

Transformation of Quality Assurance System of Higher Education in Japan
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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I feel highly honored by being invited to participate in this Conference and I greatly appreciate it. I had worked for Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) as a Managing Director for two years before I was appointed to the Chancellery of Chuo University in 2003. Although I do not represent JUAA today, I would like to give my presentation on the basis of my experience with the Association.

I JUAA

JUAA is not an establishment of the Government. It is a voluntary association of universities in Japan, incorporated, self-supporting and independent of the Government. It was founded originally by 46 universities in 1947 for the purpose of enhancing the quality of higher education by self-improving efforts and mutual cooperation of its members. A university seeking the membership must apply for the Association's accreditation and be accredited. Member universities are requested to be re-accredited every seven years. The Association now consists of 322 universities, the members being 41 national, 28 public and 253 private universities. The total number amounts to about 45 percent of all the universities in Japan.

At this juncture, let me add a few words about the term "university" as used in Japan. It is used in a broad sense and when we say a university, we mean a higher/ tertiary institution that has a four-year course of education for a bachelor's degree, and an institution of which establishment was approved by the Ministry of Education of the National Government. Many of the universities have graduate schools and research institutes, which we consider as components of the university. There exist some exceptions, which I will not go into here.

There are three kinds of university in Japan in terms of ownership. One is the national university, which is established by the National Government. National universities have recently been reorganized and given independent legal status as administrative corporations, but they are still the establishments of the Government. Second is what we call the public university, which is created by the local government and approved by the Ministry of Education. Third is the private university. Under the law, a private university can be established with the approval of the

Ministry of Education only by a particular non-profit foundation set up solely for the purpose of providing education and recognized as such by the Government. We call the foundation educational corporation. Primary and secondary private schools can also be established only by such educational corporations.

At present, there are 708 universities in all in Japan. Universities vary in their shapes and sizes from huge ones having 20 faculties and research institutes with more than 50 thousand students to small ones such as a single-faculty university and a women's university.

II Voluntary System of Quality Assurance

The Japanese system of quality assurance of higher education has undergone a profound change since 2004. Up to that time, JUAA had long been recognized as the sole organization for evaluation and accreditation of universities in Japan.

Establishment of university is required by law to be approved by the Ministry of Education. Laws and regulations did prescribe detailed standards and criteria for the granting of approval. Thus, through the approval granting process, the Ministry of Education secured the minimum standards of the quality of universities. Although the law requested the universities to conduct self-study of its operations and make the results public, it did not say that universities must undergo evaluation by external agency.

Many universities after being approved have voluntarily joined JUAA in order to improve the quality of higher education through mutual cooperation. The Association established its own standards, criteria and procedures of its evaluation and accreditation and carried out its functions on the basis of voluntary cooperation of the member-universities. Since 1996 when its accreditation system was renovated, and up to 2003, JUAA evaluated, accredited and re-accredited more than 200 of its member-universities. The Government was not involved at all in the Association's activities.

It was, and still is, left to the universities themselves to decide whether or not to join JUAA and go through its periodical evaluation and accreditation process. The decision to join is entirely autonomous and voluntary. This is the reason why more than half of the universities remain un-committed to JUAA. It means that those non-member universities never came through assessment by an external evaluation agency. National universities, however, were exceptions.

In carrying out the Government's comprehensive plan of policy assessment, the Ministry of Education launched in 2000 its own system of evaluation of educational and research programs of national universities. The Ministry requested all national universities to go through evaluation

by its own agency, National Institute for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE). Even those national universities that have joined JUAA have thus been forced to apply for the evaluation by the Institute. Although they continue to hold the membership of JUAA and to contribute to the Association's activities, they have come not to ask for its evaluation and accreditation.

The system of quality assurance of higher education in Japan up to 2004 can be summarized as follows: the Government grants approval of the establishment of university; university is required by law to conduct self-study of its operations and make the result public; JUAA, through its periodical evaluation following its own standards, criteria and procedures, assures independently of the Government the quality of its member-universities; non-member universities except national universities have remained un-assessed by any external evaluation agency; national universities including those that hold the membership of JUAA have come to be evaluated by NIAD-UE. The system is now undergoing a profound change.

III The Comprehensive Mandatory System

In 1980's some American universities opened their branches in Japan but they were not recognized as universities under the Japanese law. They did not apply for the approval for their establishment and thus they were not given the legal status of degree-awarding universities in Japan. Consequently they could not attract a sufficient number of students and most of them had to close their branches before long.

Deregulation of various economic and social activities has been one of the basic policies of the Government in recent years. Education has not been made an exception. Moreover, Japan has been under a strong pressure from abroad to open its higher education market. Some countries of WTO have made a formal request to the Japanese Government to liberalize its rigid regulatory system of higher education.

Implementing its deregulation policy in the domain of higher education, the Government has amended education laws so as to lessen the prior entry regulation and to establish and effective scheme of quality assurance. The Ministry of Education continues to hold the power to grant approval of the establishment of a university, but the conditions and requirements for approval are relaxed considerably. The laws' amendments, which took effect on April 1, 2004, have brought about a radical change in the quality assurance system.

First, the amended laws put all universities under the legal obligation to go through evaluations every seven years by an external agency certified by the Ministry of Education. In the

history of higher education in Japan, this is the first time we have come to have a comprehensive and mandatory system of quality evaluation of universities.

Secondly, the Ministry of Education is given by the law the power to certify the evaluation agency. The law prescribes several requirements for the certification, one of which, for example, says that a would-be certified agency (that is, the applicant for certification) shall have established the criteria and methodology by which it can perform the evaluation fairly and properly.

In order for JUAA to be a certified agency, it is forced to make its voluntary system of accreditation conform to the law's framework of the mandatory system so that universities successful in JUAA's evaluation for accreditation will have fulfilled their legal obligation to undergo certified evaluation. As I said earlier, JUAA has, independently of the Government, established its own standards, criteria and procedures of its evaluation and accreditation and performed its functions on its own responsibility. The law changed the situation greatly. Under the law, in its certification process, the Ministry of Education has come to have a say as to, among others, what the JUAA's evaluation criteria and methodology should be. In its application for certification, JUAA must show, among others, that its criteria and methodology satisfy the requirements prescribed by the law. If the Ministry finds them unsatisfactory, it may request improvement or deny certification.

Thirdly, the Ministry of Education has not only the power to certify, but also holds the certified agencies under its control. Under the law, a certified agency must report to the Ministry on the results of its evaluation of each university and must keep the Ministry informed of the changes made to its criteria and methodology of evaluation; the Ministry is authorized to request the agency to submit reports with relevant documents on its evaluation activities, and when it finds impropriety or unlawfulness in the activities, it may direct that necessary improvements be made. The Ministry holds the ultimate power to revoke its certification in case of serious failures on the part of the agency. Before 2004, JUAA had never had such relations with the Ministry.

Fourthly, the law anticipates that multiple bodies will be certified as evaluation agencies. It does not specify the type of bodies to be certified. JUAA, a voluntary association of universities having rich experience of accreditation of its members, obtained the certification. NIAD-UE, which was reorganized last year and was made an independent administrative corporation, was also certified. Although it still remains the establishment of the Government, its policy is extended to cover the evaluation of not only national universities but also public and private universities. There will be other entries. It is reported that an association of private universities that have not joined JUAA plans to launch its certified evaluation. In the eyes of the law, a for-

profit corporation engaged in business other than education or even a foreign accreditation organization can be a certified agency if it satisfies the condition and requirements of the law.

A special mention must be made as to the evaluation of law schools. In connection with the large-scale reform of legal education, the laws established in 2004 a special system of certified evaluation, separate from the one aiming at the university as a whole. A law school is usually set up as a graduate school of a university with the approval of the Ministry of Education. The university possessing a law school must go through the special certified evaluation of its programs of legal education in addition to the certified evaluation of the university as a whole. A foundation created by the National Bar Association and specializing itself in the evaluation of law schools was the first to be certified by the Ministry of Education. NIAD-UE was also certified. It has thus become a certified evaluation agency both for a university as a whole and a law school in particular. JUAA plans to extend its functions to cover this specialized evaluation of law schools.

IV Concluding remarks

Although its functions have covered only its member-universities, JUAA had long been recognized as the sole organization for evaluation and accreditation of universities in Japan. On the basis of voluntary cooperation of its members, it performed its functions independently of the Government. Now we have come to have a comprehensive, mandatory and competitive system of quality assurance of higher education. All universities are put under the legal obligation to go through periodical evaluation by an external agency. The Ministry of Education has come to have a part in the process of the evaluation. Several bodies have entered as certified evaluation agencies. In addition, some more are expected to appear. These agencies are, and will be, engaged in substantially the same business of evaluating universities and law schools and these agencies will be competing with each other. The competitive situation will put universities in a position where, in fulfilling their legal obligation to undergo certified evaluation, they can choose from among the several competing agencies. A university will choose one of the agencies at one time for the evaluation and after a seven year cycle, it may go to another agency. The university does not have to stay with the agency of its first choice. The Ministry of Education seems to be very positive about the competition among the certified agencies, but as for myself, I am not sure if such a system will truly contribute to the assurance and improvement of the quality of higher education.

The new system has just been set in motion. JUAA was the first to initiate the certified evaluation under the new law and has recently published the results of its evaluation of 34

universities. It put two universities under probation for two years pointing to the matters that need improvements. It remains to be seen what the results of these agencies' evaluation will be.