

**Japan-Nordic Symposium  
On the Frontier of University Evaluation  
-Making the Most of Nordic Successes-**

## **Summary and Closing Address**

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**Akihiko Kawaguchi**

**Vice-President, NIAD-UE**



**Kato:** We now move to the last item on the program, a summary of today's symposium and closing comments by Vice-President Kawaguchi from NIAD-UE.

**Kawaguchi:** Thank you for your introduction. Once again I take the floor—please bear with me just a little longer.

This Japan-Nordic Symposium today was held on the theme “On the Frontier of University Evaluation—Making the Most of Nordic Successes.” In contrast to the poor conditions we experienced up until yesterday, the weather has turned out very well, and I am extremely grateful that we were able to hold the symposium under such conditions.

I would like to thank you for finding time in your busy schedules to come here today, and for the contributions so many of you made to the long and lively discussions we have had. In particular, as I mentioned earlier, we were not able to spare enough time for questions. However at the end we were able to take quite a few questions, and I hope you feel a little more satisfied now.

I would like to convey our special thanks to Dr. Thune and all other panelists who made time in their hectic schedules to join us here on stage today. We appreciate your immense understanding and cooperation with today's proceedings, right through from the preparatory stage. Thank you very much.

Discussions today have centered on evaluation in Japanese higher education institutions, issues of reform and improvement through evaluation, and accountability to wider society. I would be interested to know your thoughts on today's proceedings. I hope that you were able to gain some idea of possible directions for university evaluation here in Japan and how the results of evaluation should be utilized.

I think today's symposium provided a very valuable opportunity to consider how to develop a culture of evaluation—an issue that we ourselves are advocating—and to take a leading role in developing systems of quality assurance for higher education institutions in this country. As I said a moment ago, the Nordic countries have been engaging these issues for five or ten years longer than we have: that is why we organized this symposium.

On a personal note, when I was studying at Harvard University about thirty years ago,

I lived near a family from Sweden who I came to know well. We visited each other's houses and shared many frank conversations. I still have a clear recollection of what we talked about. Because we were living in the U.S., we exchanged views on how the U.S. was perceived in Japan, or how Japan was viewed from a Swedish perspective. These conversations made me realize that although Japan and Sweden are very far apart both culturally and geographically, our perceptions of the United States were very similar.

So in that sense, I thought the Nordic countries had many interesting features, and I also had access to information that suggested they were quite advanced in terms of university evaluation. So last year we began visiting the five countries of the region, and this year had observer status at the annual meeting of NOQA, which was mentioned this morning. We found many commonalities with our experiences in Japan. Earlier there was a question from the floor about the distinctive features of the Nordic experience: certainly, it is similar in many ways.

As I said earlier, however, there are also points of difference. I feel that Japan has a lot to learn from the way Nordic countries are utilizing the results of university evaluation. Although these countries are far from Japan and have different cultures and education systems from us, there is a high degree of commonality in the area of evaluation. I have made this point in my closing remarks because I would like you to contemplate it as you leave the symposium today.

We recognized that Nordic countries' experiences could provide important hints when considering future directions for the evaluation services provided by our institution. That provided the rationale for this symposium. I also believe the symposium is going to provide a catalyst for further exchange of information and sharing of experiences. I think this will be crucial for us in the future.

It is about three years now since we began interaction with our Nordic colleagues on the issue of evaluation. We will continue to watch the Nordic countries and other parts of Europe as they develop their quality assurance initiatives. I think this was a good opportunity to grasp the importance of quality assurance and to consider how we can realize it in the Asian context to contribute to an enhancement of our knowledge-based society.

However, this symposium is no more than a starting point. It is important that we work

together from now on to realize a better society for stakeholders in our different regions, countries, and even across national borders. I am sure that this will lead to an ongoing cooperative relationship between our different regions and countries.

I personally believe that our two different parts of the world share a very similar mindset, and that it would be very worthwhile for us to join together in developing partnerships in the higher education field. It would bring unexpected happiness to us as organizers if today's symposium helps to promote goodwill and contributes to the development of higher education in our two regions.

Now, I would like to make use of this opportunity to do some marketing for our institution. We already have plans in place to hold another symposium in two months' time, at the end of November, this time with representatives from university evaluation bodies in China. This is part of a series we have been operating since last year on "university evaluation in Asia," in which we invite Asian colleagues to discuss issues of quality assurance in our region. Last year we held a symposium on the topic of university evaluation in Taiwan. This will be the second in the series, and we look forward to the opportunity to interact with our counterparts from China.

This next symposium will be on the topic of quality assurance in Chinese higher education, but in the future we hope that our institution will be able to play a leading role in quality assurance not just domestically or in China, but throughout the Asian region. We look forward to your ongoing support for our activities.

I will conclude my address by saying once again that we are extremely grateful to the representatives of the five Nordic countries who joined us here today, as well as to those from Japanese institutions of higher education, and to all others who took the trouble to attend this symposium. Thank you very much.

**Kato:** Thank you for joining us at this Japan-Nordic Symposium, "On the Frontier of University Evaluation—Making the Most of Nordic Successes." This concludes our program for today. Thank you very much.

We ask for your cooperation in filling out your questionnaire sheets before leaving. Your completed questionnaires will be collected by staff at the exit. Also, please leave your simultaneous interpretation receivers at your seats. A reception will be held in the

Reception Hall on the second floor, starting at 5:15. Everyone in the audience is warmly invited to attend. All those who will not be joining us for the reception are reminded to take all their belongings with them when they leave.

Thank you very much.