

The Model of General Education in Japanese Universities

Comparison of General Education Models in Tokyo University, Kyoto University and Waseda University*

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Abstract—Japan is an Asian country geographically close to us. And it is also the first Asian country to introduce general education. Tokyo University and Kyoto University are the top national universities. And Waseda University is also the top private university in Japan. This article compares the characteristics of the general education of Tokyo University, Kyoto University and Waseda University. The author would make more comprehensive understanding of general education in Japan. It would provide further reference for China's ongoing general education reform.

Keywords—Tokyo University; Kyoto University; Waseda University; general education; liberal education

I. INTRODUCTION

"General education" is also translated into "common education" and "ordinary education". It is a concept of the university and a talent training model. Its goal is to cultivate "complete people" (also known as "Holistic people"). They have broad vision, liberal spirit and elegant emotions. And they are specialized professionals in a narrow professional field. It also often refers to the content of general education. Its core emphasis is on fostering sound personality through unified knowledge and making the educatee is sound person [1].

Through several decades after World War II, Japan has gone through ups and downs. The National University basically formed two models represented by Tokyo University and Kyoto University. And Waseda University, which stands at the top of the private university, has its own characteristics. Comparing these three universities, the author can comprehensively study the model of general

education in Japan.

II. DEVELOPMENT AND STATUS QUO OF GENERAL EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Since World War II, Japan has changed the learning from German model to American model. With reference to American universities, Japan has made reforms in the education of university. Naturally, the Japanese can introduce general education, which had been implemented in American universities for more than a century. At that time, it was translated as "general education". Later, it was translated as "liberal education". Afterwards, it immediately had major developments. In 1963, the Central Education Review Association published the article "Improvements on College Education", which clarified the goal of establishing the liberal education department in national colleges. By 1968, 32 universities had established the department of education. The status of liberal education course has been greatly improved [2]. However, in 1991, the government drastically revised the "University Setting Benchmark". It was simply regarded as "outline". And it would result in the institutional disorganization of the Ministry of Education [3]. After entering the 21st century, the top universities have set off a new round of reforms. The disbanded departments that implemented general education have been reset. And general education ushered in spring. From the establishment of institute of liberal education in Nagoya University in 2001 to the establishment of institute of backbone education in Kyushu University, and the establishment of institute of high liberal education and student support in Northeastern University in 2014, the implementation organizations of new general education in Japan's top seven national universities have all been rebuilt.

Among more than 90 national universities in Japan, the general education model is divided into two modes,

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represented by Tokyo University and Kyoto University. At the same time, among 570 private universities, Waseda University is known as "the best in private education". And it is a well-deserved leader among private universities. This article analyzes the characteristics of general education in Japanese universities by taking the National University of Tokyo, Kyoto University and private Waseda University as examples.

III. CASE ANALYSIS

A. Tokyo University

Since the establishment of the Department of Liberal Studies at the University of Tokyo in 1951, the status of general education has not been shaken. All the students who entered the University of Tokyo belonged to the Department of Liberal Studies for the first two years. And then, they entered the branch of Komaba Campus to receive liberal education (general education), which was called the early course. Regardless of majors, it can be divided into three kinds of liberal arts and three kinds of science. The early course is characterized by "Late Specialization and Early Exposure" [3]. To this end, the curriculum system is divided into basic subjects, development subjects, comprehensive subjects and subject subjects.

Basic subjects are required courses. The liberal arts students should have the practice of foreign languages,

information, physical education and health sciences. At the first year, they would take six subjects of liberal arts research class courses, social sciences and humanities. The science students have the practice of foreign language, information, sports and health sciences. At the first year, they would have five subjects of science research courses and natural sciences (basic experiments, mathematical sciences, physical sciences, life sciences). There are 3 types of development subject such as social science research team, humanities research team, and natural science research team. We will take a small group of students. And then, we would analyze, practice, publish and discuss issues provided by professional content. The comprehensive subject is the main subject. Also, it is a core group of general education. It offers 400 to 500 types of 2 credit lessons, constituting six categories: "A idea and art", "B international and region", "C. Society and system", "D human and environment", "E substance and life", and "F mathematics and information" [3]. There are also L series of language and communication courses, including 4 types of classical language courses and 24 kinds of foreign languages including English, Chinese, Polish, Indonesian, and even Shanghaiese and Cantonese. And they are divided into elementary, intermediate and advanced levels of speaking, reading and writing and other courses. Subject subjects include academic seminars, free research seminars, experience-based seminars, and international studies, as shown in "Table I".

TABLE I. COMPREHENSIVE SUBJECT AND COURSE GROUP SETTING OF EARLY CURRICULUM OF THE FACULTY OF LIBERAL EDUCATION IN TOKYO UNIVERSITY

A Idea and Art	Language and Text; Modern Philosophy; Representation Theory; Comparative Culture Theory; History of Thought and History of Science
B Internation and Region	International Relations Theory; Regional Culture Theory; Japanese Culture Theory; Classical Culture Theory; Historicism; Cultural Anthropology
C Society and System	Law and Society; Modern Society; Related Social Sciences; Economics and Society; Modern Pedagogy
D Human and Environment	Earth Environment Theory; Human Ecology; Cognitive Action Science; Physical Exercise Science; Information Media Science Technology and Ethics; Technology and Systems; Modern Engineering; Environment and Energy Engineering; Medicine and Health Sciences Environment and Resource Agriculture Science; Psychosomatic Development Science
E Substance and Life	Material Science; Material and Life Science; Life Science; Cosmic Earth Science; Integration Field Science of Life Agriculture Science
F Mathematics and Information	Mathematical Science; Graphic Science; Statistics; Informatics

^a Source: Institute of liberal education, Tokyo University. List of courses (curriculum). <http://www.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/info/academics/zenki/curriculum/index.html>

With the end of the early course, students submit professional applications. Each department decides whether or not to enroll the student according to the grades and interviews of the early courses. This is called "admission to study", as shown in "Table II".

TABLE II. BASIC CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENTS OF THE EARLY COURSES AND THE DEPARTMENTS OF THE LATER COURSES

subjects of early courses (1 to 2 years)	Corresponding subjects of secondary course (3 to 4 years)
A class of liberal arts	Faculty of Law; Faculty of Liberal Education
B class of liberal arts	Faculty of Economics; Faculty of Liberal Education
C class of liberal arts	Faculty of Literature; Faculty of Education; Faculty of Liberal Studies
A class of science	Faculty of Engineering; Faculty of Science; Faculty of Pharmacy; Faculty of Agriculture; Faculty of Medicine; Faculty of Liberal Studies
B class of science	Faculty of Agriculture; Faculty of Pharmacy; Faculty of Engineering; Faculty of Science; Faculty of Medicine; Faculty of Liberal Studies
C class of science	Faculty of Medicine

^a. Source: Institute of liberal education, Tokyo University. Early course education and advanced study selection <http://www.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/info/academics/zenki/intro3/index.html>

This kind of correspondence is not 100%. It is also possible to change the subject. And it is the same as the specialty transfer in a university in China. However, compared to Chinese students' zero-learning in new

professional knowledge after the specialty transfer, it is easier for students of Tokyo University who have laid the foundation to adapt to new professional studies, as shown in "Table III".

TABLE III. UNDERGRADUATE COURSE SETTING IN TOKYO UNIVERSITY [4]

Freshman		Sophomore		Junior		Senior	
The first semester	The second semester	The third semester	The fourth semester	The fifth semester	The sixth semester	The seventh semester	The eighth semester
Faculty of Liberal Education				Early course			
				Professional Education			

B. Kyoto University

Kyoto University canceled the Department of Liberal Studies in 1992 after the implementation of "outline". In 2013, a new general education institution named "International Higher Education Institute" was established to manage and transform the original "university-based

common curriculum", and to rebuild the entire curriculum system of general education. However, the original "university-based common curriculum" is not a set of rigorously structured systems. It is rather lax. Therefore, reconstruction cannot be accomplished overnight. It is groping while reforming, as shown in "Fig. 1".

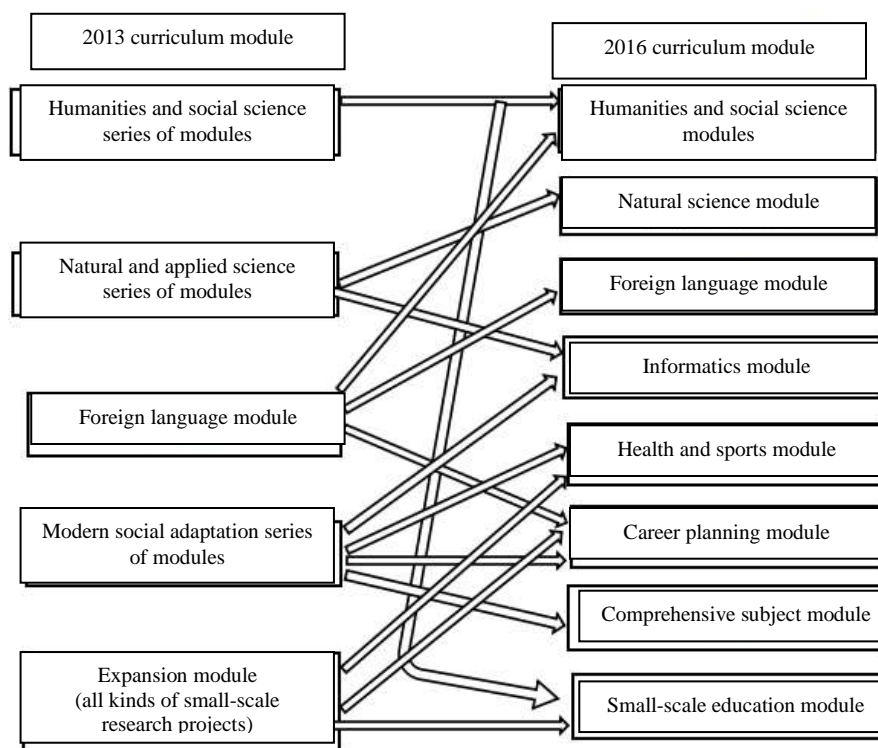


Fig. 1. Curriculum System and Reform of General Education in Kyoto University.

^a. Source: The purpose of subject design in International Institute of Higher Education, University-based institution, Kyoto University. The composition and review of course group. <http://www.z.k.kyoto-u.ac.jp/zenkyo/purpose>

TABLE IV. GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND COURSE GROUP SETTING OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE OF KYOTO UNIVERSITY

Humanities and Social Sciences	Philosophy and Thought; History and Civilization; Art, Literature and Language; Education, Psychology, Social Area and Culture Law, Politics and Economics Japan Understanding Foreign Literature Research
Natural Science	Mathematics; Data Science; Physics Chemistry Biology Earth Science; Graphics
foreign language	English German French Chinese Russian Italian Spanish Korean; Arabic; Japanese
Informatics	Information base; Information Base Exercises; Information and Society Information Base Practice (only for the Information Discipline of Department of Engineering)
Health and sports	Health and Sports Science; Sports
career planning	United Nations; International Exchange; Scholarship Course; Geographical Collaboration and Other Career Formation
Integrated Science	Comprehensive Science; Environment; Integrated disciplines of forest and sea; Other Comprehensive Science
small-scale education	ILAS Seminar; ILAS Seminar-E2; ILAS Seminar (Overseas)

^a. Source: List of subjects of International Institute of Higher Education, university-based institution of Kyoto University (2018). <http://www.z.k.kyoto-u.ac.jp/zenkyo/list>

The "International Institute of Higher Education" is a university-wide institution. It is not an independent department. It does not have its own teaching staff or students. The instructors of general education courses are teachers of various professional departments. International Higher Education Institute can't manage the freshman enrollment and how to choose courses, and how many general education courses are chosen. Instead, all professional departments and professors have the right to speak and even play a leading role in this thing. In general, the elective credits for the general education courses of Kyoto University from the freshman year to the senior year have been gradually reduced. They have been wedged into the whole education like wedges. This model is also known as the "Scholarship System".

TABLE V. UNDERGRADUATE COURSE SETTING OF KYOTO UNIVERSITY [4]

Freshman		Sophomore		Junior		Senior	
The first semester	The second semester	The third semester	The fourth semester	The fifth semester	The sixth semester	The seventh semester	The eighth semester
Liberal education		general education					
		profession				education	

communities to form a situation in which the neighbors are friends and live in harmony. This is a unique civilian style that Waseda University has formed over 100 years ago. ② There are many small-scale research classes. The exchanges among students and exchanges between students and teachers are adequate. ③ emphasis on cross-cultural and international exchanges. In order to cultivate a "world citizen" with an international perspective, the number of international students receiving and sending abroad has increased year by year. According to "2018 Waseda University's Annual Plan", the number of target students in 2018 is 39667. The number of receiving foreign students is 9396. And the number of dispatched students is 5776. It has signed cooperation agreements with about 660 universities and research institutions in more than 70 countries and regions. The school also has an International Exchange Center (ICC) to promote mutual exchanges among students, deepen understanding of different cultures and carry out various activities. President Jiang Zemin (in 1998) and President Hu Jintao (in 2008) took Waseda University as the speech location during visiting Japan.

3) *Focusing on the cultivation of expressiveness*: For example, the Department of Politics and Economy established a semi-circular open-air stage exclusively for the students to have the speech in the corner of the school [5].

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the above introduction to the general education model of the three universities, the author can make the comparison and get several different points:

The system is different. Tokyo University operates the "liberal education" system, which means that the department of liberal education undertakes all general education courses and manages the courses. Kyoto University implements the "university-wide participation system". That is, there is the "International Institute of Higher Education". There is no teacher or student in this institute. And general education courses are undertaken by teachers from various professional departments. Also, the managers belong to different organizations. Waseda University is located between the two universities. There is an "international liberal education department". There are its own teachers and students. However, it isn't same as that of Tokyo University. It does not take the entire general education course. It mainly trains its students.

The courses are distributed in different ways. Tokyo University adopts "two-two divisional system". In the first two years, all students belong to the department of liberal education and receive general education, which is called the early course. In the next two years, the students would have professional education. It clearly distinguishes general education from professional education. Kyoto University adopts "department-based system". The general education wedges through entire education of the departmental. However, it accounts for a different proportion each year. The department would gradually decrease general education. And professional education would be gradually increased.

Waseda University is similar to Kyoto University. In 4 years, it has set up general education courses. In the first one and a half years, the proportion of general education courses is large. And it is concentrated.

The status is different. The general education of Tokyo University has not been interrupted since the establishment of the Department of Liberal Studies in 1951. It has played a leading role in the enrollment and student's first two years of study. In 1994, Kyoto University cancelled the institution for the implementation of general education. Although it was rebuilt in 2013, it only played an auxiliary role in enrollment and students' learning. It was intended to make up for the lack of comprehensive professional training. The general education of Waseda University has been integrated into various disciplines and professions. It is integrated and inseparable. Communication, expressiveness, openness and globalization reflected in professional courses and students' daily life are the goal of general education.

From the comparison of these differences, the author can analyze the advantages and problems of the three models:

The "two-two divisional system" of Tokyo University would allow students to acquire certain understanding of majors and master basic knowledge before choosing the major. According to their interests or needs, the students can make the choice. And it would reduce the failure rate and the sense of resistance. Also, it has reduced the difficulty in teaching in this field. It is more suitable for students who do not have clear goals and do not know which major to choose. However, it is not absolute. The students have two years to decide the profession. However, the basic knowledge of each major in the two years is not enough to gain a deeper understanding of each major. It is not necessary for the majors. If the students are not familiar with the history, development and especially the latest trends of the major, it is difficult to make a choice based on the basic knowledge. Moreover, this model is too polarized. According to the "Survey on Achievement of University Education" conducted by Tokyo University in March 2009 for graduates in 2008, 49% of the surveyed students think that "they would lose their interest in learning halfway." In addition, the opinions of "not following the curriculum because of unfamiliar terminology" and "lack of professional learning ability and preparation knowledge" are 45.1% and 50.5% respectively [3]. These three sets of data fully illustrate that the connection between the early courses (general education) and later courses (professional education) of Tokyo University are in poor condition. It also shows that teachers who belong to the department of liberal studies do not put professional knowledge in place. As a result, professional teachers will inevitably feel that general education teachers do not play their due role. And then, it would lead to teachers in the general education system and teachers in the professional curriculum system having difficulty in understanding, respecting and communicating with each other. It is impossible to improve the connection between the curriculum. These issues have yet to be resolved.

When the students enter Kyoto University, they would enter the professional department. General education cannot

provide reference to the profession selection in the early stage. It is only in parallel with professional courses to supplement the knowledge, vision, and personality that the student lacks. Therefore, it is best for students to have a clear goal when they enter the school, and know what kind of path they want to take and what knowledge they should master. The model of Kyoto University does not include the problems arising from strict distinction of teaching time and space in general education and professional education of Tokyo University. However, the problem is that the status of general education is not high enough. It is only in supporting professional education, and to find out what is missing. It is in a secondary position. The teachers would be unwilling to open general education courses because they can't obtain enough attention. Even if the teachers set up the general education courses, they won't prepare for lessons and teaching. With less attention, the students can't study hard. Or, they would choose the courses which are easy to get the credits. To improve the status of general education courses in the minds of teachers and students is an urgent problem to be solved in the model of Kyoto University.

Waseda University is similar to Kyoto University. When the students enter the university, they would enter the profession department. The spirit of general education has penetrated into all aspects of education. The general education and professional education are well combined. The profession and the general education would influence each other. Teachers and students do not specifically think about whether it is general education or professional education. In Tokyo University, it has the problem of poor connection, and the general education can't obtain much attention. However, it doesn't have similar problems in Waseda University. Waseda University has included the cultivation of "graduates who lead the world and work hard" in the international social arena into the next medium-term plan [5]. It requires that the training for students should be more comprehensive. The professionalism, humanistic culture, international perspectives and cross-cultural communication are essential qualities.

Judging from the outstanding graduates from three universities, Tokyo University has more politicians. Kyoto University has more scholars, such as Nobel Prize winners. Waseda University has seven prime ministers, the founder or president of the companies such as Sony, Casio, and Samsung. It is not short of winners of various awards. From this point, the talents educated by Tokyo University are further influenced by general education. The students have strong communication and performance abilities, and a broad perspective. The talents of Kyoto University are more professional. The talents of Waseda University are very comprehensive.

After decades of development, Japan's general education has gone all the way. Today, universities still go forward with the exploration. How should position general education and professional education? Should they be parallel or complementary or integrated? Many universities lack general education teachers, and the system is chaotic. The general education of universities in China started later. The development in recent years is fast. However, the

shortcomings are even worse than those of Japanese universities. Problems such as teachers, students' participation in society, and lack of foreign language have emerged in an endless stream. Whether the models of Tokyo University, Kyoto University and Waseda University are worth the reference, we must contact the actual situation of the colleges. And we cannot completely make the copy because we think it's more advanced. We need to be careful to prove it. It's best only when it fits us.

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