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A lexical comparison of the public good of higher education: concepts, contextual underpinnings and implications, focusing on Japanese, Chinese and English

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Abstract
While it is generally agreed that higher education is a public good and produces public goods, it remains unclear what this means. An important reason for the unclarity is the conceptual ambiguity and cultural nuances of the concept of the public good in higher education. Coupled with the Western dominance of discourse in higher education and language challenges in translation, the ambiguity and nuances further result in challenges for studies that explore and compare the public good of higher education across contexts. This paper employs a lexical comparison approach to address these challenges, all of which have been encountered by the comparative research project that leads to this Special Issue. Taking Japanese, Chinese and English as examples, it identifies key terms in the three languages, reveals contextual underpinnings of the key terms and the cultural distance between the terms, and discusses the implications of the lexical comparison. The paper argues that this lexical comparison has been effective in this particular analysis and the comparative research project, and has the potential to contribute to comparisons of other higher education topics involving multiple languages.

Keywords Lexical-based comparison · Japanese · Chinese · English · The public good of higher education · Culture

Introduction: the potentials of a lexical-based comparison

The public good, broadly defined as benefits not confined to single individuals, is a frontier problem in research on higher education (Marginson, 2018). Higher education concentrates enormous resources. It can and has the responsibility to contribute to both the

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collective and individualised dimensions of society. However, there has been a worldwide growing emphasis on the individual private benefits of higher education (Bok, 2009; Locatelli, 2019). The public good in higher education is de facto under-recognised and under-financed (Filippakou & Williams, 2015). Compared to individualised private benefits, such as augmented earnings associated with completing higher education, the public outputs of higher education, a large dimension which takes in collective relations and shared individual rights in social welfare, the economy, innovation, social equity, the political system and social cohesion, are not readily understood or recognised (East, et al., 2014; Tian & Liu, 2019). Meanwhile, the decreasing public financial investment and introduction of high fees in certain higher education systems have provoked increasing concerns about social issues including inequalities and cultural divisions (Marginson & Yang, 2023; Naidoo & Williams, 2015).

Geo-cultural ambiguities of the public good in higher education

A fundamental reason for the lack of understanding and recognition of the public good of higher education is the ambiguity of the concept per se, including the linguistic and contextual nuances associated with it. As Marginson and Yang (2022) point out, the connotations of the public good (and related terms including the common good and private good) in higher education differ across contexts, depending on the state/society/university assemblage in which higher education is embedded. In part, the notion of the public good is rooted in the social, political and educational culture of a society (Yang, 2022). For example, the assumptions about the state-higher education relations, the relationship between the individualised and collective good, and the expectations towards higher education can largely determine the governance and financial system of a higher education and a higher education's commitment to the public good.

Closely associated with culture, there are also language issues that are critical to unpacking what the public good of higher education means in a specific context. Brown (1994, p. 165) noted that 'a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture'. Following Brown, it is fair to argue that language carries culture and manifests cultural nuances. In unpacking the public good of higher education, there exist two forefront questions: what equivalent terms can best capture the idea of the English term public good in a specific language and what cultural and philosophical ideas underpin these terms.

Public good in eight languages

As the introductory and national case papers of this Special Issue show, various terms have been identified to capture the idea of the public good of higher education in seven non-English languages (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Finnish, French, Polish and Spanish) of the ten studied national cases. Table 1 provides preliminary findings of the research project underlying this Special Issue, in relation to key terms. Identifying and understanding the key terms in different languages and establishing a lexical bridge can be fundamental to conducting a comparison that treats all contexts equally and considers contextual nuances. In linguistics, a lexical bridge refers to semantic units of analysis for exploring languages, particularly for investigating connections between different languages (see for example King, 2000). It is used in this paper as a tool for comparative studies of higher education,

Table 1 Some key terms concerning public good of higher education in seven non-English languages

Mandarin Chinese	公共物品 gong gong wu pin	Public goods or public good
	公共产品 gong gong chan pin	Public goods or public good
	公用品 gong yong pin	Public goods or public good
	公共利益 gong gong li yi	Public goods or public good
	天下为公 tianxia weigong	Global public/collective goods
Japanese	公共財koukyouzai	Public goods or public good
	共通善kyoutsuuzen	Public goods or public good
	公共善 koukyouzen	Public goods or public good
	公共性 koukyousei	Publicness
Korean	情 jeong	Bonding, culture of togetherness and we-ness
Polish	dobro publiczne	The public good
	dobra publiczne	Public goods
	dobro wspólne	The common good
	dobra wspólne	Common goods
French	biens public	Public goods
	biens communs	Common goods
	service public	Public service
	intérêt général	Public interest
Finnish	julkishyödykkeet	Public goods
	sivistys	Self-formation, societal transformation
Spanish	bienes públicos	Public goods
	bienes comunes	Common goods
	Responsabilidad Social Universitaria	University social responsibility

Source: Combined contributions of authors to this Special Issue, coordinated by Elisa Brewis

which examines contextually and culturally embedded interpretations of key concepts in each language and then moves beyond the specific language in order to build a bridge that connects different languages. The lexical bridge goes further than direct translations, and can act as a foundation for both conceptual comparison and comparison of higher education phenomena across contexts. It is also beneficial to enhancing the mutual understanding, dialogue and cooperation between higher education systems.

It should be emphasised that these terms are often not equivalents, but approximations. Culture and meanings differ from country to country and language to language. The examples of approximations for the English term 'public good' in another language include *tianxia weigong* (天下为公) in Chinese, *koukyouzai* (公共財) in Japanese, *jeong* (情) in Korean, *sivistys* in Finnish, *biens communs* in French, *dobra publiczne* in Polish and *bienes comunes* in Spanish, but as the articles in this Special Issue indicate, each has its culturally nested meanings.

The importance of language

It is thus tenable to argue that engaging with relevant terms in different languages and paying attention to the contextual ideas underpinning the terms are essential to exploring and comparing the public good of higher education across contexts. These efforts further help to address another major challenge intrinsic to a comparative project on this topic—the tendency to privilege Anglophone ideas and practices in comparison through benchmarking other contexts against Anglophone ones. The challenges were also observed by Yang

(2023) in comparing the Chinese and Anglo-American approaches to the public good of higher education.

There exists a longstanding Western, especially Anglo-American, dominance of discourse in higher education and language challenges in discussing higher education phenomena in non-Western contexts (Alatas, 2022; Dotson, 2014; Marginson & Xu, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). The Western dominance of discourse is reflected in the global influence of the Anglophone concepts of the public good(s) and little attention to non-Western concepts in the global higher education literature. A distinctive example is the globally influential economic terms of public goods, proposed by Samuelson (1954). As Tian and Liu (2019) and Guzmán-Valenzuela et al. (2020) show, the economic public goods now dominate the understandings and practices of the public good of higher education in various contexts including Chile, China and Poland, among others. These language challenges are manifested in the difficulties for researchers to 'conduct comparative studies without changing connotations and denotative uses of concepts after translation' (Yang, 2023, p. 252). Yang (2023) therefore proposed a lexical-based comparison approach to tackle the challenges. As this paper will show, this lexical approach can be effective in dealing with the above-discussed challenges in exploring and comparing the public good of higher education across contexts.

A lexical-based comparison approach

In conducting the comparative project that leads to this Special Issue, all the above challenges (i.e. the conceptual and linguistic nuances of the concepts, language- and comparison-related challenges) have been encountered by the project team. This project involves ten national cases and eight languages. To avoid privileging either case/language over others, arguably an ideal approach is to establish a well-rounded and comprehensive conceptual ground that draws upon all contextual nuances of the national cases before comparison. However, this was not possible from the beginning of the project, as the starting point of the project was embedded in the Anglophone contexts and Anglophone ideas were more developed than others. Moreover, the language-related questions only appeared in the process of conducting national cases and later the comparison. For example, to use what terms in interview protocols in national languages? In grounding the analysis in national contexts, what scholarship to draw upon and what key terms to be used for searching? How to consider contextual underpinnings of the terms in different languages during comparison? These questions further call for developing an approach to addressing the language-related challenges in exploring and comparing national cases. Progress has been made. An important one was the above-mentioned lexical-based comparison proposed by Yang (2023), which turned out to be effective and was therefore applied to the whole project.

The advantages of the lexical-based comparison approach, in Yang's (2023) words, are manifested in that

> It takes into account and engages with the contextual and cultural settings of the languages in order to develop concepts and expressions based on their own knowledges and cultures, and then to establish bridges that connect these contextual-specific concepts and expressions with each other, and with global audiences for mutual dialogue and understanding. This lexical-based comparison can further reveal cultural nuances through language and help to reverse the under-privilege of non-Anglo-American knowledges in discussing the public good of higher education (Yang, 2023, p. 249)

This approach consists of three steps. First, instead of looking for the equivalence or translation of relevant key terms of one language (in most cases, English terms) in other languages, researchers need to engage with each of the specific contextual and cultural settings of the languages involved in comparison in order to identify key concepts relevant to the public good of higher education. In other words, the key concepts are identified from the contextual and cultural settings in a bottom-up manner. This requires researchers to deeply engage with the local settings and scholarships of the languages. The process of identifying key concepts is not static and may continue throughout the whole process of the lexical comparison, as new concepts may emerge at later stages. Researchers are expected to stay open-minded.

Second, researchers respectively explore the identified key terms in each of the compared languages, and then interpret and elaborate on those key terms in other compared languages. In exploring the key terms in their original language, it is essential to deeply engage with the ideas and assumptions underlying the terms. In interpreting the key terms in other languages, researchers are expected to go beyond simple translation, but develop nuanced and detailed elaborations of the terms, covering their connotations and underlying ideas and assumptions. Notably, as the global academic lingua franca and the language used in writing this paper, English plays an important intermediating role. In the main text of the paper, English is used to explain the key terms and their underpinning ideas in all three languages. Nonetheless, we keep a short version of elaborations of the terms in Japanese and Chinese in tables for readers of these languages (i.e. Tables 2, 3, and 4).

Third, researchers discuss the issue of fit and the degree of overlap between the terms' original connotations and the elaborations in other languages. This is to reflect to what extent the elaborations in other languages can reveal the terms' authentic connotations and underlying ideas in their original language.

The findings of the above three steps can further establish a lexical ground and lead to implications for comparing the public good of higher education across multiple contexts.

This paper and the selection of languages for a lexical analysis

Against this backdrop, employing a lexical-based comparison approach, this paper lexically explores and compares key terms related to the public good of higher education in the comparative project. However, considering the scope of a journal article and the richness of the terms in each of these languages, it is almost impossible in this single paper to cover all eight languages while giving adequate justice to details and nuances. Thus, this paper selects three languages—Japanese, Chinese and English—as examples to explain the process of conducting a lexical-based comparison, identifying key terms in different languages, revealing contextual underpinnings of the key terms and cultural distance between the terms, and discussing the implications of the lexical comparison.

The paper develops in the above three steps. First, the key terms are identified on a bottom-up basis in each language. This is done relatively briefly for Chinese and English. The Chinese and English language terms, and the comparisons, translation issues, similarities, differences and gaps between them, have been explored elsewhere in detail in the publications arising from the shared research on the public good role of higher education (see Yang, 2022; Yang, 2023, Marginson & Yang, 2022; Brewis & Marginson, this issue; Marginson, this issue; Tian & Liu, 2019; Tian & Liu, this issue). The bulk of this section consists of a detailed discussion of the relevant Japanese terms and underlying ideas. In recent years, the Japanese government has increasingly emphasised the public good of

Table 2 Moving from Japanese concepts to Chinese and English lexicon

Japanese	Chinese	English	Discussion about the issue of fit
公 (kou, ohoyake, ooyake)	• 公,公家的, 政府的; • 公共的; • 公众的; • 公平,公正; • 雄性;	• Imperial Palace; Emperor; Empresses and Middle Court; Imperial Court • Official; governmental; national • Public; common; shared by the society and community • Open; exposure; disclosure • Equity • Male	• Japanese-Chinese: The concept of '公' largely overlaps with the corresponding Chinese terms, encompassing meanings related to governmental, public, or communal matters. Additionally, it also includes the meaning of male • Japanese-English: Although the connotation of '公' largely overlaps with the corresponding English term public, there are nuances, such as equity and male, that 'public' cannot fully capture
世間 (seken) / 世の中 (yononaka)	• 世界 • 社会 • 人世间 • 人情世故	• The world • The general public; society; people • Life	• Japanese-Chinese: The concept of *seken/yononaka* largely overlaps with the corresponding Chinese terms, highlighting not only the general public but also the relevant social values and customs • Japanese-English: *Seken/yononaka* has a similar meaning to the English terms, but *Seken/yononaka* often refers to the general perceptions, common sense, social values and customs in society as a whole or in a particular community, especially in the eyes and reputation of people, whereas the English terms refer to a specific group of people and the general public within a geographical or physical area or society
国 (kuni, koku)/国家 (kokka)	• 国 • 国家	• Country; state • Area; region • Central government • Governmental officers • Country-related features	• Japanese-Chinese: The concept of '国/国家' largely overlaps with the corresponding Chinese term, both contain the nuances of being a family state and nation-state despite the different historical backgrounds and political regimes • Japanese-English: The terms '国/国家' and their English equivalents have similar meanings but differ in nuance and scope of use. '国/国家' focuses on both the family state and the civilizational state, emphasising cultural roots and political units and regimes in a modern sense. In contrast, the English terms are used in a broader sense, primarily encompassing geographical aspects

Table 2 (continued)

Japanese	Chinese	English	Discussion about the issue of fit
社会 (Shakai)	• 社会	• Society; gathering of diverse people • Different from educational institutions, the open world in general	• Japanese-Chinese: The concept of *shakai* largely overlaps with the corresponding Chinese term as the Chinese term was imported from Japan using the same Chinese characters • Japanese-English: *Shakai* is a translated Japanese term from English word 'society', thus largely overlaps in terms of meaning. However, in terms of cultural nuances, *shakai* tends to focus on the interests and harmony of society as a whole, whereas in 'society', individual rights and freedoms are also often emphasised
コミュニティー (komyuniti)	• 社群	• Community • Gathering of similar people	• Japanese-Chinese: The concept of *Komyuniti* largely overlaps with the corresponding Chinese term. However, *komyuniti* applies to broad groups. '社群' is more likely to be applied to gatherings with specialised interests and goals • Japanese-English: *Komyuniti* is a translated Japanese terms from the English word community, thus largely overlaps in terms of meaning. However, due to cultural differences, *komyuniti* often emphasises a sense of cooperation and harmony with others, while community often emphasises the common goals and interests of a group of people who share certain interests and attributes

Table 2 (continued)

Japanese	Chinese	English	Discussion about the issue of fit
身内 (miuchi) / 家族 (kazoku)	• 亲戚 • 家人	• Relatives • Family	• Japanese-Chinese: The social structure of the family is very similar in Japan and China; therefore, the meaning of *miuchi/kazoku* is basically the same as the Chinese terms. However, *miuchi/kazoku* places more emphasis on intimacy and the feeling of the inner circle, whereas the corresponding Chinese terms describes more of the family relationship • Japanese-English: The concept of *miuchi/kazoku* largely overlaps with the English terms. However, *miuchi/kazoku* indicates particularly intimate gatherings and close relationships, whereas the English terms indicate relatives in general and often does not indicate a particularly emotional connection
個人(kojin)	• 个人	• Individual	• Japanese-Chinese: The concept of *kojin* largely overlaps with the corresponding Chinese term, both implying individual and private aspects • Japanese-English: *Kojin* and individual largely overlap, because the concept of *kojin* is imported from the English term individual
私 (shi, watakushi, watashi)	• 私, 私人的, 个人的; • 私密的, 不开放的; • 自私的; • 我	• Private; privacy; secret • Private; not open to the public • Individual; selfish • I/me	• Japanese-Chinese: The concept of *shi* largely overlaps with the corresponding Chinese term *si*. However, in addition to conveying the idea of the private, individual or selfish, *shi* also encompasses the meaning of I/myself, which is not included in *si* • Japanese-English: While there are large overlaps of connotations between *shi* and private, *shi* contains more nuances than the English terms of private. New ideas needed to be added to the English terms that are not included in the original terms. For example, *shi* also entails selfishness, egoism and the meaning of oneself

Table 3 Moving from Chinese concepts to Japanese and English lexicon

Chinese	Japanese	English	Discussion about the issue of fit
我 (*wo*)	• 己; • 自己; • 自分; •私	Self	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *wo* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms. However, in addition to conveying the idea of the individual self as a member of a larger community, the Japanese terms also encompass the nuances of being an independent self, which is not necessarily associated with any specific community as the term私indicates • **Chinese-English:** Although *wo* is often referred to as 'self' in English, they are not equal. The absolute 'self' in the Western sense does not exist in imperial China and arguably still today. Chinese *wo* is a relational term that captures the self being a member of a larger community (e.g. family, country)
个人 (*geren*)	個人	Individual	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *geren* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese term *kojin,* both implying individual and private aspects • **Chinese-English:** *Geren* and individual largely overlap, because *geren* is the Chinese translation of the English term individual

Table 3 (continued)

Chinese	Japanese	English	Discussion about the issue of fit
家人/家庭 (*jiaren/jiating)*	家族/家庭	Family	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *jiaren/jiating* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms *kazoku/katei*. However, family ties in China are particularly strong, and the term *jiaren* generally refers to all individuals directly related by blood or marriage. This results in a tendency to emphasise family honor and group interests. In contrast, family ties in Japan are not as strong, and *katei* refers to the household where families live together, as well as the family itself, often implying a smaller family unit. In Japan, individual independence and privacy also tend to be respected • **Chinese-English:** *Jiating* refers to family and *jiaren* refers to family members. However, in imperial China, *jiating* was used in the sense of clan than nuclear family in the Western sense. In the contemporary time, *jiating* can either be understood as the traditional Chinese family (larger than the nuclear family) or sometimes the nuclear family
家族 (*jiazu*)	親戚	Clan	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *jiazu* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese term. In addition to the nuclear family, people with extensive blood and marital ties, such as grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins are also included • **Chinese-English:** *Jiazu* largely overlaps with clan

Table 3 (continued)

Chinese	Japanese	English	Discussion about the issue of fit
社会 (*shehui*)	社会	Society	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *shehui* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese term *shakai*, as it was imported from Japan • **Chinese-English:** *Shehui* is a widely used word translated from the English term 'society', so they have a high degree of overlap. But *shehui* may also be understood in China in relation to the series of nested circles
国家 (*guojia*)	国家	• Country; the civilisational state; the family state • The state paralleling with the modern nation-state	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *guojia* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese term, both contains the nuances of being family state and nation-state despite the different historical backgrounds and political regimes • **Chinese-English:** There may be confusions caused when using the term *guojia*, as it can be used both as the family state and the civilisational state in a traditional Chinese sense, and the modern nation-state because of the Western impacts on China. The nearest overlap needs to be used with caution
天下, 世界 (*tianxia*, *shijie*)	• 全世界; • 天下; • 世間	• All under heaven; everything on earth (including human beings, living creatures, natural resources …); a Chinese way of viewing the world • All under heaven belongs to/is for all (tianxia weigong): people's pursuit of universal love, which includes fairness between others and oneself, so that people are able to overlook specific differences in reality and seek an ideational and abstract equality	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The Chinese term *tianxia* is often used in classical literature and historical references to political rule or totality and is also expressed in Japanese terms according to its meaning. Japanese *tenka* has basically the same meaning but is often used especially in historical contexts and literary expressions • **Chinese-English:** 'All under heaven' is the direct translation from Chinese. The English overlap is an explanation of the original Chinese term. Thus a high degree of overlap

Table 3 (continued)

Chinese	Japanese	English	Discussion about the issue of fit
公 (*gong*)	• 公式、国、政府 • 公共、共通 • 公開 • 公平 • 雄の	• Public; common • Justice; for all's benefits; altruism and selfless spirit; openly; equally divided • State; social; international; official • Male; Duke	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *gong* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms, encompassing meanings related to governmental, public, or communal matters. Additionally, it also includes the meaning of male • **Chinese-English:** There are no explicit explanations of '公' in Chinese, similar to 'public' in English. It has different meanings in varied situations. Need to discuss based on contexts
私 (*si*)	• 私的、個人 • 利己的 • 秘密に • 非合法の、不正な	• Personal, individualised • Selfishness, egoism • Secrecy • Private	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *si* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms, encompassing meanings related to private, personal or individual matters • **Chinese-English:** There are no explicit explanations of '私' in Chinese, similar to 'public' in English. It has different meanings in varied situations. Need to discuss based on contexts
善 (*shan*)	善	Goodness, benevolence, kindness	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *shan* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese term, referring to the state of being good, morally right or excellent • **Chinese-English:** *Shan* is one of the Chinese approximations of the English term 'good'. *Shan* has a strong normative orientation, largely influenced by Confucian virtues including benevolence and kindness

Table 3 (continued)

Chinese	Japanese	English	Discussion about the issue of fit
收益、利益 (*shouyi*, *liyi*)	収益、 利益	Profits, interests	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *shouyi/liyi* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms, including financial gain and overall business results and economic benefits • **Chinese-English:** *Shouyi* and *liyi* are the Chinese approximations of the English term 'goods'. However, *shouyi* and *liyi* might carry negative cultural underpinnings in Chinese. For example, Mencius stated, 'Why must your Majesty use that word "profit?" What I am provided with, are counsels to benevolence and righteousness, and these are my only topics'. ('王!何必曰利?亦有仁义而已矣。'–*Mencius, Lianghuiwang I*)
产品、物品 (*chanpin*, *wupin*)	• 製品/商品 • 物品/品物	Goods (economic-wise)	• **Chinese-Japanese:** The concept of *chanpin/wupin* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms, referring to objects and goods in general, but can have a wider meaning that is not limited to commercial goods • **Chinese-English:** *Chanpin* and *wupin* largely overlap with the English term 'goods' in an economic sense, as they are the Chinese translations of the 'goods'

Table 4 Moving from English concepts to Japanese and Chinese lexicon

English terms	Japanese	Chinese	Discussion about the issue of fit
Public	• 公開する、公にする; • 公的な, 政府の; • 公共の、公衆の; • (共通の目的を持つ)人々, …層	• 公, 公众, 公开; • 公共的, 公众的, 政府的, 非市场的; • 公用的, 公开的	• **English-Japanese:** While there are large overlaps of connotations, the Japanese terms contain more nuances than the English term of public. New ideas needed to be added to the English terms that are not included in the original terms. For example, *kou* also entails equity and male • **English-Chinese:** While there are large overlaps of connotations, the Chinese terms contain more nuances than the English term of public. New ideas needed to be added to the English terms that are not included in the original terms. For example, *gong* also entails equity and male
Private	• 私立の、私営の; • 非公式の、非公開の; • 私用の、個人の、私有の	• 私, 私人, 私下; • 私人的, 私立的, 个人的, 秘密的,自私的	• **English-Japanese:** While there are large overlaps of connotations, the Japanese terms contain more nuances than the English term of private. New ideas needed to be added to the English private that were not included in the original term. For example, *shi* also entails selfishness, egoism and the meaning of oneself • **English-Chinese:** While there are large overlaps of connotations, the Chinese terms contain more nuances than the English term of public. New ideas needed to be added to the English terms that are not included in the original terms. For example, *si* also entails selfishness and egoism
Common	• 共通; • 一般; • 普通; • コモン	• 共同的, 共享的	• **English-Japanese:** The concept of *common* largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms, which generally indicate a shared characteristic or widespread condition • **English-Chinese:** These are Chinese translations of the English concepts. Thus, there is a high degree of overlap. Nonetheless, the English term 'common' largely overlaps with the Chinese idea of '公' in the sense of their shared emphasis on the communal and shared

Table 4 (continued)

English terms	Japanese	Chinese	Discussion about the issue of fit
Public goods	• 公共財 • 公共善 • 公共の利益	• 公共利益; 公共物品; 国有利益; 国有物品	• **English-Japanese:** Public good is almost identical to the concept of *koukyozai*, although there are some limitations to the scope of its use, as *koukyouzai* often refers to resources and services available to the general public in economics and public policy. The expression *koukyo no rieki* is also used in Japan as a translation of public goods, as it generally indicates activities and services for the public in a broad sense • **English-Chinese:** The connotation of the Chinese translations is narrower that only refers to economic and political meanings
Private goods	• 私有財 • 私的財	• 私人利益; 私人物品; 商业产品 和服务	• **English-Japanese:** The concept of private goods largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms. However, Japanese terms also encompass additional ideas not contained within the notion of private goods. For instance, Japanese terms may relate to specific ownership or control rights within legal or cultural contexts, whereas they might not focus exclusively on the economic characteristics associated with private goods • **English-Chinese:** The connotation of the Chinese translations is narrower that only refers to economic and political meanings
Common goods	• 公共善 • 共通善 • 公共の利益 • コモン•グッズ	• 共同利益; 共同物品, 公益; 公用资源	• **English-Japanese:** The concept of common goods largely overlaps with the corresponding Japanese terms. However, common good is often associated with concrete policies and practices, while Japanese terms may emphasise abstract values and ideals • **English-Chinese:** These are Chinese translations of the English concepts. Thus, there is a high degree of overlap

higher education in policies. For instance, the next phase of the Top Global University Project, aimed at the internationalisation of Japanese universities, focuses on promoting collaboration between local universities, businesses and governments to address regional issues. This form of engagement reflects the role of universities as public institutions that serve the broader community, fostering social, economic and cultural development. Through such collaborations, universities are able to address public needs, promote innovation and enhance societal well-being, aligning with the principles of higher education as a public good. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has also proposed a plan for tuition-free higher education to enhance equality and accessibility, regardless of students' socioeconomic backgrounds (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), 2018). Additionally, there has been a strong emphasis on mechanisms for applying Research and Development outcomes to societal needs. All these tendencies in Japanese higher education are deeply intertwined with the national values and cultural concept of harmony (和, wa), which is closely linked to the maintenance of social stability and the avoidance of disparities that could result in societal tensions. However, except for a few (Huang & Horiuchi, 2020, Huang et al. 2022, 2024; Takagi, 2022), hitherto the underlying ideas prevailing in Japan have been little discussed in the global literature on the public good role of higher education. In the second step, the paper presents tables which engage with the three-way comparison. In the third step, the paper explores issues of fit and overlap. Finally, at the end of the paper, it discusses the implications and potentials of the lexical-based comparison.

The lexical analysis: exploring and comparing key terms in three languages

This section employs the three-step lexical comparison approach to explore and compare the relevant key terms of the public good of higher education in Japanese, Chinese and English. To reiterate, more space is given to Japanese terms and ideas, which remain largely unknown in the global literature.

Step 1: identifying relevant key contextual-based concepts in Japanese, Chinese and English

Relevant key terms in Japanese

The Japanese expression of 'public' is '公', pronounced as '*kou*' or '*ooyake*', and 'private' is '私', pronounced as '*shi*' or '*watashi/watakushi*'. As the Chinese terms will show below, both characters are used in Chinese to refer to public and private. The Japanese term '公' contains the nuances of government-owned, whereas the term '私' refers to things owned by private individuals, which is un-governmental. For instance, civil servants serving the interests of citizens are named *koumuin* (公務員, public servants). The mass media, used to monitor the activities of legislators and public officials, are called *kouki* (公器, public organs).

In further identifying relevant key terms in Japanese, we established a framework of individual—group (個人—集団, *kojin—shuudan*) and inside—outside—elsewhere (うち—そと—よそ, *uchi—soto—yoso*) (Fig. 1). As previously elucidated, the terms '公' and '私' may respectively refer to government-owned (官; government) and

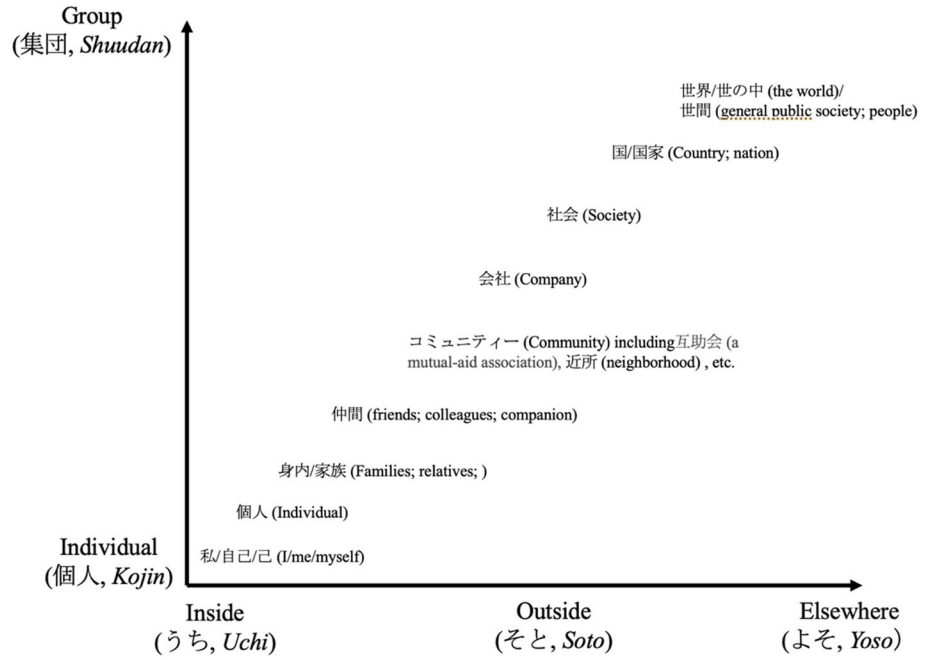

Fig. 1 A framework of individual—group (個人—集団) and inside—outside—elsewhere (うち—そと—よそ). Source: authors (2024)

non-government-owned (民; people). Within Japan's democratic framework, the government wields authority as the representative of the people, who are expected to engage in governance through electoral processes and civic participation. Hence, '官' and '民' denote the interplay between a collective entity (*shuudan*) and the individuals (*kojin*) comprising it. The governmental '官' symbolises the collective interests of the people '民' while safeguarding the rights and welfare of individuals, who in turn adhere to strict group discipline and adhere to established group norms (Reischauer & Jansen, 1995). This perspective is elaborated in works including *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Benedict, 2005), where the collectivist 'national character' underpins Japan's state-authoritarian political structure (Aoki, 1990). Thus, the framework based on the interplay between individualism and collectivism holds significant relevance in analysing the dynamics of public and private-related terms within the Japanese context.

In the examination of groups (集団, *shuudan*), various criteria for their classification have been proposed in Japan. Classifications such as family and friend groups, classroom groups, workplace groups and other groups central to individuals' daily lives are often based on the differences in the goals of these groups. There also exist widely recognised classifications that emphasise the meanings and functions of groups for their members. Two prominent classifications are the in-group (内集団, *naishuudan*) and out-group (外集団, *gaishuudan*), as well as the primary group (1次集団, *ichijishuudan*) and secondary group (2次集団, *nijishuudan*). The in-group or primary group comprises direct face-to-face interactions, such as families or close-knit friend groups, while the out-group or secondary group involves indirect contacts over distance, such as communities or societies formed through such means. In sociology and cultural anthropology, the concepts of *Uchi* and *Soto* are viewed as influential regulators of human relations among the Japanese

(Haga, 2004). Similarly, comparative cultural and linguistic studies have explored Japanese linguistic behaviours by comparing the Japanese personality structure with that of Westerners, particularly Americans, based on this distinction (Ide, 1977). For a more effective analysis of verbal behaviour, Miyake (1994) proposed a conceptual model of *Uchi-Soto-Yoso*, delineating *Uchi* as closely relevant, *Soto* as less closely relevant and *Yoso* as completely irrelevant. This conceptual framework provides a nuanced understanding of Japanese culture and social structure, making it a valuable analytical lens in this study.

Based on the above theoretical framework of the individual—group (個人—集団, k*ojin—shuudan*) and inside—outside—elsewhere (うち—そと—よそ, *uchi—soto—yoso*) axes, the public good within Japanese higher education can be understood across various dimensions, including 世 (*yo*/*se*, world/society) and 国家 (*kokka*, country/nation). Influenced by Confucian principles, the Tokugawa Shogunate placed a significant emphasis on the part of 修己治人(*shuukichijin*), which means cultivating oneself and governing the world (世を治めていくこと), as proposed by Zhu Xi, a Neo-Confucian philosopher in China (Sawai, 1995). Consequently, the concept of 世 holds great significance within the Japanese understanding of public goods from higher education.

Furthermore, a pervasive ideology within Japanese higher education is encapsulated in the phrase 'For the nation, for the way (国の為、道の為, *kuni no tame, michi no tame*)'. This ideology posits that higher education not only serves an individual's personal trajectory but also contributes collectively to humanity's legacy for future generations, reflecting a belief in the interconnectedness of humanity as a community with a shared destiny. This can be traced back to the 1980s in Japan when the theory of nation-building based on technology (技術立国論, *gijutsurikkokuron*) gained prominence (Saitou, 1983). Before the 1980s, Japan primarily focused on applied research, often neglecting the foundational science and technology of the West, which drew significant criticism. In response, the Science and Technology Agency introduced the concept of 'Nation-building based on science and technology (科学技術立国, *kagakugijutsu rikkoku*)' as a national policy in its 1980 White Paper on Science and Technology. Higher education institutions, pivotal in the advancement of science and technology, emerged as key contributors to nation-building (立国, *rikkoku*) (Yonezawa, 2023; see also Huang, Chen & Horiuchi in this volume for more discussions), a facet that will be further explored later in the section of Step 2 explaining the term of 国家 (nation, country).

Additionally, variations exist in the Japanese language to convey the concept of 'good(s)', which can represent something beneficial or products. Typically, the term is translated as 財 (zai) or 善 (zen). In some cases, for convenience, the term グッズ (guzzu), derived from the English 'goods', is used depending on the specific context.

Drawing upon the above discussions about the Japanese context and ideas, we have therefore identified the following key terms with regard to the public good of higher education in Japanese: 公 (official; public; open), 私 (private; individual), 世 (world; society; the general public), 世間 (the general public; people; life), 社会 (society) and 国家 (country; government; nation).

Relevant key terms in Chinese

Earlier studies (Marginson & Yang, 2022; Yang, 2022, 2023) began the process of identifying the relevant key terms of the public good in Chinese. Influenced by Confucianism, including the Confucian anthropocosmic worldview (ref, Fig. 2), the Chinese social and political culture underlines the terms of 'the smaller self (小我, *xiaowo*)' and 'larger self (

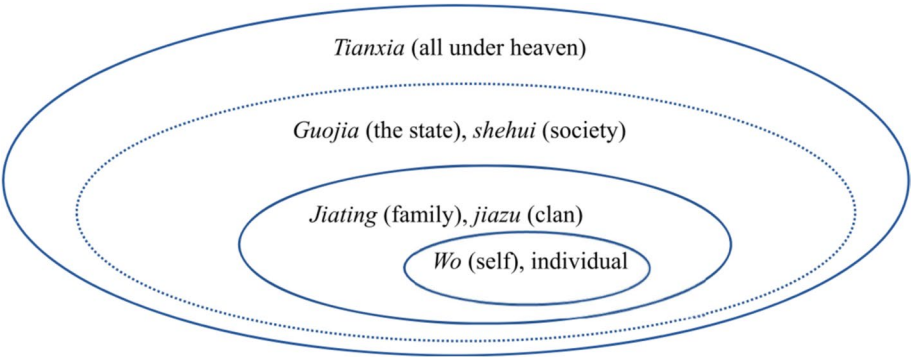

Fig. 2 The Confucian anthropocosmic worldview (Yang, 2023, p. 253)

大我, *dawo*)', which are essential to the relational dynamics between the public (公, *gong*) and private (私, *si*). Although the two characters for the public and private are the same in Chinese and Japanese, they reflect different underlying assumptions and ideas. In Chinese, there is never static public or private. Rather, the private is always nested within the public, as the smaller self is nested within the larger self. There is a normative preference and emphasis on the public or larger self over the private or smaller self, in the sense that, when necessary, the private may be sacrificed for the public. This is in line with the collectivist tradition in China (Marginson & Yang, 2022). In addition, in expressing the idea of 'the public good' in Chinese, nuances exist regarding how to interpret 'the good'. A few Chinese terms are related to the notion of 'the good', reflecting various emphasis and normative orientations. For example, 善 (*shan*, goodness, benevolence or kindness) has a normative orientation, 收益 (*shouyi*, profits) or 利益 (*liyi*, interests) are normative-free and emphasise mechanical returns, and 产品 (*chanpin*) /物品 (*wupin*) are economic notions of goods. In contrast, although the Japanese terms of 公 and 私have inherited the normative preference of the public over private from Chinese, there has been a saliently increasing emphasis on the private in Japan since the Meiji era, demonstrating the welcome of Anglophone ideas in Japan. Thus, for the modern Japanese terms of 公 and 私, a mixed influence from both Chinese and Anglophone ideas can be observed. More elaborations are provided in sections of Steps 2 and 3.

Furthermore, as illustrated in Fig. 2, the Confucian anthropocosmic worldview points to a few terms that are also key to understanding the public good of higher education in China, including the self (我, *wo*), individual (个人, *geren*), family (家庭, *jiating*), clan (家族, *jiazu*), state (国家, *guojia*), society (社会, *shehui*) and world/all under heaven (天下, *tianxia*). All the aforementioned terms are identified as key terms in Chinese.

Relevant key terms in English

In English, the public good of higher education is generally captured by key terms such as the public, private, common, public good(s), private good(s) and common good(s). The Anglophone connotations of these terms are rooted in the Anglo-American political culture. As Fig. 3 shows, different from the Japanese and Chinese political cultures, ideally there exist clear boundaries between the state, civil society and economic market in Anglo-America. The individual overlaps with all these spheres and enjoys

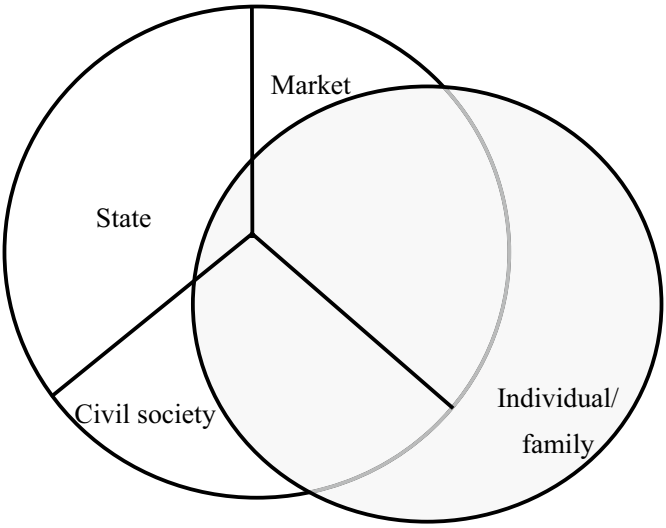

Fig. 3 The state/society/individual assemblage in the Anglo-American political culture (Marginson & Yang, 2022, p. 6)

the normatively absolute primacy. Divisions of power is fundamental. Building on this state/society/individual assemblage, there are primarily four strands of the meaning of the English term 'public' (Marginson, this issue). The first strand equalises the public to the state or government, as used in terms including 'the public sector'. Accordingly, the private refers to non-state or non-government, and often the market in economic senses. The second strand underlines the universal public good, embodying a universal normative appeal. This meaning overlaps with the idea of the common (good). In this sense, the public good is a condition of universal well-being and welfare. The third strand reflects the idea of 'the public sphere' (Habermas, 1989). It understands the public as a universal-communicative sphere that includes all population. The fourth strand manifests the public/private dualism. Following this dualism are the widely employed concepts of economic public/private goods proposed by Samuelson (1954). Economic public goods are goods that are non-excludable and/or non-rival, and therefore cannot be effectively produced by the market. The production of economic public goods requires input from the state or civil society.

There is further discussion about these terms and their meanings and uses in the introductory paper for this issue by Brewis and Marginson, and the conceptual paper by Marginson.

Step 2: exploring the above key concepts in each language and elaborate them in other languages

As in the preceding section of the paper, the main discussion of Step 2 is in relation to the key terms in Japanese, and their equivalents in Chinese and English, as this detail is new to the global literature in higher education studies.

Japanese key terms and their explanations

The explanations of the Japanese key terms are explained below and summarised in Table 2.

公 **(public) and** 私 **(private)** As previously discussed, the usage of 公 (public) and 私 (private) in the Japanese context incorporates nuanced distinctions, blending elements of both Chinese Confucianism and Western influences. Japanese ideology appears to prioritise public norms over private interests. This perspective is exemplified in idioms such as '滅私奉公' (*messhi houkou*, self-annihilation for the sake of the country) and '活私開公' (*kasshi kaikou*, promoting individuals for the common good). Historically, the pre-war education system, influenced by the Imperial Rescript on Education, instilled in citizens a selfless dedication to serving the nation and the emperor (the '公'). In the post-war era, there was a shift towards a more privatised approach, aimed at leveraging individual talents to foster national prosperity. In recent decades, with the introduction of new public management principles into Japan's higher education institutions, as evidenced by the incorporation of Japanese national universities in 2004, there has been a heightened emphasis on the role of higher education in contributing to the development and advancement of local society and the nation as a whole meanwhile addressing the needs of the labour market. This underscores the importance of publicness in higher education and its pivotal role in driving societal progress.

世 **(world; society; the general public)** As one broad domain of the contribution of Japanese higher education, the term '世 (*yo/se*)' implies the objectively existing society or the world, as indicated by the term *sekai* (世界, world), from a broader perspective in opposition to the narrow self. One of the significances of education in Japan is understanding the world (世を知る, *yo wo shiru*) so that individuals can grow as human beings and contribute to the world and society. The saying in the ancient Japanese language, *nikumarekko, yo ni habakaru* (憎まれっ子、世にはばかる, People who are disliked by others are more likely to gain prominence in the world)', verifies the meaning of '世'. Utilising the term '世', several concepts were developed and are now used on a daily basis in Japan. For instance, by adding the Chinese character '中' (*naka/chuu*), which implies inside or in-between, *Yononaka* (世の中) is used when people hope to subjectively describe the overall situation of the general society and the world (Nakamura, 2013).

世間 **(the general public; people; life; social environment; public opinion)** Additionally, a similarly frequently used and explored term is '世間' (*seken*), which was originally a translation of the Sanskrit word *loka*, meaning something transient (Abe, 2004). *Seken* comprises two Chinese characters, '世' and '間' (*aida/ken*), indicating something in between or inside the world. The Japanese terms *kiseken* (器世間), the world where sentient beings live, and *ujouseken* (有情世間), the realm of sentient beings including human beings and other living organisms, encompass all aspects associated with physical space and emotional attachment of individuals and collectives in Japan. In the 16th volume of the *Manyoushuu* collection of classical Japanese poems, there is a poem: '世間之繁借廬尓 住々而 將至國之 多附不知聞 (*yononakanoshigerikaruiorini sumitsutsumo yukukunino okushirajitozoomou*, After spending so much time in this chaotic world, which is a temporary place of residence, I have no idea how the world that I'm going after death someday in the future will be)' (*Manyoushu*, 2009 updated online), implying that *seken* is a place

where people live, and the place where they go after death is not *seken*, but rather known as the other world (あの世, *anoyo*,) or a different spirit world (異界, *ikai*). Partly due to the origin of the term, different from *yononaka*, *seken* seems to be a polarising force in people's lives in their respective societies, serving as a standard or model for norms and common sense while being influenced and shaped by people's subjective basis for judgment (Nakamura, 2013).

社会 **(society)** The term '社会 (*shakai*, society)' was originally created as a Japanese translation of the concepts of society introduced with Western civilization's national systems after the Meiji Restoration (Amari, 2015). This translation was further introduced into Chinese to refer to society in the nineteenth century. '社' originally represented an earthly deity, and its rituals formed the basis of group cohesion. '会' refers to gatherings. Therefore, *shakai* represents the gathering of a group of people who live in the same geographic areas or work together in solidarity, without reference to the temporal or spatial nature of society. Due to the influence of Western ideology, *shakai* is understood as an aggregation of individuals based on explicit rules, with each individual serving as a mediator of these rules through various forms (e.g. contracts).

As such, *seken* can also be viewed through a narrower lens as *shakai*, despite significant differences in their origins and their practical embedment in Japan. Inoue (1977) suggests that for the townspeople of the Edo period, *seken* meant the world of their daily lives and the people who inhabited that world, as well as the outside (外, *soto*) world beyond their inside world (内, *uchi*). *Seken*, therefore, encapsulated societal aspects without particularly clear boundaries. It was not the individuals who confronted the wider *seken*, but rather the *uchi* (家, homes) and *mura* (村, village), the narrower *seken* centred on the local family business. In other words, the boundary between the inside and the outside of the *seken* is ambiguous and primarily based on one's own position.

Despite their similar translations into English, *seken* and *shakai* have distinct connotations, which can be identified through two key distinctions. On one hand, despite the ambiguity in defining *seken*, its essence has been understood as an idea that Japanese people construct when they form a group. In other words, it represents a communal imaginary based on each individual's subjective sense of belonging, which maintains a unique and independent relationship separate from the power of the state and government, yet strongly binds Japanese people together. Instead of being governed by political rules, the norms of behaviour for Japanese people have traditionally been regulated from the perspective of their peers (仲間, *nakama*) who belong to the same *seken*. Thus, the concept of togetherness (一体感, *ittaikan*) deeply influences Japanese people's consciousness and behaviour (Akiyama, 2014). A popular Japanese saying reflects this sentiment: '赤信号、皆で渡れば怖くない (You will never be afraid if you are going to cross the red light together)'. Benedict (2005) characterised this phenomenon as the culture of shame (恥の文化, *haji no bunka*), highlighting that Japanese people often base their actions not on what is right or wrong according to rules, but on how they are perceived by the eyes of their peers (仲間の目, *nakama no me*) belonging to the same *seken*. As the *seken* evolves, people's perception of shame also changes, either for the better or worse, as indicated by the Japanese saying '世間の目を恥じる (*sekennome wo hajiru*, to be ashamed in the eyes of others/society)'. Therefore, *seken*, as a social community, also exhibits an exclusive nature, characterised by the exclusion of those from the outside and the tolerance of those from the inside. It is believed that once a person is excluded from the *seken*, they have no place left within it (Sato, 2001).

On the other hand, as previously mentioned, *shakai* is formed by people gathering together based on explicit rules, such as laws and contracts, originating from Western countries. Although the term *shakai* has become ingrained in the Japanese language, key concepts like individual equality, associated with Western societal ideologies, are less likely to exist practically in Japan (Abe, 2004). In contrast to *seken*, the knowledge-based, objective, public domain is more likely to be referred to as *shakai* in Japan, with its fundamental nature closely linked to concerns regarding performance-based systems and internal controls influenced by neoliberalism. Consequently, more emphasis is placed on contractual relationships, the equality and practicality of each individual, and the rational relationships between individuals (Amari, 2015). Additionally, instead of *shakai*, the term '実社会 (*jisshakai*)' is sometimes used to denote the real world experienced by Japanese people, recognising the gap between the concept of *shakai* imported from the West and the *seken* that actually exists around them (Amari, 2015).

Therefore, *shakai* as public stance (建前, *tatemae*) and *seken* as true feelings (本音, *honne*) both coexist in contemporary Japan (Abe, 2004), implying that Japanese people inhabit a dual structure of '*tatemae shakai*' and '*honne seken*'. This duality is also evident in Japanese societal practices. For example, when a scandal occurs in a company or government office, the person in charge apologises for causing a public disturbance in *seken*, but not in *shakai*, by emphasising '世間をお騒がせして申し訳ない', suggesting that Japanese people reside in *seken* rather than in *shakai*. Similarly, Amari (2015) observed that the organisation (workplace) in which Japanese people work is the *seken*, and the divisions within organisations can be seen as smaller *seken* within the larger one. The *jisshakai* in Japan represents the broader *seken* that encompasses all organisations. In other words, individuals working for an organisation are members of the *seken*, which is composed of various forms and layers.

国家 **(nation, country)** As previously indicated, the contribution of higher education to nation-building has been considered an important sphere in contemporary Japanese universities (Yonezawa, 2023). Therefore, the term '国家' (*kokka*, nation, country) warrants special attention when investigating the public good of Japanese higher education. In Japan, two main categories can be distinguished, namely family state (家族国家, *kazoku kokka*) and national state (国民国家, *kokumin kokka*), depending on varied ideological approaches.

In the case of the family state, the family (家) was positioned as the basis of the Emperor's ruling system (Katou, 1996), and the concept of the family state attempts to explain the nation through the analogy and expansion of the family. Based on imperial management rule, the royal family was regarded as an extended family of the imperial clan. The relationship between the emperor (天皇, *tennou*) and his subjects (臣民, *shinmin*) was akin to that of a main family (宗家, *souke*) and a branch family (分家, *bunke*), similar to the relationship between a parent and a child. Therefore, honoring the royal family is just the same as honoring one's parents and ancestors. These are considered an indivisible combination. This notion is characterised as '忠孝一本 (*chuukou ippon*, the combination of loyalty and filial piety)', which has been highly valued in Confucian principles (Katou, 1996). On the other hand, after the Meiji Restoration, Japan began to be seen as a modern nation-state (近代国民国家, *kindai kokumin kokka*) due to the introduction and application of Western systems. Addressing the modern family within the modern nation, the concept of the national state highlights that it is not the concept of the home (家) as an extended

family where ancestors are emphasised, linking families/clans to the nation, but rather the household (家庭, *katei*), as a container for small urban families where marital relations are emphasised, illustrating how families live in modern times.

Chinese and English key terms and their explanations

There is a nuanced exploration of the relevant Chinese and English terms in Special Issue papers by Tian and Liu, and Marginson, as well as in Marginson and Yang (2022) and the full-scale comparative treatment in Yang (2023). In this sub-section, instead of developing a detailed main text that repeats those previous discussions and the Chinese and English language terms and their respective equivalents, as for the Japanese terms, the main explanations of the terms and also the three-way equivalents are summarised in two tables (Tables 3 and 4).

Step 3: discussing issues of 'fit' and the degree of overlap

In each of Tables 2, 3 and 4, there is a column on the issue of fit that discusses the conceptual distance and overlap between the key terms and their nearest approximations or equivalence in the other two languages. It is evident from the tables that for most of the terms, be they in Japanese, Chinese or English, there are seldom clear-cut equivalences in the other two languages. Although several Japanese terms (e.g. 公 and 私) were introduced from Chinese, and they have very similar properties (e.g. 公 and 私 are both relative terms with ambiguous boundaries), new connotations were added in the new context. For example, the Japanese term *shi* (私) is derived from the Chinese character *si* (私), resulting in a significant overlap in their meanings, both encompassing notions of privacy and individuality. However, from the Meiji era onwards, Western individualist thought was introduced to Japan, emphasising individual rights and freedoms. Consequently, the use of the kanji character *shi* as a first-person pronoun increased and became widespread. This phenomenon, as noted by Yasunaga (1976), has not been observed in any other language, including Chinese.

Additionally, the Chinese character 世, used in Japanese terms, deserves special attention as it is originally from China, where it implies 'world'. However, in the context of the Japanese language, this term conveys more nuanced notions depending on the specific context, encompassing world, society and even social values and norms. This extends the scope of the term beyond its usage in the Chinese language.

Nonetheless, in general, there is a larger overlap between Japanese and Chinese terms than between Japanese/Chinese terms and English terms. This indicates a closer distance between the Japanese and Chinese contexts and cultures, than between either and English.

Compared to Japanese and Chinese terms that are generally under-known in English literature, almost all the English terms have been translated and interpreted in both Japanese and Chinese. Further, influence from English terms and Anglophone ideas can be observed in both Japanese and Chinese terms. Many modern Japanese and Chinese terms only appeared as the translation of English terms, which have been widely used as such. Distinctive examples include the Japanese and Chinese translations of public goods (*koukyouzai* in Japanese and *gonggong wupin/chanpin* in Chinese) and society (*shakai* in Japanese and *shehui* in Chinese).

Notably, however, even in the case of such translations of English terms, Japanese and Chinese terms may carry unique underlying ideas. Take the example of the state—applying

the notion of the Emperor's ruling system, the Japanese *kokka* refers to both the family state and nation-state. Similarly, the Chinese *guojia* can also be understood as the nation-state, civilisational state or family state. Meanwhile, after the translation, certain aspects of the original English terms may be lost. For example, though *gong*/*si* and *kou*/*shi* are the Chinese and Japanese translations of public/private, they do not carry the individualistic assumption that underlies the English public/private. To elaborate, in both Chinese and Japanese, there is a normative preference towards the public over the private (though in modern times, there has been an individualisation trend in both countries), whereas the English public/private normatively protects the rights and goods of the private in relation to the public. These nuances and unique underlying ideas warrant special attention and caution in dealing with approximations or equivalents of English terms in other contexts.

Concluding remarks

The above discussion and analysis have demonstrated the existence of lexical and contextual nuances that deserve attention in exploring and comparing the public good of higher education between Japan, China and Anglophone countries. A key contribution has been the focus on Japanese terms and underlying ideas.

In discussing public goods in Japanese higher education, Japan continues to use terms rooted in ancient Confucian thought (e.g. *seken*) while also incorporating many new terms that embody Western ideas and characteristics (e.g. *shakai* and *komyuniti*). On the one hand, Japanese higher education seemingly continues to promote the collectivism inherent in traditional Confucian thought, and this relates to Japanese policy agendas and the practices of higher education institutions. As previously mentioned, as the next step in the Top Global University Project, Japanese universities are expected to collaborate with local communities and contribute more to public collective aspects (JSPS, 2018). For instance, Hiroshima University, a national university located in the Chugoku region of Japan and a member of the Top Global University Project, implemented the Town and Gown project, collaborating with local governments, businesses and citizens to revitalise the local economy and promote social and cultural engagement. Moreover, following the Great East Japan Earthquake, Tohoku University established the International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS) to collaborate with local governments, businesses and international partners in improving disaster preparedness and response. This partnership addresses public safety and regional resilience, demonstrating how higher education can contribute to addressing societal challenges through research, public engagement and policy input. Meanwhile, at the world level, the Japanese government has actively implemented various strategies to support developing countries, as expressed by the Japanese term '*kuni no kyousei* (国の共生, coexistence of nations)', suggesting a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between countries, in alignment with the principle of public good(s) and *wa* (和). A significant practical example in this context is the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), established in the 1970s, which plays a key role in providing technical assistance and knowledge transfer to developing countries, focusing on areas such as disaster management, agriculture, health and education. JICA has implemented, for instance, the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS). The JDS program offers scholarships to young professionals from ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. This initiative enables students to pursue master's and doctoral degrees in Japan in fields such as public administration, economics and law, with

the aim of fostering the next generation of leaders in ASEAN countries. JDS scholars are expected to contribute to their home countries' development upon their return.

On the other hand, in relation to the development of the nation and higher education, Japanese higher education also emphasises the development of individualism for each individual. This helps to explain why there is a large number of private universities in Japan, and why the government provides substantial financial support to these private institutions. Notably, the private higher education sector also embodies the nuanced-contextualisation of the Western private idea (e.g. the private/public legal distinction) in Japan, implying an ongoing mixture of Western ideas and Japanese traditions. A distinctive manifestation is the state's regulation of the private higher education sector in Japan, through accreditation, quality assurance and funding mechanisms. This regulatory framework reflects Western ideas of accountability and quality control in higher education while being influenced by Japan's historical emphasis on social harmony and public welfare. In addition, despite being private sectors, they have been encouraged to align with national educational goals, such as fostering innovation and addressing societal needs. This demonstrates an ongoing negotiation between Western ideals of educational reform and the Japanese tradition of prioritising collective benefits and social responsibilities. Finally, drawing on the private universities on their cultural adaptation of governmental policies, the regulatory environment for private higher education often incorporates elements of Confucian values, such as respect for education and the importance of lifelong learning, which align with the Western emphasis on personal development and continuous education. This synergy illustrates how Japan adapts Western ideas within its cultural framework to enhance its educational landscape.

The lexical comparison approach developed in this paper may serve well for comparisons of other higher education topics involving multiple languages. For example, the comparative examination of the ideas of human development in higher education, reflected in, say, the English concept of student-formation, the German concept of *bildung* and the Chinese concept of *xiushen* (self-cultivation), can be compared, exploring also the practical implications of the similarities and differences in policy and practice. Lexical comparison can generate analytical frameworks of value in a very wide range of studies on a worldwide basis. It can be particularly helpful in exploring the potentials of pan-national regional cooperation in higher education, in investigating similarities and differences, and possibly in developing common ground.

In addition to the many possible applications of the lexical approach for analytical purposes, and their potential applications in policy and practice, the use of lexical analysis arouses and reinforces researchers' awareness of certain essential elements in comparative studies: paying attention to the foundational cultural ideas underlying the more immediate manifestations in practice and policy, respecting diversity across cultures and contexts, and developing methods that avoid privileging one culture over another culture, or over all the other cultures.

Next steps are for researchers to apply the approach in comparative studies of higher education of additional topics and involving additional languages, beyond Japanese, Chinese and English—not only the five other languages discussed in Table 1 and in this Special Issue, but the fuller range of world languages. In such applications of the method, more cultural variations or similarities may be revealed and new possibilities for combination and cooperation may emerge.

Different languages and cultures embody different social relations, values and key ideas about human conduct and social organisation, in general and in higher education; and each specific language/culture might have useful insights for other languages/cultures

to consider. For example, *jeong* in Korean suggests collective or public social relations grounded in empathetic understanding (Mun & Min, 2022): it is a norm of social relations with a potentially transformative effect, one that once understood can resonate in any cultural context. The multiple potentials of this powerful idea start to open up when the lexical approach is used. The Chinese term *tianxia* offers a basis for worldwide relations in general and in higher education that takes all societies beyond the limitations of zero-sum contestation between bordered nation-states (Yang, et al., 2024). The concept and practice of *sivistys* in Finland (Brewis, this issue) offers a mode of higher education's role in building nation and society that could be transformative in other political cultures, though each would nuance the education-society relation within their own tradition.

The wider employment of the lexical approach in higher education studies can also contribute to moving beyond Western dominance in the global literature on higher education and be conducive to the evolution of worldwide diversity and heterogeneity in the sector.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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