

Japanese Modernization Lecture Series

Chapter 8. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Modernization in Japan

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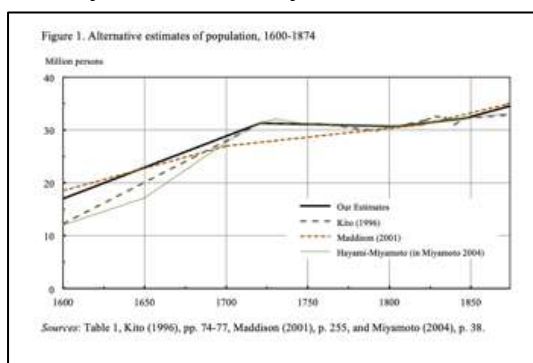
This lecture will focus on the character of political thought and its social background at the early stage of modernization of Japan, specifically the period from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries.

This lecture aims to present a brief picture of continuity and change of the trend of social and political thought from the Tokugawa shogunate period to the twentieth century.

To begin with, I will provide an overview of the political and social system of pre-modern Japan and examine the impacts of the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate and the abrupt Westernization on the intellectuals in the mid-nineteenth century.

Section 1: Japanese Society in the Early Modern Period

Let me start with basic facts about the Japanese society in the period which historians usually call "the early modern." Please see the chart.



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Under the Tokugawa shogunate rule, the population growth of the first one hundred years shows a remarkable increase by approximately nine million.

The main reasons for this growth were the absence of foreign or civil warfare and the development of arable lands due to the long period of peace.

The next one hundred years shows relative stagnation of the growth. Then, not rapid but steady population growth took place in the early nineteenth century.

The priority given under the Tokugawa regime was to clamp down on any sign of social turmoil.

The Tokugawa clan was the final winner of the long civil war among domain lords that had lasted more than one hundred years and established an iron-fist rule over Japan. Maruyama Masao, a prominent political thinker in the twentieth century and whom I will examine later, named it a "congealed or frozen state of civil war."

The Tokugawa government implemented strict regulations of arms, swords and firearms, castellation by domain lords, and shipbuilding.

People, including the *samurai*-warrior class, were not allowed to leave their assigned domicile without the official permission of the authority.

In principle, there was no freedom to choose an occupation.

Every family (in Japanese "*ie*") had its designated profession or trade (in Japanese "*kagyo*" or "*kashoku*"), and every person was bound to the family business for life. Peasants could assert the rights to cultivate land or inherit their status, but selling or buying land was legally banned.

Officially, everyone in any class had to live, work and die in the assigned status and place. Fukuzawa Yukichi, a leading intellectual in the mid-nineteenth century, depicted the Tokugawa regime as "a system that every person was contained in a separate small box and was not allowed to move."

Samurai warriors, who comprised about six or seven per cent of the whole population, were the ruling class.

They enjoyed political and social privileges.

However, they were not allowed to own land as private property or be engaged in a commercial business or investing activities.

They had no other option than to live off a fixed stipend according to the rank, at least officially.

Chances of promotion were quite rare because no war occurred after the Tokugawa regime was established its authority, which meant they had few opportunities to succeed as warriors.

They were like a group of people destined to live as lifelong pensioners.

The picture here indicates that samurais were feared but not so much respected.



The words on this card teach that “You don’t need to be servile to a samurai as long as you are doing the right thing.”

The imperial family and aristocrats in Kyoto had religious and cultural authority, but they were not allowed to move out from Kyoto without the permission of the Tokugawa government.

They were granted modest estates, but again the estates were not their freehold property; therefore, they were not allowed to manage or sell them at their own discretion.

The emperor maintained the formal authority to give aristocrats, samurai warriors, and monks court ranks, but every decision had to be approved in advance by the Tokugawa shogun.

Christianity was strictly banned.

The status and estates of Buddhist and Shintō institutions were protected, but they were

under the strict surveillance of the officials.

Tokugawa government's vigilance against the religious forces derived from the threat of the military and social power exerted by temples and shrines during the civil war period.

It also came from a possible threat if feudal lords and religious institutions allied.

Not a few warlords became Christian or allied with Jesuits mission partly or mainly because of their interests in Western firearms and trade benefits.

Moreover, Tokugawa officials knew that once religious faiths permeated common people's minds, it would arouse a spirit of defiance to the rulers.

After the Shimabara Uprising, in which Christian peasants took a leading role, the ban of Christianity became more strict.

On the other hand, the Tokugawa government paid very little attention to the contents of religious doctrines.

In contrast with the state-church relations in European countries, religious bodies did not exert independent authority over society.

Also, religious rivalries among different faiths or schools did not usually cause severe confrontations among the ruling class or common people.

China and Korea had a system of open competitive examinations for appointing higher state officials.

They were civilians, not warriors.

Contrastingly, the Tokugawa shogunate established a strict hereditary class system.

The academic capability was not relevant to the political and social status.

The picture here shows Chinese mandarin officials in the early twentieth century.

They had to pass the very competitive examination to obtain a position in the bureaucracy.



Moreover, the idea of meritocracy, such as the one that the Chinese higher civil service examination was based on, was recognised as an ideological threat to the Tokugawa regime.

Therefore, very little attention was paid to evaluating the academic competence of each samurai, let alone of common people.

It is not difficult to find opinions among higher officials or even intellectuals, which judged that bookworms could not cope with the actual tasks and were useless in service to shogun or lords.

However, interest in education gradually grew and flourished in the late eighteenth century because academic competence became needed in the state bureaucracy and business activities.

As a result, Tokugawa shogunate and local domain lords established official schools for young samurai. Even commoners began to acknowledge the usefulness of education for providing an opportunity for a better life for their children.

The table of the number of schools newly established shows that interest in education rose in the late eighteenth century.

However, a teacher of classics was not recognised as a respected profession.

Usually, experts in Chinese classical philosophy and writing were classified in the same category as popular actors or masters of popular culture lessons.

Despite the difficulty in verifying the literacy rate before the Meiji period, historians estimate that in the early nineteenth century, 30 to 40 per cent of the male population and 10 to 20 per cent of the female population seem to have obtained the necessary reading and writing skills.

In the urban commercial areas, the literacy percentage may be much higher.

Western diplomats and missionaries who visited Japan in the late-Tokugawa and early Meiji periods remarked how they were impressed by common people's reading and writing skills, including lower class labourers and women.

Viewed in a comparative perspective, the Japanese literacy condition at this stage can be placed higher than Italy and lower than France in the contemporary period.

For high-ranked samurai officials, Buddhist monks, Shintō priests, affluent merchants and village leaders, sophisticated reading and writing skills were necessary because every official and business correspondence was issued and registered in a highly elaborated format.

Also, reading became a popular pastime for them and their family members.

Agriculture was the primary industry.

The currency system was a unique combination of specie money and rice.

The Tokugawa government monopolised gold and silver mines, minting and issuing currency.

At the same time, the tax and stipend of samurai were paid in the form of the bale of rice. Therefore, the public budget and samurai's income depended on the market price of rice, gold, and silver.

The rice market was also beyond governmental control; even they tried to interfere with it once in a while to no avail.

Further complicating matters, rice vouchers (promissory notes), not only of the actual spot rice but also of the futures, were used as money orders and exchanged in the market.

Some economic historians suggest that this rice voucher exchange was a precursor of today's derivatives trading.

This prototype of the credit market system possibly became a hotbed of the free market economic idea, which prepared the introduction of the Western theory of economics later.

The government suppressed innovations in technology, especially in weapons and transportation, due to their potential threat to the regime.

The building of the big ships was prohibited. Production and possession of firearms were strictly monitored. Even the use of wheeled vehicles was restricted.

The Tokugawa state viewed the uncontrolled development of technology as detrimental to the ruling authority.

To sum up, the Tokugawa shogunate regime was a totalitarian state with the deterrence of

innovation and social mobility but leaving the market activities free.

Overhaul of the whole system had never been attempted for two hundred and fifty years.

Although the system maintained the overwhelming power for such a long time, it collapsed only within a short time after 1860.

Section 2: Japanese Society at the Beginning of Westernization

The Meiji Revolution (generally called the Meiji Restoration) in 1868 remains a controversial topic among historians because it is difficult to decide whether it was indeed a revolution.

The dissolution process of the Tokugawa shogunate was so rapid, and the transfer of power from Tokugawa to the new government force took place relatively smoothly without a significant armed clash.

A brief outline could be given: The United States and other Western countries requested the Tokugawa government to open the country.

The Tokugawa government had little choice but to make concessions facing the overwhelmingly superior military force of the Western powers.

At the same time, the Tokugawa government promoted introducing Western-style military technologies and skills with a vision for catching up with the Western powers.

The southwestern domain lords attempted to take advantage of Tokugawa rule's weakening and gain their influence on the national politics and foreign policies.

These reformist domains demanded the Tokugawa shogunate to give up the despotic power and cooperate with other domains to form a federation-like state under the Emperor.

At the same time, the reformist domains insisted on “expelling barbarians” and rejection of the requests from the Western powers.

Military tension between pro-Tokugawa and anti-Tokugawa camps was heightened due to this conflict of foreign policy.

After twists and turns, the new government under the name of Emperor was finally established.

Ironically, once the southwestern domains overthrew the Tokugawa shogunate, their new government openly promoted trades with the Western countries and the introduction of Western technologies and skills, not only in the military sphere but also in the broad range of things.

A new type of intellectuals emerged during this time of crisis.

Many of them started their career as translators of Western documents in service for the Tokugawa shogunate.

The only Western language officially admitted to learn had been Dutch because the Netherlands had held the trading right exclusively among Western countries under the shogunate's permission since the early seventeenth century.

But after the treaties between Tokugawa shogun and Western countries were concluded, ambitious young samurai students began to learn English, French, and German.

The Tokugawa government founded a new department for treating the documents in Western languages and hired these young students.

Some of them captured opportunities to visit Western countries.

The new Meiji government (Meiji is the name of the new imperial era) actively hired experts in Western languages, most of whom used to be Tokugawa vassals.

You may note that loyalty was not such a serious issue there.

I am giving here a few prominent examples.

Nishi Amane was dispatched to Leiden, the Netherlands, by the Tokugawa government to study Western science.

He introduced Western philosophy, law and economics.

Also, he taught French to the last shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu.

After the Meiji Revolution, he took the post in the new Meiji government and drafted the Imperial Rescript to soldiers and sailors of the new army and navy.

Kato Hiroyuki, who had no experience visiting foreign countries, mastered the German language and studied German law.

He used to be an instructor at the Dutch research institute of the Tokugawa government but later became the president of the University of Tokyo, the first modern university chartered by the Meiji government.

Fukuzawa Yukichi had opportunities to visit Europe and the United States three times as a member of the missions of the Tokugawa shogunate.

He was an official translator of diplomatic documents in the Tokugawa government.

After the Meiji Revolution, the new government offered a post to Fukuzawa, which he rejected.

He established a private school of Western studies, *Keio gijuku*, where economics and other Western sciences were taught.

Keio gijuku have produced many business leaders and journalists.

Section 3:Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901): Liberalism, Patriotism, and Modernization

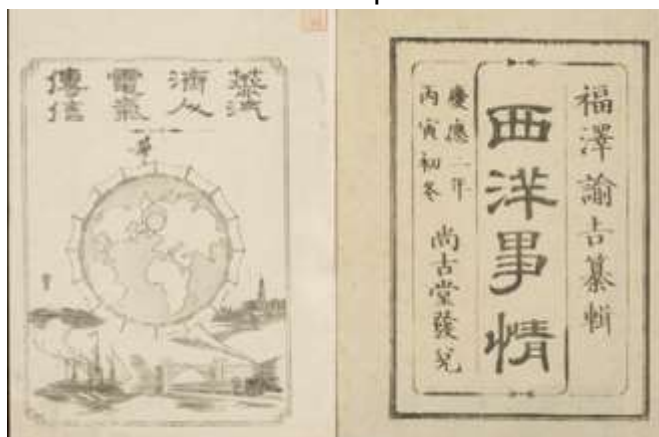
Let me focus on Fukuzawa Yukichi.

Fukuzawa was dispatched to the Western countries as a member of the Tokugawa envoys three times from 1859 to 1867.

He introduced many important Western concepts such as liberty, rights, economic competition, and civilisation.

Fukuzawa's political and economic works contributed to the diffusion of Japanese translations of these terms.

Please have a look at the picture.



This is the front page of the book he published soon after returning from Europe. This is a groundbreaking book that introduced not only technology but also the political and social systems of Western countries.

As the picture shows, the steam engine, electricity, and telegraph are the prominent symbols of the Western “civilisation” (It reads: “Steam engine helps people, electricity transfers news”).

In probing the historical process of the development of the Western countries, Fukuzawa focused on the progressive spirit of citizens, high social mobility, and efficiency of communication as the indispensable elements of civilisation.

He threw scathing criticism, in contrast, against the condition of the Eastern countries, including Japan, where authoritarianism dominated and rulers neglected or rather held hostility against the civic initiatives.

He earnestly studied the works of liberal philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, François Guizot, and Alexis de Tocqueville, which provided a theoretical foundation of his argument on Japan’s future goal.

Fukuzawa was a nationalist (he called it “patriotism”) in the sense that he advocated the national autonomy and independence of Japan, politically and economically, from the interference of the Western powers.

At the same time, he insisted on the importance of autonomous spirit of every citizen as an individual, and the need for education to foster this spirit.

In his book *Encouragement of Learning*, which was one of the biggest selling books in 1870s, he quoted the United States Declaration of Independence, school textbooks of economics used in Britain and the United States, and even a Chinese classic *Mencius*, to maintain that education, individual liberty, political participation and national independence were inextricably linked with each other.

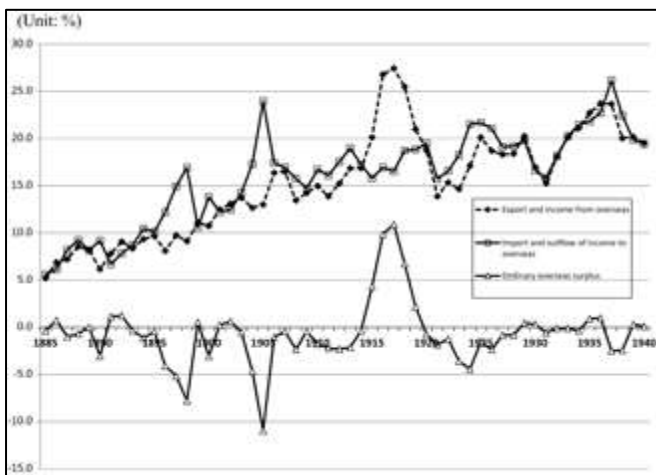
Fukuzawa stressed that intellectual diligence must be more difficult than physical one but essential to attain the independence of individual and of the nation.

Section 4: Yoshino Sakuzo (1878 – 1933): Democracy, Industrialisation, and Social Problem

Let us move on to the twentieth century.

The Meiji government set industrialisation with adopting the Western technology as a national project.

The result of this project emerged around the beginning of the twentieth century, about the time of the First World War.



As shown in the chart here, the export and income from overseas rose steeply during this period.

As a result of the development of industrialisation and urban economy, the share of the employee in agriculture fell below 50 per cent around 1920.

Behind the rapid industrialisation, the poor condition of housing, sanitation, and labour of urban workers, the poverty of farmers, and expanding income disparity became severe issues.

The term “social problem” and “working class” emerged around this time.

Let me focus on one of the opinion leaders of the democratic movement of this time.

Yoshino Sakuzo was a professor of political science at Tokyo Imperial University and known as an earnest advocator of democracy.

He published articles on parliamentary democracy, election reform and class issues on periodicals based on his up-to-date knowledge about the social thought and movement in Europe.

Eventually, he resigned his post at the university and became a full-time editorial writer of Asahi Shimbun, a nationwide Japanese daily newspaper.

Though some radical socialists emerging at this period criticised his arguments as lukewarm, Yoshino maintained that democratic reform would be feasible within the existing framework of constitutional monarchy.

He supported people's demonstration calling for universal suffrage as a lawful demand that met the need of the times.

Also, he was an ardent supporter, financially and morally, of students from Korea and China.

He hoped those students would contribute to the modernisation of their home countries as the new generation of intellectual and political leaders.

While he criticised the Japanese colonisation policy, his argument did not go far to insist on overturning the whole Japanese political and colonial system.

From my point of view, one of the most important contributions made by Yoshino was introducing the sociological aspect into political science.

At that time, political science was regarded as a sub-division of the study of governmental institution and function, or in the German word, *Staatswissenschaft*.

He stressed the need for taking social change into account as a critical element of the study of politics.

Also, his activities in media opened the way for a university professor to engage publicly in political debates.

However, the government restricted the political activities of professors of national universities.

Criticising the government's policy carried considerable risk.

It was not until the end of World War II that intellectuals obtained the freedom to criticise the

government or the whole political regime openly.

Section 5: Maruyama Masao (1914-1996): Psychopathology of Japanese Nationalism

The defeat of Japan in World War II made a tremendous impact on Japanese intellectuals, but the postwar democratisation created unprecedented freedom of political activity and debates.

Maruyama Masao started his academic career just before World War II broke out, with a groundbreaking analysis of the early modern Japanese philosophy by introducing the German method of history of ideas.

He became the first professor of Japanese political thought at the University of Tokyo. After the war, he began to publish insightful critical essays on the political structure of the modern Japanese state and society from the Meiji Revolution to the fall of the wartime regime.

One of the most well-known essays was titled “The Logic and Psychology of Ultrationalism”. He scrutinised the psychological mechanism of what he called “ultra-nationalism” commonly shared by Japanese wartime leaders and common people. His analysis was rather based on an intuitive judgement than scientific research.

But the vital key phrases and thorough clarity of his writing based on his deep knowledge of European social science and philosophy achieved acclaim as a new leader of post-war intellectuals.

Even today, his essays are often adopted as required readings in a political science course.

Maruyama focused on an idiosyncratic attitude of Japanese wartime leaders and common people.

He pointed the strange lack of senses of responsibility and determination regarding political issues as a salient collective mindset of Japanese people.

The wartime national mobilisation and militaristic imperialism were carried out without having any determined leaders or civil supporters.

Even the Emperor was not regarded as the final decision-maker.

Even the passionate advocates and supporters of militarism and imperialism during the war seem not to think their conduct stood on their responsibility and decision.

Everyone remarked that there was no other option under the given circumstances.

Maruyama did not judge it as a simple evasion of responsibility, but he detected a psychological truth in their attitudes motivated by cultural and historical background, which he named the “system of irresponsibility”.

We can sense that the system of irresponsibility is still working in the government or private corporations. Perhaps you may have seen that, if their misconducts or misjudgments were accused, Japanese leaders would apologise for “causing anxiety”, but no one would identify who should be responsible nor who made a decision.

In this sense, Maruyama’s analysis may not be scientifically evidenced enough but still contains some truths.

Maruyama supported the protests by students and citizens against the US-Japan Security Treaty in 1960, but he was not sympathetic to the radical student movement in the late 1960s, and he took early retirement from the University of Tokyo after the student protestors vandalised his office.

Section 6: Conclusions and Implications

Viewed from a historical perspective, taking an intellectual as a valued social role and status was an imported idea from outside Japan.

The period when Japanese political power and society acknowledged the value of intellectuals and recognised their authority of knowledge spanned only approximately between 1868 to 1968.

It was the period when many Western things, such as political institutions, economic systems, and industrial technology, were earnestly studied and introduced.

At the same time, it was the time of national development and expansionism, at least until 1945.

Japan engaged in wars almost every ten years.

The population and GDP grew significantly.

Japan gave up using military force to advance national interests after the catastrophic defeat in World War II and began to devote all, or most of the national resources to economic and social development.

The standard of education for ordinary people drastically improved.

However, curious to say, the interest in higher intellectual training for the political or business leaders moved away from the main policy arena.

Compared to the countries with a high living standard, you will find those holders of PhD or MA, lawyers, or other qualified professionals among politicians, bureaucrats, and business leaders markedly few in Japan.

Please see the chart.

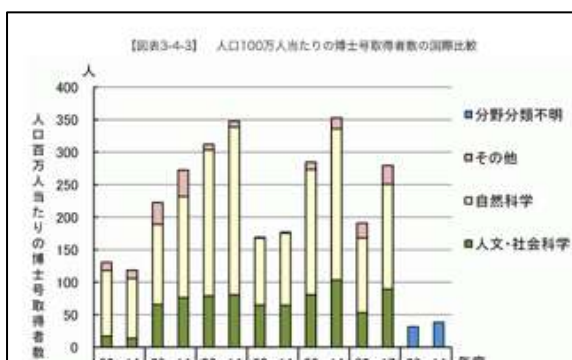
The ratio of PhD holders in executives and researchers in Japanese companies is quite low.



The economic growth and the spread of education enhanced the living conditions, improved social mobility and consolidated democratic values.

However, on the other hand, high intellectual achievement has been underestimated in post-war Japan.

Please see the chart here.



In the twenty-first century, Japanese PhD holders began to decrease, and you would expect less chance in the Japanese job market if you earned a PhD.

Japan undoubtedly failed in fostering innovative and highly cultured social leaders or enhancing the sense of individual responsibility in decision making, which Fukuzawa, Yoshino and Maruyama expected to achieve as the fruit of the modernisation of Japan.

Also, this may be partly a reason why Japanese women are almost excluded at the executive level both in public and private organisations.

Is this a chronic and cultural flaw, which has been neglected for a long time in the rapid modernisation process, or is this an unfortunate by-product of the success?

That's my talk. Thank you for your attention.

Section 7: Open Discussion

(Narration)

For this lecture, we specially invited these five participants.

Researchers from various countries, who all share an interest in Japan's modernisation.

Their majors range from international relations to business administration, and they study in grad schools and research institutes in Japan.

Now, here is the open discussion with the researchers.

(Prof. Matsuda)

How did you find my lecture? Or what did you find in my lecture that could be a kind of useful or inspiring, the issues or topics you may see in your own country?

(Houmlack)

The first point that I've found it interesting, inspiring for my country is, the first thing is, the Japanese culture puts more emphasis on the importance or the significance of the intellectuals, whereas in my country we still haven't got to this position yet.

So we need more time to cultivate our human resources so that we have more intellectuals to help to frame, the policy-making for the government.

(Nikolay)

I think in Russia, like in Japan, the topic of modernisation has been very salient.

The topic of great reforms, pushing the country forward, after some time of period of stagnation in the history.

And certainly Russia's relationship with the idea of the West, with the idea of the Western countries, is also quite special, similar to Japan.

Russia is a country that has elements of West and European but also has the elements that considers Eurasian or Asian.

So there always has been a debate for intellectual, like where does Russia belong?

(Dorothy)

I learned that Japan and the Philippines, my country, have a lot of similarities.

Most of our intellectuals, even our national hero was educated in the West, and they brought liberal ideas to my country.

And from there, we can see the value of adopting these modern or this Western ideas and technologies and applying them to national issues in solving national problems.

(Nicole) I have two or three questions.

(Prof. Matsuda) Yes. Please.

(Nicole)

When you explained about the fact that at the point, the system in Japan was like a family-inherited business, and it was only for that family, like they cannot change (jobs).

Even someone treated this part like a kind of system is like every person was contained in a small box.

(Prof. Matsuda) Yes.

(Nicole)

So I was wondering how they were able to change?

Because I think understanding better about this could even help people in knowing how to go from a situation to a new one.

(Prof. Matsuda)

I would say it's one of the very critical questions.

Officially, the Meiji government declared that now you are free to choose your occupation or where to live.

You don't have to stay in that small compartment of assigned occupations.

So officially and legally, the government declared that now you are free.

On the other hand, say, one of the elements that we should note is that even in Tokugawa times, it's not usual, but there still was a way to go out of your assigned occupation or assigned residential places. So one way was to become an adopted child of another family, not many, but it's not difficult to find a case that some samurai family was adopting a child originally from a farmer's family. So, even in those days, there was a way to get out of those systems' formal format silently.

On the other hand, the most significant change happened in 1868.

The new government declared that now it's over, so you have to choose.

Then the competition started. Then, as I slightly mentioned, education was a key element.

(Edem)

At the beginning of your lecture, you talked about the families and how they affected your career.

I was wondering, does it have any lingering effects on Japanese today?

(Prof. Matsuda)

In Japanese cases, when they talk about their ie or kagyo or kashoku, they try to stick to it. They don't want to change that even if it's not profitable enough. That way of thinking is quite interesting because, for that family, they try to stick to the profession or business as a kind of business corporation or business body, rather than family ties.

(Nicole)

The world is producing more PhDs than ever. And for me, I want to get a PhD. So, I'm kind of thinking, do you think the solution is to stop PhD? Or rather to adapt and try to make it more useful for society?

(Prof. Matsuda)

I got a PhD. In Japan and anywhere in the world, getting into the academic world is very difficult and competitive. But I never regretted getting a PhD. I truly believe that education and knowledge are robust that you can use anywhere, out of your context. That's a more critical power you can get, rather than just earning money or getting into a better business.

(Prof. Matsuda)

Once again, thank you very much for participating in this very inspiring discussion. Thank you very much once again.