

**Future of Certified Evaluation and Accreditation:
Toward a Substantial Self-Check and Evaluation System**

Hiromitsu Takizawa
(Executive Director, RIIHE)

Time to reexamine Certified Evaluation and Accreditation scheme

Certified Evaluation and Accreditation (CEA) scheme was promulgated in 2004, and the 5th generation of evaluation has ended: The number of universities evaluated within CEA scheme is more than half of all Japanese universities. The first cycle of seven years of CEA will finish in two more years, so this is a good time to assess what CEA has done, based on the first five-years in order to examine the scheme of evaluation itself. In fact, various questions were raised before and after the introduction of this brand-new scheme of evaluation: Is it viable to establish well-prepared organizations powerful enough to evaluate and accredit all institutions including universities and junior colleges within a time as short as seven years? Even if the organizations could somehow were established, would the evaluations be reliable and sustainable? How should CEA deal with the contradictory problems of contemporary higher education, especially the universalization of higher education that results in the diversification of students' academic abilities, and the globalization of higher education that requires quality education?

As of 2009, three organizations had been certified by the government to evaluate and accredit individual higher education institutions in Japan, and it is fair to say that all of them have been already aware of the challenges in the current CEA scheme. In spite of that, none of them seem to have tried to change the ways of evaluation that they had initially prescribed, so as not to cause more confusion among higher education institutions before the first cycle of CEA ends. Instead, they are apparently planning fundamental improvements in ways of evaluation for the second cycle.

I believe questions about the first cycle of CEA originate, in general terms, in two defects found in the process of its establishment. One defect is that CEA became obligatory too hastily. Neither the "self-check and evaluation" system on the higher education institution side nor the third-party evaluation system on the evaluator side was given enough time to mature. The other defect is due to the fact that CEA started without full understanding of its purpose and character among the concerned parties of higher education, since the government had come to an impetuous decision to introduce CEA. It resulted in ambiguous share of the scope of responsibilities among quality assurance mechanisms of CEA, licensure,

self-check and evaluation and administrative guidance. In point of fact, these two defects remain today with no real corrections or revisions.

This essay traces how the second defect of CEA emerged: It questions why CEA was established with no clear idea of the purpose or the nature of the evaluation to be performed. It also seeks to indicate clues to improve the methods of evaluation in the second cycle of CEA.

Relation between CEA, and self-check and evaluation

As the Central Council for Education pointed out in its report, *A Vision for Universities in the 21st Century and Reform Measures* (1998), the essence of university evaluation should be found in the self-check and evaluation which each university performs itself, knowing that the prime responsibility for maintaining and enhancing the quality of education rests with individual higher education institutions. Universities should be obliged to adopt "independence and autonomy" as their ideals, in the light of their missions. Hence, it would be natural for institutions to consider themselves responsible for quality assurance in the first place. However, since CEA system started and "analysis of self-check and evaluation" began to be employed by third party evaluators in 2004, the substantial characteristics of self-check and evaluation have changed. Self-check and evaluation suddenly became a sort of preparation or required condition for CEA, without any culture of spontaneous self-research and self-improvement having matured within higher education institutions.

When CEA scheme was inaugurated in 2004, self-check and evaluation had already been regulated for higher education institutions, but the process was in a very immature stage. And there existed no organizations or infrastructures of self-study or full understanding of self-study among higher education institutions when CEA became compulsory. Consequently, the result of the introduction of CEA was, it now seems, to create obstacles in the development of self-check and evaluation of individual universities because administrators and faculties took it as mere a prerequisite which all institutions had to go through before undergoing CEA. As a result, administrators and faculties missed a golden opportunity to grasp the concept of checking and evaluating themselves in order to improve their activities. In other words, the system of self-study that had been introduced eventually failed to lead to true "self" improvement.

Since the sound development of self-checking and evaluation was impeded, as described above, the development of CEA itself had to be eventually looked at in a new light. The task we are facing, in reality, is to reconsider the purposes and the roles of CEA.

The purposes of CEA as understood by every certified evaluator were believed to have a common mission: assuring the quality of universities and/or their education and research. It is, however, reasonable to wonder if

the *assuring the quality of universities and/or their education and research* is proper expression in this situation.

CEA was designed to analyze self-check and evaluation: It does not have, in principle, any authority to directly assess the education and research of universities. What CEA is supposed to do is assure the quality of self-check and evaluations performed by universities, at the same time, ensuring that the quality of education and research itself shall be the responsibility of each university itself.

Considering that the mission of CEA is to evaluate the self-check and evaluation of each institution, I would like to re-define the purpose of CEA clearly: “CEA was designed to enhance the quality of the universities’ self-check and evaluations by assessing their accuracy and integrity, in order to assist universities not only in developing greater quality in education and research but also in being accountable to society.”

CEA and government licensure: other creatures

The central purpose of the university licensure by the government is to make sure a university fulfills fundamental requirements—such as mission, purpose, education and research settings, qualified faculty and their proper organization and physical equipment, etc.—, prior to its establishment. This is an approval procedure which is indispensable in terms of quality assurance of higher education institutions. This procedure cannot, by its nature, be replaced by any kind of post-evaluation.

On the other hand, administrative standards (of administration of educational organizations, student support, evaluation of students’ learning outcomes, faculty development, governance and self-check and evaluation) provided by regulations such as the *University Establishment Standards* focus on actual governance in individual institutions. Moreover, these regulations aim at more qualitative aspects of these governing activities, so *prior* or *official* evaluation does not seem feasible in judging compliance of an institution with regulations like the *University Establishment Standards*. Instead of these, *posterior* and *private* evaluation is expected to play much of the role in assessing the practical administrative activities of a university.

Thus, the items being evaluated must be the key to define the timing of the evaluations, *prior* or *posterior*, to the establishment. Within activities of a university, there should be a set of items that fits prior and governmental evaluation, while the other set of items fits posterior and independent evaluation. We cannot mix them up. In fact, CEA began using the uniformed slogan “a change from prior regulation to posterior checking,” *i.e.* “handing responsibility for quality assurance of higher education from the government to the market.” However, this idea does not always feed the demand for proper exercise of quality assurance system of higher education.

The first step in re-thinking the quality assurance system of higher education in Japan is to review the current principle of quality assurance that overemphasizes the market-orientation of higher education and ignores much of the reality. And as the second step, we need to review the allocation of responsibilities in quality assurance between the public prior licensure system on the one hand, and the “private” posterior evaluation system on the other hand. In the process of this allocation, it is absolutely essential that we consider the reality of higher education.

The role of CEA and the legal compliance with University Establishment Standards

Above all, I would like to confirm that CEA does not play a part in the direct supervision of compliance with the *University Establishment Standards* of a university. Even if violations of regulations are found during the process of CEA, it is inappropriate to consider CEA to be responsible for persuading a university to disclose their violations: This is the role of the government so long as it has legal authority and responsibility to take gradual corrective measures to cease violations of regulations by a university.

The fundamental value of CEA lies in mutual support in the university community. This activity of quality assurance belongs to the “private” domain of higher education, rather than to the scope of “public” responsibility: CEA can function efficiently only when this principle is upheld. Meanwhile, the initial report of the Council for Regulatory Reform defined CEA as a system of “posterior surveillance” of higher education institutions. This definition clearly tells that the Council did not understand the fundamental concept of CEA.

Future of CEA

To conclude this article, I would like to summarize the basic policy that is necessary in reconsideration of CEA:

1. The success of the quality assurance system totally depends on the success of self-check and evaluation. The first priority of CEA therefore ought to be to promote the function of the universities’ self-check and evaluation and to fully establish it as a way of quality assurance.

2. CEA is primarily a “private” and flexible system. It is essential to make it clear that CEA has a different role from that of public/governmental licensure and inspection.

3. It is necessary to make the evaluation procedure more effective by narrowing down its focus and simplifying its items of evaluation, based on the re-definition of the purpose of CEA: This is required not just to reduce work-load but to endure quality maintenance and improvement of evaluation itself.

This article was originally published in Japanese in the *Kyoikugakujutu* as
Arcadia Gazette, No. 356, February 18, 2009
<http://www.shidaikyo.or.jp/riihe/research/arcadia/0356.html>