

## Considerations of the Development of Continuing Higher Education in Japan

### – Focusing on the tide and changes at Private Junior Colleges –

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In the history of the Japanese educational system, junior colleges were established during the post-war process of educational reform as a provisional measure to “rescue” old technical colleges in the age before World War II, which were not allowed to upgrade to four-year universities under the new system. After that, junior colleges were thought to have contributed to a certain degree to women’s social advancement, the provision of university education opportunities to regional communities and to increasing the rate of advancement to higher education during the high economic growth period. Recently, junior colleges are regarded as the main reason behind the increase in the number of four-year universities (through their reorganizations from junior colleges to four-year universities); however, today, some people say that the historical “mission” of Japanese junior colleges has nearly come to an end.

Most short-term higher education in Japan is carried out done by the private sector and the process of its tide and changes, especially their closure, can be explained largely by using the following three reasons: A. Absorption and Abolition—a junior college is absorbed into a four-year university in the group it is affiliated with; B. Upgrade/Closure—a junior college is reorganized and upgraded into a four-year university; and C. Retreat/Closure—the junior college’s establisher (a company) completely ceases its higher education operations by closing the junior college. Out of the above, reason B., “Promotion and Abolition”, which is becoming rapidly more common after the Deregulation of Universities Act in 1991, represents in a certain sense the institutional characteristics of junior colleges in postwar higher educational history, and reveals an aspect of Japanese higher education that the “reform” of junior colleges has been achieved in the form of upgrading them into four-year universities.

Currently, the significance of the existence of junior colleges as “institutions for the completion of education” is being jeopardized. In the future lifelong learning society, it is anticipated that junior colleges will be required to reconstruct their organizations from short-term higher educational institutes to “continuing- higher educational institutes” beyond the framework of the conventional junior college system and to build up their distinctiveness as “post-secondary education” not “low level higher education.”