Japanese Universities in a Period of Transition
—Focus on Soka University

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Introduction
In a famous speech, John F. Kennedy declared that "There are few earthly things more beautiful than a university," and he added that a university is "a place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know, where those who perceive truth may strive to make others see." Indeed, it is not too much to say that nothing is more important than universities for the sake of the future of humankind.

Where does the national power of the U. S. lie? Is it in its military strength, or in its economic, scientific and technological power? Of course, these are important elements contributing to the national strength of the U. S. However, in my opinion, the real national power of the U. S. lies in the attractiveness of its universities. Many scholars and students from around the world are eager to study at U. S. universities such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, or Stanford. They are the real treasures of the States, and the fact that these U. S. universities continue to attract many people’s attention can be said to be the genuine national strength of that country.

According to a survey, 90 percent of the students of the University of Beijing want to do their postgraduate research at Harvard University. This is an astonishing fact. The point I want to make here is not simply that the U. S. is a glorious country. I am using these examples to stress the fact that for the future development of the entire humankind, it is vital for many nations in the world to have attractive universities. Moreover, universities themselves should strive to become attractive through self-reformation.
1. Japanese Universities at a Turning Point

Japanese universities are now standing at a huge turning point. There are more than 1,200 universities and junior colleges in Japan. Twenty percent of them are national and eighty percent are private institutions. We can say that private universities have been shouldering Japanese higher education. We can also notice that the graduates of national universities have mainly contributed to bureaucracy and education, whereas the graduates of private universities have supported the Japanese industry. It can be said that both the Japanese government and its universities have made the development of Japan possible until today.

However, in this process, Japanese universities have left some important issues unattended. I would like to point out three of them.

First, universities have neglected the education of students. Universities are places for research, and using this as a pretext, they have neglected the education of students. Educational institutions with an absence of education —— this is the reality of Japanese universities.

Second, Japanese universities have not created ties with local communities and industries, and have therefore not contributed to their development. Japanese universities look like ivory towers isolated from reality.

Third, they have not taken the lead concerning exchanges with the international community. Especially, they have failed to actively accept students from overseas and confer degrees on them, and they have not intellectually contributed to the international community. Because of this attitude, Japanese universities have ended up being unattractive for scholars and students throughout the world, except for a small section of researchers in Japanese studies.

Leaving these important issues behind or overlooking them, Japanese universities could by no means achieve self-reformation. The main reason lies in the nature of "the Faculty Committees." Japanese universities refused the demands for self-reformation from outside
under the name of autonomy. However, the autonomy of a university here means "Autonomy of the Faculty Committees." They had and still have great authority—their power is so strong that even executives, such as presidents and deans, who aimed at reformation, could not show their leadership. The autonomy of the Faculty Committees let faculty members’ ego halt reformation efforts. Change was rejected, because they did not want to give up their vested rights, which would be lost through reformation, and they ended up sticking to the status quo. For Japanese universities to reform themselves, responding to the changing times, they first need to change the nature and attitude of organizations such as the "Faculty Committees".

Today, Japanese universities are facing massive changes, and here I will point out three aspects.

First, Japanese universities as a whole have to become internationally competitive. How can they catch up with universities from all over the world, or even surpass them, in terms of research, education, administration and management? Their true value will be tested more and more.

Second, how will Japanese universities cope with the matter of declining birth rate? In Japan, the birth rate is rapidly declining, and as a result, we have fewer children. There are less and less Japanese reaching the age of 18, the age when one enters a university. It is said that their number will be under 1.5 million by the year of 2008. It is therefore estimated that many universities will go bankrupt because they cannot recruit students. Some symptoms are already visible and some universities and colleges had to close. If universities do not make efforts to offer interesting and unique research and educational programs, students will desert them.

Third, how will Japanese universities meet the two above-mentioned challenges, and in order to overcome them, how will they reform their organizational structures and utilize the abilities of all the members of the university? If they cannot strengthen the leadership of the presidents and deans and utilize all the resources of the universities,
they will perish.

Japan experienced a revolution on the political level in the 19th century and on the economic level in the 20th century. The 21st century will see a revolution at the university level in Japan. Needless to say, universities are "wellsprings" to foster capable leaders for the next century, to make science and technology advance, and to make the economy prosper. Especially upon entering the 21st century, humankind is facing serious global issues such as threats to peace and the destruction of the environment. It is no exaggeration to say that universities, halls of intellect and wisdom, hold the key to solve these problems. Universities can, and should be fortresses exerting influence on the future of human civilization.

2. The Challenges Facing Soka University

Soka University was founded on April 2nd, 1971. It is a young university with a short history of 32 years. It consists of 6 faculties: Economics, Business Administration, Law, Letters, Education, and Engineering. In addition, the campus houses the Soka Women's College, The Institute of Japanese Language, and the Division of Correspondence Education. In total, 25,000 students are enrolled, and 500 faculty and staff members are employed. It also has a sister university in California, Soka University of America, which was founded last summer as a 4 years Liberal Arts college.

During the past 32 years, Soka University produced about 40,000 graduates. Among them, many are now active in society as statesmen, bureaucrats, local parliament members, diplomats, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, and entrepreneurs. It is also noteworthy that 10 percent of its graduates, which means 4,000 of them, are engaged in education as schoolteachers. Soka University has therefore produced capable leaders in the field of education in Japan.

When we consider the 32 years of Soka University's short history, we could say that it has successfully fostered many outstanding graduates. However, as I mentioned before, many difficulties are awaiting
Japanese universities. Soka University is no exception, and the quality of its management and administration will be questioned.

Now, let me talk about the ideas and principles on which Soka University operates. I would like to introduce the main ones.

First, Soka University always goes back to its founding principles, and strives to implement them. The heart of a university lies in its founding principles. Neither the length of its history nor its size determine the value of a university. What really matters is how alive the founding principles are, and how much the university is striving to implement them in reality.

The founding principles of Soka University are: "Be the highest seat of learning for humanistic education", "Be the cradle of a new culture" and "Be a fortress for the peace of humankind." Education, Culture and Peace are the three pillars. The members of the university community always go back to these ideas, make plans and guidelines for new research and educational endeavors, and make efforts for the realization of these ideals. A university which forgets the founding principles is a house of cards and management of a university in these conditions will run idle.

Second, Soka University puts energy in "Internationalization", "Information Technology", and "Collaboration with the local communities". Exchanges among universities are the key to cross-cultural communication. It is an important ingredient for peace in the world. Soka University, upholding "Peace" as one of its founding principles, has academic agreements with more than 70 universities throughout the world and promotes reciprocal exchanges of faculty members and students.

It is noteworthy that Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of Soka University has received honorary doctorates from more than 130 universities. He has been promoting a network of intellect with many universities in the world. This is the precious heritage of Soka
“Information Technology—orientation" is a current of the times and Soka University has also been enhancing computer education as well as information—oriented research and administration.

As some examples of "Collaboration with the local community", Soka University has been organizing Extension Courses for citizens, in collaboration with the city of Hachioji and the Santama Area of Tokyo, where the university is located. Moreover, the collaboration between a university and industrial circles will be important from now on. Therefore, we should create strong links and contribute to the enhancement of enterprises. Many teaching staff of the Faculty of Engineering hold patents for their research. They usher in a new phase of the development of science and technology.

Third, the advent of an aging society and the rapid change of the times gives more and more prominence to Adult Education in Japan. Soka University has been paying attention to this issue for a long time and has put its energy in the development of correspondence education, as a part of adult education. Today it has 16,000 students in the correspondence education division, and this is the second largest number in Japan. Our correspondence students live all over the world.

In the summer, Soka University organizes “Summer Seminars" for citizens, opening all the facilities to them. The faculty members of Soka University are in charge of the seminars. Every summer 2, an average of 7,000 enthusiastic citizens participate in these seminars.

Fourth, since its foundation, Soka University has been a student—centered university. The main purpose of students entering a university is to study in order to become capable leaders of society. Needless to say, the basic stance of a university management should be to tap the students' potential. At the same time, it is an important task for a university to have students develop a sense of autonomy and responsibility as early as possible. Especially meaningful is a sense of
mission within the community they belong to. With this perspective in mind, students engage in the organization of various university events such as ceremonies and meetings, and they do not only passively participate in the events. For instance, students act as masters of ceremonies on the occasion of the entrance and commencement ceremonies.

At the Soka University honorary doctorate conferment ceremonies, students give congratulatory addresses to the recipients. Moreover, during recruiting seminars for new students, Soka students always participate and they actively share their experiences about university life and about methods to study efficiently to pass the university entrance examination. This is always concrete and useful advice for the candidates hoping to enter Soka University. These pieces of advice are even more appreciated than those of the teaching staff.

Furthermore, let me give you some examples concerning the dormitory management. Soka University has dormitories, which accommodate more than 1,000 male and female students including foreign students. Actually only 10 staff members are taking care of the dormitories, because students themselves autonomously and systematically manage their dormitories, under the guidance of the supervisors they have chosen themselves. As a matter of fact, many universities in Japan closed down their dormitories in the aftermath of the student revolts at the end of the sixties, because they were afraid that the dormitories would turn into secret bases of operations for the radical student movements. However, Soka University considers dormitory life as "the place where students grow and polish their character", and regards it as important.

As mentioned, Soka University pays respect to students' inner potential. As a pillar of the university management it has established this system, with which they can bring their ability into full play.

Fifth, one important aspect of Soka University's philosophy of management is the emphasis placed on the stimulation of the potential of all members of its community and the thorough utilization of that
potential. Making the best out of the synergy of an organization can be said to be the engine of effective management. In other words, when it comes to a university, all the members of the board of trustees, faculty and staff members, and student body should unite and exhibit their own abilities——this is important. Needless to say, in this case, the leadership of the president becomes the core.

With these principles, since the second year of its foundation, Soka University started a special consultation body called the “General University Council”. This council consists of the representatives of the board of trustees, faculty and staff members, and student body. All important issues concerning the university are discussed and information is shared in this council. For instance, an issue concerning tuition is being discussed here and the amount is decided. The content of important events of the university, and all their programs are discussed. When a new building is to be built on campus, the agreement of this council is needed.

I would like to add that representatives of female students and also international students are always present in this council, because the development of a university is not possible if their voices are ignored. The president is also the chairperson of the “General University Council.” His role is to harmonize and stimulate the energies of all members of the university community.

My sixth and last point is the contribution of the university graduates. It would be a great loss for both parties (the university and the graduates), if the alumni did not relate to their Alma Mater after their graduation. Graduates who are proud of their Alma Mater are full of enthusiasm, creativity and intellectual capability. A university that can cherish its graduates can deeply take root in society. Financial contributions from the alumni members do constitute a very important source of revenue. Needless to say, prestigious private universities in the U. S. considerably depend on the donations of their alumni members.
Soka University also regards each individual alumni member as important. Every year an alumni meeting is held on campus. Local alumni meetings are held whenever needed. In those meetings, the alumni hear the latest news about their Alma Mater, and ways to continue supporting the university and its current students are discussed. Scholarships for the students, financial support to study abroad, scholarships for the postgraduate students planning to get a ‘PhD’ in the graduate schools overseas are offered by the alumni members.

Along with the Alumni Association, Soka University has a “Parents Association” whose members are the parents of the graduates. In these parents’ meetings, the President, members of the board of trustees and faculty members attend and report the latest news about the university.

As mentioned, when it comes to the running of the university, Soka University makes the best out of each individual and of each group related to the university, and encourages them to be the driving force for the further development of the university. In order to do this successfully, the leadership of the President and Deans, the sharing of information by all related people, and the participation by the constituents in the process of political decision-making are all necessary. In other words, a democratic style of management is the key to the healthy development of the university.

Other important factors a university should not neglect are self-evaluation and self-inspection. Based on its founding principles, the management is encouraged to set goals and check periodically how many have been achieved. This kind of self-purifying work is essential for the progress of the university. Soka University also actively grapples with self-inspecting work. We cannot say that we do that perfectly, however, day-by-day, year-by-year, we make efforts to reach our goals.

Conclusion

The management of a university should be perfectly autonomous.
The life of a university will come to an end the moment it starts depending on other organizations, especially governmental entities, for its further development. I would like to emphasize that I consider this a death sentence for a university. Needless to say, in Europe and the U. S., universities had existed long before national states were established. We must be aware of the fact that national states are not at the origin of the establishment of the first universities, but that on the contrary it was the oldest universities, which helped establish the national states.

For the smooth running of a university, self-discipline and self-reformation are absolutely necessarily. Finally, I would like to quote the words of a British scholar during the time of the university reformation in the U. K. under the government of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980's:

"Universities where nobody does anything of value have started appearing in several countries. There is no single example of a university having been able to improve when the national government has taken the lead."

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