

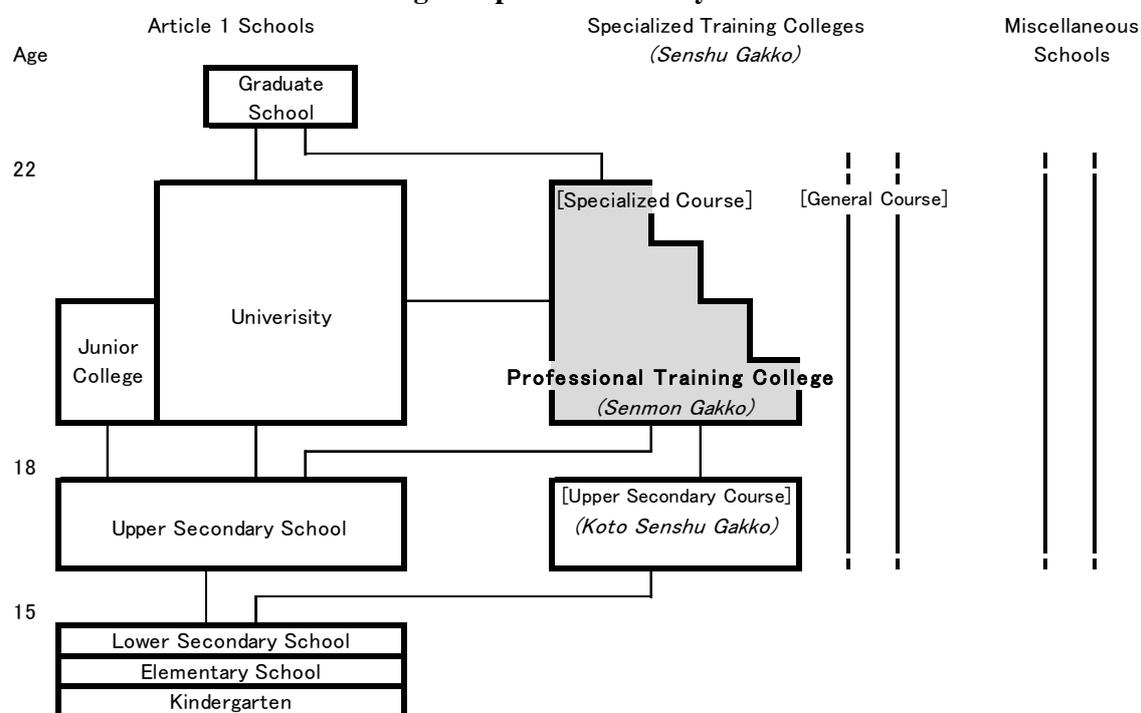
Senmon Gakko (Professional Training Colleges) in Japan

1. Introduction

Japanese schools are roughly classified into the following three categories under the School Education Act (Fig. 1):

- (i) Schools prescribed in Article 1 of said Act (collectively referred to as “Article 1 Schools”): kindergartens, elementary schools, lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools, secondary education schools, schools for special needs education, universities (including junior colleges), and colleges of technology (eight types of schools);
- (ii) *Senshu gakko* (specialized training colleges) prescribed in Article 124 of said Act: education facilities other than Article 1 Schools established with the aim of cultivating abilities required for vocations and daily life or improving culture, including specialized courses targeting graduates of upper secondary schools, upper secondary courses targeting graduates of lower secondary schools, and general courses with no specific entrance requirements (three types of schools); and
- (iii) Miscellaneous schools prescribed in Article 134 of said Act: education facilities other than Article 1 Schools and *senshu gakko* that provide education similar to Article 1 Schools .

Fig. 1 Japanese School System



Note: Article 1 Schools also include secondary education schools, schools for special needs education, and colleges of technology, in addition to those indicated in Fig. 1.

Senmon gakko (professional training colleges) refers to *senshu gakko* falling under category 5B of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) which target graduates of upper secondary schools. Most provide two or three year courses of study.

At present, approximately one out of six upper secondary school graduates goes on to a *senmon gakko*. *Senmon gakko* thus play a significant role, together with universities and junior colleges, in tertiary education in Japan.¹ They are non-degree granting tertiary education facilities with fewer legal regulations when compared with universities and junior colleges categorized as Article 1 Schools.

This paper aims to summarize the history of the *senmon gakko* system from the time of its establishment, its current status, challenges it faces, and its future, thereby clarifying the position of *senmon gakko* and the characteristics of the Japanese school system as a whole.

2. History

(1) Pre-war school system

The 1879 Education Order stipulated the categories of elementary schools, lower secondary schools, universities, teaching schools, *senmon gakko*, and other miscellaneous schools (Article 2).

Senmon gakko were defined as places intended, "...to provide academic knowledge in a single area of specialty," falling under the category of higher education facilities equivalent to current single-department colleges. Therefore, pre-war *senmon gakko* need to be distinguished from current *senmon gakko*, which are characterized as higher education facilities focused on vocational education.

(2) Post-war system for miscellaneous schools

The School Education Act enacted in 1947 simplified the complicated pre-war school system and specified eight types of schools (elementary schools, lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools, universities, kindergartens, schools for the blind, schools for the deaf, and schools for the disabled) as regular schools under the law (Article 1 Schools).²

Separately from the Article 1 School system, the miscellaneous school system was established to provide education similar to Article 1 Schools. Miscellaneous schools under the new system mainly provided vocational education. Schools which provided graduates of lower and upper secondary schools with vocational knowledge and skills and domestic housework-related

knowledge and skills, such as sewing, hairdressing, cooking and typing, became particularly popular.

The number of miscellaneous schools focused on providing vocational education expanded in accordance with Japanese economic growth. From 1948 to 1970, the number of such schools increased from around 1,400 to 8,000 while the number of students increased from around 220,000 to 1,400,000.³

Unlike Article 1 Schools, such as upper secondary schools and universities, miscellaneous schools were not under strict legal regulations concerning years of study, educational curricula, and entrance requirements, etc., and therefore an array of miscellaneous schools were established providing quantitatively and qualitatively diverse courses of study. Free from strict legal regulations and characterized by freedom and flexibility, miscellaneous schools were positioned as alternative education facilities. In the meantime, miscellaneous schools providing education equivalent to that of Article 1 Schools also increased in number and issues arose concerning proper public assistance to such schools and the improvement of graduates' qualifications.

(3) Establishment of the *senmon gakko* system (1976)

The *senmon gakko* system was established as a result of the revision of the School Education Act in July 1975 which entered into force in January 1976. Under this system, conventional miscellaneous schools satisfying the following standards were newly classified as *senmon gakko*.⁴

- (i) Schools providing education in an organized manner with the aim of cultivating abilities required for vocations and daily life or improving culture.
- (ii) Schools providing courses of study of at least one year in length.
- (iii) Schools providing courses of study requiring at least 800 lesson hours per year.
- (iv) Schools whose enrollment never falls below 40 students.
- (v) Schools granting admission only to graduates of upper secondary schools and persons found to have equivalent academic ability.

In this manner, *senmon gakko* became subject to stricter standards than other miscellaneous schools and were positioned as higher education facilities targeting graduates of upper secondary schools. However, the applicable standards were more flexible than those for Article 1 Schools, such as universities and junior colleges, and their nature as alternative education facilities, like other conventional miscellaneous schools, was maintained.

In the latter half of the 1970s, approximately 2,000 miscellaneous schools were converted to *senmon gakko*.⁵

(4) Development of the *senmon gakko* system

Various promotional measures equivalent to those taken for Article 1 Schools have been taken for *senmon gakko* as necessary in accordance with their circumstances, while respecting their nature as free and flexible education facilities similar to conventional miscellaneous schools. Since 1983, national and local governments have been providing financial assistance to school corporations that have founded *senmon gakko*. With the goal of improving the perceived value of *senmon gakko*, a system was introduced in 1995 to grant diplomas for the completion of *senmon gakko* courses of study satisfying the following requirements:

- (i) The course of study is at least two years in length.
- (ii) A total of at least 1,700 lesson hours are required to complete the course of study.
- (iii) Completion of the course of study is certified based on an evaluation of results through examinations, etc.

In response to further upgrades to curricula and the lengthening of courses of study at *senmon gakko*, a new system was introduced in September 2005 to grant advanced diplomas for the completion of *senmon gakko* courses of study satisfying the following requirements:

- (i) The course of study is at least four years in length.
- (ii) A total of at least 3,400 lesson hours are required to complete the course of study.
- (iii) Curricula are organized systematically.
- (iv) Completion of the course of study is certified based on an evaluation of results through examinations, etc.

Persons who have obtained a diploma are permitted to transfer to universities mid-year, and persons who have obtained an advanced diploma are admitted to graduate schools. When persons who have obtained a diploma or an advanced diploma are employed as public officers, they are paid equally to graduates of junior colleges (holders of associate's degrees) or graduates of universities (holders of bachelor's degrees), respectively.

3. Current Status

As of FY2013, 2,812 *senmon gakko* serve 587,500 students (Table 1). More than 90% of them are private institutes. *Senmon gakko* fields of study are classified into eight categories (industry, agriculture, medical care, health, education and social welfare, business practices, apparel and homemaking, and culture and the liberal arts). Large percentages of students study in the fields of medical care and culture and liberal arts, which account for 35% and 18% of the total, respectively.⁶

According to a MEXT survey, approximately 80% of *senmon gakko* graduates find a job and

approximately 90% of these find jobs in fields related to their courses of study. Nearly half of *senmon gakko* instructors have over ten years of business experience prior to becoming instructors, and nearly half of the lessons provided at *senmon gakko* consist of practical training at school or at companies. Furthermore, some classes of professionals are mainly trained at *senmon gakko*. In FY2008, 95% of hairdressers, 88% of barbers, 78% of physical therapists, and 67% of nurses⁷ were graduates of *senmon gakko*.

Student satisfaction is also apt to be higher at *senmon gakko* than at universities. According to a survey conducted by the Department of University Management and Policy Studies of the University of Tokyo, 75% of university students and 91% of *senmon gakko* students answered that “sufficient support in finding a job is provided”, and 76% of university students and 87% of *senmon gakko* students answered that “paying the tuition is worthwhile.”⁸

Students of *senmon gakko* pay admission fees upon entering school and also pay tuition and other fees every year. The average annual amount paid for *senmon gakko* in Tokyo, including admission fees, was approximately 1.2 million yen⁹ in FY2013, almost the same as the average annual cost of attending a private university.¹⁰

4. Challenges and Predictions

As explained above, *senmon gakko* have been highly rated by students and employers for the practical education they provide, but the number of enrollees has been declining in recent years. The number of *senmon gakko* students was over 700,000 in FY1993, but continuously declined to 550,000 in FY2009. The percentage of graduates of upper secondary schools who entered *senmon gakko* reached 22.2% in FY2003, but has also decreased since then to 14.7% in FY2009.

In Japan, the number of 18-year-olds has been decreasing since 1993 while the university entrance rate has been rising simultaneously; this has decreased the percentage and number of students entering *senmon gakko*. Japanese companies still place great importance on academic qualifications and are eager to hire university graduates. It is also pointed out that *senmon gakko* have never been underrated by society.

On the other hand, approximately 5% of new *senmon gakko* entrants are working people and approximately 8% are graduates of universities or junior colleges. Therefore, *senmon gakko* are expected to serve as adult education facilities which actively accept working adults and provide them with career development education. In an effort to increase the availability of flexible learning methods to working adults, who have difficulty finding sufficient time, correspondence courses and credit-system courses have been permitted for *senmon gakko* since FY2012.

In recent years, an increasing number of schools have adopted a dual education approach to allow students to simultaneously enroll in cooperative programs which take advantage of both a university and a *senmon gakko*. In this case, an educational program is organized to allow students to attend classes at a *senmon gakko* in the morning and at a university in the afternoon, and students can learn a wide range of subjects including liberal arts and highly specialized subjects at the university, and at the same time receive practical vocational education at the *senmon gakko* and obtain required vocational qualifications. When they graduate, both university qualifications (bachelor's degree) and *senmon gakko* qualifications (diploma or advanced diploma) are granted simultaneously.

Formerly, most Japanese companies employed a policy of fostering professional knowledge and skills among their employees through in-house OJT or other training, under the lifetime employment system. However, due to changes in the employment structure, including an increase in the number of irregular workers, companies have been increasingly outsourcing education and training, while individual workers are now often required to develop their abilities on their own. Workers face an increased likelihood of transfer to fields and careers different from those in which they have amassed vocational experience. In Japan, adults – particularly adults who are not full-time employees - have very limited opportunities to develop vocational abilities after completing their initial education. The future of *senmon gakko* in a society with fewer children depends on their ability to provide attractive services in response to companies' demands for the outsourcing of education and training.

5. Conclusion

Senmon gakko have been recognized as flexible vocation-oriented higher education facilities distinct from universities and junior colleges, and have played a central role in human resource development especially in the fields of medical support services and business practices. However, they are now facing unprecedented difficulties due to a declining birth rate and a rise in the university entrance rate starting in the latter half of the 1990s. *Senmon gakko* should take advantage of their merits as flexible education facilities with fewer regulations than Article 1 Schools and should flexibly respond to the diversified needs of learners, including working adults. Such efforts would not only be advantageous to *senmon gakko* but would also be significant in increasing the fluidity of labor markets in Japan and in creating a lifelong learning society.

Table 1 Changes in the Number of *Senmon Gakko*, Enrollees, and Students

FY	Number of schools	Number of enrollees	Number of students
1976	683	53,818	90,619
1977	1,523	154,524	268,990
1978	1,808	175,183	310,800
1979	1,936	182,081	321,379
1980	2,033	190,570	337,864
1981	2,217	199,228	356,479
1982	2,279	201,260	361,937
1983	2,328	218,282	385,911
1984	2,386	223,332	404,153
1985	2,445	209,835	398,821
1986	2,505	248,263	434,489
1987	2,581	269,463	483,220
1988	2,622	287,261	521,574
1989	2,675	309,488	559,046
1990	2,731	339,125	611,503
1991	2,785	354,664	658,150
1992	2,818	364,687	691,343
1993	2,834	360,516	701,649
1994	2,857	343,256	684,790
1995	2,902	335,347	664,562
1996	2,956	335,590	659,057
1997	2,981	327,461	652,072
1998	3,020	315,483	634,379
1999	3,014	308,815	635,369
2000	3,003	313,718	637,308
2001	2,980	314,714	642,893
2002	2,967	326,632	659,780
2003	2,962	338,264	685,350
2004	2,966	335,102	697,212
2005	2,973	326,593	695,608
2006	2,996	300,834	667,188
2007	2,995	282,019	627,397
2008	2,968	254,749	582,864
2009	2,927	247,823	552,711
2010	2,904	266,915	564,640
2011	2,837	263,618	574,152
2012	2,847	264,072	578,119
2013	2,812	269,843	587,500

Source: "School Basic Survey," MEXT

¹ According to the "School Basic Survey (preliminary report) for FY2013" (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)), the percentages of students who graduated from upper secondary schools (including higher-level courses of study at secondary education schools) in March 2013 who then enrolled in universities, junior colleges, or *senmon gakko* are as follows.

Universities: 47.4%

Junior colleges: 5.4%
Senmon gakko : 17.0%

² The original categories of Article 1 Schools were slightly different from those at present. See Section 1 (i).

³ “School Basic Survey,” MEXT

⁴ See Section 1, (ii).

⁵ As a result of the establishment of the *senmon gakko* system, the number of miscellaneous schools decreased significantly, but there are still around 1,300 miscellaneous schools as of 2013. By education field, driving schools, international schools and schools for ethnic minorities, assistant nursing schools, and fashion schools, etc. are large in number.

⁶ “Basic School Survey,” MEXT

⁷ “Basic School Survey,” MEXT

⁸ “Follow-up Survey on Graduates of Upper Secondary Schools” (2007), Department of University Management and Policy Studies, the University of Tokyo

⁹ “Survey on Student Payment,” *Tokyo Senshu Gakko Kakushu Gakko Kyokai*

¹⁰ According to the “FY2010 Survey on Student Life” (Japan Student Services Organization), the national average amount paid by a private university student was 1.15 million yen.

〈Atsushi Kogirima〉

専門学校（記述の要点）

本稿は、専門学校制度の創設と発展に関する沿革や、専門学校の現状、課題と展望について概観し、日本の学校制度における専門学校の位置づけや特徴を明らかにすることを目指す。

現在日本では、高等学校卒業者のうち約 6 人に 1 人は専門学校に進学している。専門学校は、大学や短期大学と比べて法令上の規制が緩やかな非学位型の高等教育機関である。

専門学校の制度は 1976 年に創設された。従来の各種学校のうち、高等学校卒業者を入学資格とし、修業年限が 1 年以上であることその他一定の基準を満たすものを新たに専門学校とし、高等教育機関としての位置づけが与えられた。1995 年には、専門学校卒業者の社会的評価の向上を図ることため、修業年限が 2 年以上で一定の基準を満たす専門学校の卒業生に対し「専門士(Diploma)」の称号を付与することができる制度が発足した。

2013 年度において、専門学校の数は 2,812 校、生徒数は 587,500 人となっている。生徒数が多いのは医療分野と文化・教養分野である。専門学校の卒業生は大学と比べて就職率が高く、学生の満足度も、専門学校の方が大学より高い傾向にある。

専門学校は「実学の学校」として、生徒や雇用主からその教育実績を評価されているが、近年は少子化によりその入学者数が減少傾向にある。専門学校の今後の発展の可否は、就業構造が変化する中で拡大しつつある企業外の教育訓練サービス市場において、専門学校が魅力的なサービス提供者となれるかどうかにかかっていると見える。