severity with that era’s fascist assault on academic freedom. But the narrow and largely negative focus of many academics on resisting reforms to their own institutions, in the name of faculty autonomy, echoes the response of their 1930s predecessors to official interference. What Marshall termed “the conflation of university autonomy and academic freedom” led scholars during the fascist era to sacrifice the meaningful exercise of their autonomy (along with the careers of their more outspoken colleagues) in order to preserve its empty shell.

Academics in Abe’s Japan face a difficult choice: Do we repeat that pre-war pattern – shoring up our external defenses, seeking to maintain professional self-governance within the narrow bounds of the faculty while retreating from confrontation with the social and political forces that fundamentally threaten academic freedom? Or do we adopt a more positive, activist stance, seeking not just to resist objectionable reforms, but to articulate and exemplify a vision of the university as a microcosm of a more open, tolerant, and plural society? Not just in Japan, but especially here, the times call for dragons, not turtles.

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