

Is the entrance examination for Japanese universities the cause of the declining interest in the subject 'Chigaku'?

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The number of students who select the Earth Science subject 'Chigaku' in the upper secondary schools in Japan has been in decreasing tendency during the last two decades. This phenomenon is caused by the several reasons related with changes in geosciences education conditions. Several Japanese educators consider that the entrance examination system for Japanese universities is responsible for this trend. However, no strong supporting evidence is available for this thought until now.

The present study investigates transition the number of universities, faculties, departments, and students to be admitted to the Japanese universities which are able to elect the Earth Science subject 'Chigaku' for the entrance examination for Japanese universities in the past two decades.

The number of universities offering the Earth Science subject 'Chigaku' for the entrance examinations has increased in the Central Examination System (the common university entrance examination for several Japanese universities), which is the well-known universities' entrance examination as 'Center Shiken' in Japanese, during the last decade. Especially, the Earth Science subject 'Chigaku' is offered as an elective subject of entrance examinations in the Central Examination System of many private universities. The data shows that the number of private universities offering the Earth Science subject 'Chigaku' as an elective subject in entrance examinations for their universities has jumped from 4 to 271 in 1984 and 2003, respectively. Interestingly, only few of these private universities offer the Earth Science subject 'Chigaku' in faculty of science, the majority of these private universities have other faculties such as faculty of letters, commercial science, law, and so forth. On the other hand, preliminary analyses indicate that the number of national and public universities offering the Earth Science subject 'Chigaku' as an elective subject of entrance examinations for their universities have remained almost unchanged during the past two decades.

Based on this study, it can be said that the entrance examination system for Japanese universities is partially responsible for the declining number of students who elect the Earth Science subject 'Chigaku' in the upper secondary schools in Japan. However, the problem is not as simple as thought, it is rather multiple and complex and related with several changes in geoscience education system that needs to be further investigate and address seriously.