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## The Role of University Co-ops in Student Support in Japan

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Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen!

I am very grateful for this opportunity to give a presentation at this conference.

I am a sociologist, Professor Emeritus, University of Tokyo and currently Professor of Global Citizenship Studies, Seisen University, Tokyo.

I have been serving as the President of the National Federation of University Co-operative Associations, NFUCA, since December 2005

Japanese university co-operatives are made up of undergraduate and graduate students, together with teaching and other staff.

They are headed by a faculty member and the post of the president of NFUCA has also traditionally been taken by a university faculty member.

Today, I would like to talk on “The Role of University Co-ops in Student Support in Japan” by three major topics.

First, I will explain much of the student support in Japan is provided by university co-ops.

Secondly, I will talk about Japanese universities’ more and more business-like approaches under the increasing exposure to global market forces.

Lastly I will demonstrate the new vision and action plan that NFUCA has adopted to respond to these developments.

First of all, I would like to define the concept of student support.

We believe that universities and society should provide facilities for housing, dining, funding and whatever else is required by students for study and research.

In effect, the construction, provision and maintenance of student dorms, cafeterias and campus book shops, and the establishment and running of student scholarship programs should be done in some way.

To my understanding, there are three major different models of

student support in our contemporary world.

The first model is the student support done by organizations supported by the respective governments to run student dorms, cafeterias and scholarships. These are found in Germany and France, such as DSW (Deutsches Studentenwerk) and CNOUS (Centre national des oeuvres universitaires et scolaires) .

In the United States of America, on the other hand, universities manage their own dorms and cafeterias, and run their own student scholarship programs with government assistance and private funds. There are also shops on campus for supplying textbooks, other books, clothing, stationery and other commodities. This is the second model.

In Japan, however, there have always been a lot of private universities, and with the recent incorporation of public universities, universities are increasingly being forced to business-orientation. In this climate, university co-ops have to provide broad support to students in the form of supply of food, books, stationery, computers, housing referrals, supplementary education and so forth. I would say this is the third model.

Then, I would like to give you an overview of this third model.

There are co-ops in universities and colleges throughout Japan. Today, NFUCA has a membership of 229 co-ops including 214 university co-ops, 5 inter-college co-ops and 10 business associations. Most of the co-ops of key public and private universities are included in the 214 university co-ops. As the result, we have today about 1.48 million co-op members altogether, which is about 40% of total students and about 31% of total faculty and staff.

Each university co-op is affiliated, according to region, with one of ten regional local centers, and does business under the supply of goods and services by a business association.

Local centers are effectively branches of NFUCA, but their business associations are independent organizations that have the same NFUCA membership status as the co-ops of individual universities.

As for the Japanese government, their support for students has always been insufficient.

In terms of student numbers, 66% of higher education in Japan is private, but the government has wielded control over the private sector too by providing subsidies, although they are insufficient.

In 2004, the government implemented the incorporation of public

universities and demanded each of them to become a self-supporting entity. As a matter of fact, the government has cut budget allocations due to its fiscal austerity.

Government support for students in this climate is limited to the exemption of tuition fees for a small minority (14% of students in case of national universities), the provision of scholarships through the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) principally in the form of 100% loans (to 27.7% of total students), and a very small number of student dorms in comparison with the total student population.

Government funding for mental health counseling, career support and others is also insufficient.

With globalization and the resulting growth of both domestic and international competition among universities, Japanese universities are facing severer and severer circumstances.

Higher education is becoming increasingly like business in service industry, and universities are facing commercialization of their operations.

The university-entrance-aged population is declining and will be declining continuously, so that universities are competing more and more fiercely to attract students.

We are seeing increasing differentiation of universities both in what they teach and in level of research and education. Some universities have folded, while some others are establishing overseas bases to get students.

And government support for both public and private universities is shrinking.

As the result, Japanese universities are being forced to become more and more business-oriented.

They are now trying whatever they can think of, soliciting contributions through developing alumni associations, and making academic-industrial partnerships to obtain external funding, and so forth.

And universities are actually going even further, seeking to boost revenues through allowing convenience stores, coffee shops and other private retailers to operate outlets on campuses.

Some universities have created subsidiaries in order to rationalize university management and generate revenue.

In this climate, university co-ops too are being forced to launch new initiatives.

Japan's university co-ops emerged after 1946 and grew in the

postwar years of poverty and shortage of everything.

They are autonomous organizations funded by investments from the university community --- undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff members.

Thus, they have developed as democratic organizations based on 'one person, one vote' system.

They are non-profit business organizations and, as a matter of fact, were pioneers in the development of NPOs in Japan.

They have been satisfying various needs in universities, returning all profit to co-op members and the university community.

As they were relatively small-scale, they put priority on joining activities among them for joint purchasing and so forth.

Regarding to the relationship with universities, each university co-op has had a contract to rent their facilities by free from a viewpoint of student welfare.

The first and foremost business of Japan's university co-ops is to support student life.

The key business areas are cafeterias and other food services, supply of textbooks, books, stationery, commodities, etc., supply of information products including IT hardware and software, travel services, mutual aid business and housing referrals.

Housing referrals now amount 42,000 rooms, which meet about 40% of freshmen's needs.

The mutual aid business through which students help each other has a yearly membership of 700,000.

Thus, in terms of turnover, Japan's university co-ops got about 200 billion yen (approx. \$1.7 billion) last year.

The second main area of business is the support of student growth.

University co-ops support career formation through supplying students with job information and goods required for job-hunting.

They also supply indirect educational support through sub-schools offering foreign language courses, lectures for civil servant examinations and others, or through introducing trustworthy private schools offering such courses.

Now that university education is open to a wider range of people, university co-ops also contribute to required supplementary education areas, such as computer and language education, by hiring graduate and senior undergraduate students.

And university co-ops support internship-based education by enabling students to participate in co-op activities so as to learn the significance of organizations, society and businesses, etc..

The third area is the support of university activities.

University co-ops supply research and educational equipment, stationery and other commodities for labs and classrooms.

They also support libraries through the delivery, sorting and shelving etc. of books.

Another area of contribution is the donation of surplus funds to increase both the amount and the number of recipients of student scholarships.

In recent years, co-ops are also helping to boost university management efficiency through contracting with universities to undertake various tasks outsourced.

In line with these activities, NFUCA formulated “Vision and Action Plan of the University Co-ops in the 21st Century” at the Annual General Assembly in December 2006.

NFUCA confirmed the commitment of university co-ops to the following four missions:

1. Cooperation of students, graduate students, international students, and faculty.
2. Collaboration with the university to contribute toward the enrichment of higher education and research.
3. Independence of organization to promote activities both in the university and the surrounding area.
4. Participation of more and more members to get and spread the cooperative experience so as to realize a sustainable society kind both to people and the planet.

And we have further paraphrased these four missions into a vision with eight clauses and an action plan with 16 specific goals.

Very simply, we can say as follows.

First, we will practice cooperation in the university community, and seek to demonstrate the importance of cooperation in a society that is increasingly subject to global market forces.

Secondly, we will collaborate with universities, many of which face difficult circumstances, and contribute to the further development of the kind of research and education that our society requires.

Thirdly, to achieve the above goals, we will manage our organization both democratically and scrupulously to ensure that we are independent and do not generate losses.

Lastly, we will continue to encourage our members to participate positively in co-op activities, and through such participation propagate the spirit of cooperation throughout society.

Then we see cooperation, collaboration, independence and participation as feeding into each other in a virtuous circle.

To conclude, I would point out four things.

We NFUCA seek to communicate the value and role of university co-ops to all university personnel who are eager to strengthen student support.

We seek to promote exchanges with East Asian universities and university co-ops to cultivate understanding of the merits of Japanese university co-ops.

To this end, we will continue to elaborate our thinking on the form that universities and student support should take in the coming society.

Finally, international exchanges on student support like this are so significant that we will be very happy if we are able to have more exchanges from now on.

Thank you very much for your attention.