

Carrying the Burden of Tradition : Considering Discrepancy between History and Historical Practice through the Case Studies of Japanese College Ouendan

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Carrying the Burden of Tradition: Considering Discrepancy between History and Historical Practice through the Case Studies of Japanese College *Ouendan*

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1. Introduction

1.1 History and Historical Practice

In this paper, I will approach the topic of historical memory and media from the case of a Japanese *ouendan*, a cheering party. The *ouendan* taken up in this paper are groups that carry out extracurricular activities in Japanese universities. They do everything from cheering their college teams in intercollege sports events to helping out at university events such as entrance ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, and homecomings, to even organising school festivals. Extra-curricular activities groups are often classified into two subcategories in Japan: athletic associations and non-athletic associations. In the case of *ouendans*, partly due to their activities, they are often classified as athletic associations. However, they are sometimes classified as independent circles.

The image of the Japanese cheering party is inseparable from *bankara*. This term refers to a rough and uncouth look or style (Watanabe, Skrzypczak, and Snowden 2003: 2148). The typical style of a *bankara* student is imagined as follows: wearing unique or out-of-date outfits such as *hakama*, cocoons, high clogs, or school uniforms that are not common in today's college life (Figure 1), uttering unique greetings such as 'os' (yes) and 'gottsuan-desu' which means 'thanks' after a meal, and *enbu*, invented ritualistic performances carried out on various occasions such as public ceremonies or intercollege conventions.

The reason for paying attention to these peculiar groups is that we can gain some insights into cultural performance in the context of Japanese history. They are considered to be successors to and maintainers of Japanese traditions in modern Japan. In some cases, they are associated with a conservative, right-wing image by some people (e.g., Graewe 2002; 2003). In fact, the origin of the unique style of *ouendan* described above is inherited from the traditions of student life during the Meiji period. However, based on the year of their formal recognition, they cannot be said to be particularly old organisations.

What I would like to highlight in this paper is the relationship between history and historical practice by examining various cases of *ouendans*. This is not only because



Figure 1 Cheering scene of the Fifth High School *ouendan* at the Boat Race. Man on dram is wearing *hakama* costume. (Memorial Museum of Fifth High School, 1939, reference number 84-37-3)

ouendans are a kind of organisation which remind the average Japanese of pre-war student lifestyles but also because current *ouendan* members inherit some cultural items which relate to historical roots, sometimes dating back to the Meiji or Taisho period. In his famous historical study on Australian aborigines, Minoru Hokari, once wrote, ‘historical practice can be possible only through the interaction between the living world and yourself: history happens in-between body and place’ (Hokari 2011: 110–111). In this sense, he discusses a kind of history that is ‘always situated in time and space’ (Hokari 2011: 111). Thus, an *ouendan* serves as a good case study to investigate history in this volume. This paper examines this dynamism in the case of Japanese *ouendans* and clarifies the use of embodied history in modern societies.

1.2 The Case of Japanese *Ouendan*

I would like to organise the terms before starting the discussion in this paper. I have used the term *ouendan*, a cheering party, to describe Japanese cheerleading groups. However, referring to the Japanese-English dictionary, translating *ouendan* into English is not a straightforward affair. For example, according to various dictionaries, an *ouendan* is a ‘supporting party,’ a ‘cheering party’ (Saito 1979[1928]: 689), a ‘cheerleading club’ (Watanabe, Skrzypczak, and Snowden 2003: 346). Some other dictionaries add another definition along with them such as a ‘cheering squad’ (Kojima, Takebayashi, and Nakao 1996: 185), a ‘rooter,’ as a usage of American English (Kondo and Takano 2002: 217).

What makes matters more complicated is that simply using the term cheering party in this paper written in English will cause confusion. This is because the Japanese cheering party has reached its current composition through a peculiar history. Cheering parties are often divided into various sections. Typically, they have three subsections: the leader, cheerleader, and wind orchestra sections (Kato 2017).¹ In this context, the leader section is the successor of the prototype organisation from the Meiji era that gave rise to modern day cheering parties. This section, consisting mostly of men, corresponds to a Japanese public image of an *ouendan*, a cheering party.

On the other hand, when we use ‘*cheerleader*’ in the Japanese context, it generally indicates a group that is usually made up of women, regardless of whether it is a cheerleader section of an *ouendan* or an independent cheerleading circle.²⁾ Therefore, we adopt the following terms in this paper. As a general term indicating a Japanese cheering party, *ouendan* is used. For describing the sections or divisions of an *ouendan*, leader section, cheerleader section, and wind orchestra section will be used. In the case of a cheerleader circle or wind orchestra circle that is separate from the *ouendan*, it will be specified as an independent circle.

In addition, the term ‘cheerleader’ in the United States seems to refer to cheering parties or cheering squads. On the other hand, the term ‘cheering group’ seems to be more prevalent when examining the homepage of Japanese *ouendans*. This may be due to the author’s biased impression, as no quantitative or exhaustive survey has been conducted. However, if this is a valid observation, this is an interesting point. I am even tempted to point out that this choice of a word may consciously or unconsciously reflect the image of permanence of the Japanese *ouendan*.

In the next section, we will organise information based on data from the official establishment year of the *ouendan*. According to the institutional classification of Japanese universities in the order of national, public, and private, each trend and characteristic will be provided. In Section 3, we analyse the history-conscious activities of active *ouendan* members from the perspective of historical practice. Finally, I will discuss history and historical practice from the perspectives of both sides.

2. When Were the Japanese *Ouendans* Established?³⁾

2.1 National Universities

As of 2017, there were 86 national universities in Japan,⁴⁾ and 32 (37.2%) had an extra-curricular circle equivalent to an *ouendan* or an independent cheerleading circle. Counting only the number of national universities that have *ouendans* with leader sections, there are 17 (19.8%). The left column of Table 1 shows the numbers of *ouendans* whose establishment dates are known, at 16 universities. The table also includes information on the year of establishment of *ouendans* that are no longer active.

Among the *ouendans* established during the 1940s, the University of Tokyo was the first, establishing its *ouendan* in 1947 (Niwa 2018: 211). In Table 1, we can see that *ouendans* spread widely among national universities after the Second World War. These data do not include the pre-war imperial universities, which were the predecessors of the current national universities, or Old High School (*Kyūsei Kōkō*) and Old Technical College (*Kyūsei Senmon Gakkō*) (hereinafter referred to as old high schools).

Even though the image of cheering activities of the old high schools with a characteristic style called *bankara* is still widely held by the general public in Japan, they are not generally related to the current cheering parties in terms of genealogy. Not including them in the *ouendan* history of national universities is not based on the author’s arbitrary choice. As a matter of fact, if we examine the various commemorative journals, annual journals, website information, etc. that are independently made by each

ouendan and the alumni associations, they seldom mention the former *ouendans* in the pre-war period. Regarding *ouendans* at old high schools, although there are mentions about the succession of specific items such as cheering songs and *enbu*, traditional dances,⁵⁾ it is hard to say that these old organisations are directly connected to the current cheering parties. This is in line with the fact that the *ouendans* have a custom of calling their current leader by the sequence of succession (such as the 5th leader of the *ouendan*) but this sequence does not take into account the leaders from the pre-war era.

An exception is the universities in Hokkaido. As illustrated in the left column of Table 1, Hokkaido University and Otaru University of Commerce reported that their *ouendans* originated during the 1900s and the 1910s, respectively. Looking at the history of the *ouendan* by the alumni of the Hokkaido University *ouendan*, the origins of the group can be traced back to one of the preparatory courses in the pre-war era. The first set of rules for *ouendan* was drafted in 1927 (Taniguchi 1978: 11). In addition, the number of pre-war leaders is counted, and members are aware of the number of current leaders (Kimura 2009). The table of “successive leaders” began in 1918 (Taniguchi 1978: 110–111). A similar feature can be observed in the *ouendan* of the Otaru University of Commerce, where the leader of 2017 was the 103rd.⁶⁾ As described in the homepage, organised presumably by alumni members, the latter *ouendan* might recognise the 1912 cheering battle with that of Hokkaido University as the starting point of organisational traditions.⁷⁾

However, we should not rush to the conclusion that each university’s *ouendan* was founded in the years that have been specified in the table below. It would be a more accurate to say that other kinds of cheering activities and more earlier types of cheering organisations had existed prior to the current *ouendan*. That being said, identifying groups that current *ouendans* can directly trace their origins to is a different story. In

Table 1 Numbers of *ouendan* ordered by period of establishment

	national	public	private
1900s	1		1
1910s	1		
1920s			3
1930s			4
1940s	1		9
1950s	2	2	10
1960s	6	5	18
1970s	1		2
1980s	3		4
1990s	1		3
2000s			2
2010s		2	3

(made by author)

fact, some private university *ouendans* hold that earlier forms of cheering parties are not their origin, but their predecessors. Even Hokkaido University clearly declares the temporal disruption from the past: the abolition of its *ouendan* due to the Second World War, and the resurgence and reorganisation under the new university system in post-war Japan (Taniguchi 1978: 35–39; 46).

To understand the background of these differences, it is necessary to examine the history of the establishment of each university and its *ouendan* in detail. One thing that I can say with certainty is that old high schools were the predecessors of the current university liberal arts departments, but they were not necessarily part of the imperial universities. For example, students from the former Third High School, a predecessor of the liberal arts department of Kyoto University, could go on to study at the Tokyo Imperial University.

2.2 Public Universities

As of 2017, there were 88 public universities in Japan.⁸⁾ Among them 18 public universities (20.5%) had an extra-curricular circle equivalent to an *ouendan* or an independent cheerleading circle. Counting only the number of public universities with leader sections, there were nine (10.2%).

The central column of Table 1 shows the number of *ouendans* whose year of establishment is known. It should be noted that when the founding year could not be obtained, but the resurrection year was obtained, the latter was entered into the table. Regarding public university *ouendans*, there was less information available for reference than national and private universities.

An important point in this paper that considers historical practice is that public universities are relatively new. As shown in Table 2, some *ouendans* were established in the late 1950s, but we must bear in mind the fact that there were only 34 public universities around that time. The number of public universities increased rapidly from the 1990s, and by the 2010s, exceeded 90, about three times the number in the 1950s.⁹⁾

2.3 Private Universities

As of 2017, there were 605 private universities in Japan.¹⁰⁾ Among them 188 private universities (31.0%) had an extra-curricular circle equivalent to an *ouendan* or an independent cheerleading circle. Counting only the number of private universities with leader sections, there were 64 (10.6%).

The right column of Table 1 shows the number of *ouendans* of 58 universities whose founding dates are known, which includes data of those are not currently active but whose foundation years are known. In addition, it does not include data for Senshu University because the year of establishment is not clear. According to the official website of the university,¹¹⁾ it was established in the Taisho era; thus, it would be included in either the 1910s or the 1920s. For the same reason, Musashi University was not included. It was established in the Showa 30s, and would therefore be included either in the late 1950s or the early 1960s (Niwa 2018: 225; 258). The past *ouendans* of Komazawa University and Nihon University are treated as separate organisations from

those that are currently active (Niwa 2018: 222; 225), so they are also not included in the table. If they are added, the former will be in the 1920s and the latter in the 1950s.

When founding year could not be identified, but the resurrection year was known, the latter was entered into the table. Of the nine *ouendans* established in the 1940s, three were established before the Second World War: Waseda University (1940), Kokugakuin University (1941), and Kinki University (1941) (Niwa 2018: 221; 227; 232). Clearly, there were many other university *ouendans* in the past, but I have not included the ones on which I could not find concrete evidence.

The total number of private university *ouendans* is overwhelmingly larger than the combined number for national and public universities. However, there was not much difference in terms of percentages. 37.2 percent and 31.0 percent of national and private universities respectively have *ouendans* with leader sections. The situation is different when solely considering the leader sections of *ouendans*, which are equivalent to the so-called Japanese cheering parties, the *ouendans*. Only 10.6 percent of private universities had *ouendans* with leader sections.

3. Cheering as a Historical Practice

3.1 *Ouendan's* Activities as a Historical Practice

In the previous section, we examined the origin of *ouendans* from public records. All the information about the years of establishment has been collected by examining public discourses about the university *ouendan* provided by the *ouendans* themselves or by the universities they belong to. In this sense, these discourses can be said to reflect the historical consciousness of the current members of the *ouendans* in each university. It can be seen that the prototype of the *ouendan* emerged in old high schools and private universities during the Meiji era, and it became common with the popularisation of universities after the war. What does this history mean from the perspective of the active members? I would like to examine this question from the viewpoint of historical practice.¹²⁾

Current *ouendans* play a wide range of roles. Their roles are not limited to cheering their teams in intercollege sports matches. They are sometimes given the special roles of performing dances and leading school songs during public events such as university entrance ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, and homecomings. Although they are just one of the students' associations in universities, they are supposed to perform these in a public context. This exceptional status may be partly attributed to their historically ancient origin at each university. As a matter of fact, among the many dances and songs that they have inherited is *ryoka*, a kind of song with a unique performance, mostly created by students when current universities used to be higher educational institutes before the post-war reorganisation. During the performance, they wear traditional costumes such as *hakama* and *geta* (Japanese clogs), which are rarely seen in modern times, and showcase how student life was in the past with the unique characteristics of each university (Figure 2).

Furthermore, historical consciousness is expressed through historical practices. In



Figure 2 *Sennari* gourd used as a feature of the *ouendan* (Kansai University Archives Section 1951)

mutual exchanges such as *enbukai*¹³⁾ and intercollege competitions¹⁴⁾ of sports or concerts, *ouendan* members introduce themselves by the sequence of succession from the first *ouendan*, along with their university name. By introducing and presenting themselves in this way, they are always reminding themselves and reconstituting the self that is inherited through generations. Compared to other university circles, this historical consciousness seems to be distinctive. The number of university students might be conscious of what year a circle was established in or what the year of the current team is; however, there are not many circles that are conscious of the generations that preceded them and the generation of the current team.

The songs of the *ouendans* of the former imperial university (now national university) are case in point. As already mentioned, all of these *ouendans* were established after the Second World War. On the other hand, if one examines the years of production of the songs inherited by each cheering party, one can find a mixture of old songs. Among their songs, *ouendans* of the University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, Nagoya University, and Osaka University list dormitory songs from the days when they were old high schools. Furthermore, the *ouendan* songs of Hokkaido University were created between 1909 and 1938. Except for Hokkaido University, all these songs used by the *ouendans* of the aforementioned universities pre-date their year of establishment.

In recent years, with the decrease in *ouendan* members, it has become common for members of the cheerleader section or the wind orchestra section to take the lead of the *ouendan* instead of a member from the leader section. However, even in such cases, the inheritance and maintenance of the historical practices of the *ouendan* to demonstrate the continuity between the past and present is preserved.

The important point is the gap between public records and practice. In the previous

section, the year of the establishment each *ouendan* formally recognises, and their historical trends are organised through investigation, mostly using records written by the *ouendan* and its members. On the other hand, some of the historical practices of the *ouendan* can be clearly traced back beyond their official origins based on their year of foundation. *Enbu*, cheering songs, and student songs are cases in point. These performances are inherited by the *ouendans* through generations. Although most members of *ouendans* are not necessarily able to identify when and how *ouendans* inherited these cultural practices, they are quite aware of their relatively ancient origin.

This can be clearly seen in the format of the *danshi*, a group magazine. The *danshi* is a booklet published every year by the *ouendan* to recruit new students. Each *danshi* is different in content, but they all have a similar format to some extent. Usually, a *danshi* contains forewords or prefaces from university officials, such as directors and university presidents, congratulatory messages from the heads of other university *ouendans*, and various old songs inherited by the *ouendan*. Another conspicuous point is that it states the goal for the year. Therefore, in addition to information about current activities and the annual schedule, which is probably the most important information for freshmen, these kinds of historical weights are added to the composition.¹⁵⁾

The gap between the formal founding year and historical practices may be one of the reasons why it is difficult to clarify when the *ouendan* was established.

3.2 Cheerleading in Japanese Context

The *ouendans* at the time of establishment were all solely made up of male members as higher education in those days was open almost exclusively to male students. One of the biggest changes in the history of *ouendans* is gender composition. Since the 1970s,¹⁶⁾ the cheerleader section, made up of female students, has gradually become commonplace in university *ouendans*. Nowadays, due to the decrease in the number of leader sections and the increase in the number of cheerleader sections, it is not uncommon for women to outnumber men when counting the membership of the entire *ouendan*. Furthermore, even cases where a woman has become a member of the leader section are now becoming common.

There is no doubt that the number of cheerleading circles in Japanese universities is increasing. However, it is important to note whether this increase is due to an increase in the cheerleader sections of *ouendans* or an increase in independent cheerleading circles. When you add the data (Niwa 2020) found in the subsequent survey to a previously published paper (Niwa 2018), you can see the number of cheerleading circles in Japan in Table 2.

Table 2 Numbers of cheerleading in universities

	cheerleader section of <i>ouendan</i>	indepent cheerleading circle
national	11	20
public	9	7
private	50	158

(made by author)

In Table 2, the cheerleader section of *ouendans* and independent cheerleading circles are counted separately. Except for public universities,¹⁷⁾ there appears to be a preference for more independent cheerleading circles. This is because an *ouendan* is supposed to represent its university, so one *ouendan* is set up in one university, whereas several independent cheerleading circles can be set up depending on students' demands. Furthermore, although collectively referred to as independent cheerleading circles in this paper, the increase in their number is partly due to the inclusion of widely related, sometimes inseparable circles such as competitive cheerleading, cheer dancing, song leading, baton twirling, and so on. Considering these in Table 2, we can see that the demand for various forms of independent cheerleading is high.

Next, I would like to arrange those cheerleading circles whose year of establishment is known, in chronological order. The result of this exercise is presented in Table 3. Regardless of the type of university, we can see that the cheerleader section of *ouendans* is generally older than independent cheerleading circles. To supplement the column of *ouendan* at private universities, Seijo University, Chuo University, and Meijo University are listed in the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000s, respectively. However, the baton twirling circles, which are the predecessors of the cheerleading circles, were founded in 1964, 1967, and 1970, respectively; if you count them here, the year of establishment is even older (Niwa 2018: 223; 229).

In the Japanese context, it is self-evident that *ouendan* and 'cheerleader' in Japanese are entirely different entities. However, in the English context, they become the same: a cheerleading circle. It is true that independent cheerleading circles gradually tend to specialise in intercollege, or sometimes international competitions, regardless of whether they fall in the category of cheerleading, cheer dancing, or song leading. At the same time, it is also true that these various types of cheerleading circles may come across occasions where they are asked to cheer a team in some sporting event.

What is the difference between the so-called traditional *ouendan* leader section and an independent cheerleading circle? Once seen as male *ouendans* and female cheerleaders, the difference in gender composition is now being diluted. In my opinion, the most salient distinguishing feature is historical consciousness. When independent cheerleading circles are asked to cheer in events such as an intercollege sports game and

Table 3 Numbers of cheerleading circles ordered by period of establishment

	national		public		private	
	<i>ouendan</i>	independent	<i>ouendan</i>	independent	<i>ouendan</i>	independent
1960s					6	
1970s	2				5	1
1980s	2	2			10	9
1990s	2	3	2		3	34
2000s	3	6		4	3	21
2010s		2	2	2	1	17

(made by author)

so on, they may be conscious of representing a university, but probably not of carrying the burden of tradition of a university or a circle. This seems to be different from the cheerleader section or wind orchestra section of *ouendans* that take the place of the leader section. This is because if they participate in these activities as *ouendan*, they cannot help but be involved in historically conscious activities. In contrast, independent cheerleading circles tend to be free of such historical consciousness.

Recently, most cheerleading circles have been born out of students' voluntary requests. As I noticed when organising the data in the paper (Niwa 2018) and its subsequent addition (Niwa 2020), though many cheerleading circles have been created, many have soon ceased to exist. When new cheerleading circles are established, they rarely inherit any part of other older cheerleading groups. This may suggest that circle members have no awareness of carrying a burden of tradition but are eager to join cheerleading circles and do physical activities.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have examined the issues of history and historical consciousness through an analysis of *ouendans*. The specific target was university *ouendans* that are often regarded as traditional organisations in Japan today. The following points have emerged from the analysis carried out in this study. First, the organisation that became the basis of the *ouendan* was born with the introduction of physical education in Japan around the beginning of the Meiji era. Second, an *ouendan* that is officially recognised by its respective university and can be recognised genealogically as a present-day *ouendan* was born around the 1930s. Third, many current *ouendans* are post-war establishments.

These points on the origins of *ouendans* can be seen from an analysis of public records and descriptions provided by the *ouendans* themselves. On the other hand, when analysing from the viewpoint the historical practices of the current *ouendans*, we found a different situation. Of the dances and songs that active *ouendan* members perform, there are certainly ones whose origins can be traced back to older times, times pre-dating the *ouendans*' official year of establishment. In addition, several *ouendan* performances involve a variety of historical costumes that ordinary students have almost no chance to wear. As such, *ouendan* members themselves are clearly aware that they are re-enacting their continuity with the past.

The discrepancy between recorded history and historical practice can explain, to some extent, the ambiguity surrounding the image of *ouendans* in Japan today. The *ouendan* generally has an old image, which outside observers might associate with conservative organisations. However, *ouendans* are not particularly old as per their official establishment years. Focusing on historical practice, the traces of history embodied in the practices of *ouendans* have been inherited from the past beyond their formal founding years. Furthermore, even a newly established *ouendan* tends to reproduce the image of a long-standing *ouendan* through its outfits, old dances and songs, and typical behaviours. After all, there are two histories of the *ouendan*, and they

overlap to form the present.

Notes

- 1) Usually, this typical formation is called *sanbu*, and has three parts. The cheerleader section used to be a baton twirling section and the wind orchestra section used to be a brass band section in their original form.
- 2) In order to categorise it distinctively from Japanese cheering parties or *ouendans*, a Japanese-English term called ‘cheer girls’ has even been created.
- 3) This section uses data from a separate paper on the establishment of a Japanese cheering party (Niwa 2018). However, various numbers have been added and modified based on subsequent research (Niwa 2020), and the text has been revised to match the content of this paper.
- 4) The numbers are from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology website. Retrieved June 17, 2017.
- 5) Literally, *enbu* means to dance and showcase the performance to many people.
- 6) Refer to the website operated by the *ouendan* (<http://otaru-uc-ouendan.com/about/>). Retrieved January 13, 2018. Since the *ouendan* is sometimes inactive, the founding year and the number of generations do not always match.
- 7) This is based on the website of the alumni organisation (<http://endan.s366.xrea.com/index2004.html>). Retrieved May 23, 2017.
- 8) The numbers are from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology website. Retrieved June 17, 2017.
- 9) Refer to ‘Number of Schools’ in ‘9. Universities’ in the ‘Bulletin of Science and Education Statistics (2015)’ (http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/002/002b/1356065.htm). Retrieved January 18, 2018.
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- 11) Its website is <https://www.senshu-u.ac.jp/campuslife/activity/club/>. The year of establishment is taken based on Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nihon_Gakusei_Ouendan_Renmei). Retrieved June 25, 2017.
- 12) The following fieldwork-related data has been obtained from intermittent surveys since the year 2012.
- 13) An intercollege event to show their own *enbu* to the general public including other *ouendans*.
- 14) In Japanese universities, exchange games are often held annually with specific universities. Students are often unaware of when this practice was started, but it is often claimed that this is a long-standing practice. For example, the regular line between Kobe University, Hitotsubashi University and Osaka City University is called Sansho-Sen, a competition between three schools of commerce. This is an example that intercollege sports events are held because these universities have a shared history of being schools of commerce in pre-war era.
- 15) This part is based on the many *danshis* of Kyoto University and Kobe University. However, it is also worth noting that this observation is a characteristic of the publication as an organisation. I am not claiming that the motivation of the individual participants is to carry on

the tradition. In fact, if we refer to the commemorative magazine, which contains comments from all the people involved in the cheering party, we can see that each person finds what interests him or her in the activities. It does not mean that the historical weight is foregrounded (e.g., Tokyo Daigaku Undokai Oenbu Akamon Tesseikai 1997).

- 16) The first appearance of female cheerleaders in Japan begins in the 1960s. It was in the context of intercollege baseball games among six universities based in Tokyo.
- 17) This may be since public universities have fewer cheerleading circles, both in proportion and in real numbers, than national and private universities (Niwa 2018).

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