

Influence of Michael Scriven in Japan

Ryo Sasaki

International Development Center of Japan (IDCJ)

I studied at the doctoral program in evaluation at the Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University, from 2006 to 2009. My original mentor (academic advisor) was Michael Scriven. I took several courses taught by him and learned the basics of evaluation. His influence for evaluation study and practice in Japan is huge. I thought I would not be able to illustrate everything of his influence in Japan. However, I will try some of them.

Japan Evaluation Society and Its Professional Certification Program

The Japan Evaluation Society (JES) was established in 2000. It celebrated its 20-year history in 2020. Inspired by the American Evaluation Association (AEA), the evaluation professionals and scholars thought we needed our own forum in Japan, as one of the advanced nations in the world.

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In 2008, JES started a training program for preparing professional evaluators and launched the world's first professional certification program for evaluation personnel at the same time. The committee preparing the training and professional certification program reviewed the up-to-date situation in the world, including the discussion of the competency framework prepared by the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) at that time.

The following is the structure of the training program for professional evaluators. Here, we can clearly see the influence of Michael Scriven. Actually, I served as an instructor in the program, teaching the basic logic and fundamentals of program evaluation, from the start of the program. I still serve as an instructor teaching the basics of program evaluation after leaving for a while.

Course structure: “32nd Evaluator Training Program” (2023)
hosted by Japan Evaluation Society (JES)

- Overview of the course and basic idea of evaluation
 - Evaluator ethics and social responsibility of evaluators
 - **Fundamentals of program evaluation (I serve as an instructor)**
 - Five levels of program evaluation
 - (Needs assessment) (Evaluability assessment)
 - (Theory evaluation)
 - (Process evaluation/outcome evaluation)
 - (Impact evaluation)
 - (Quantitative qualitative approach)
 - (Efficiency evaluation)
 - Reporting and utilizing evaluation results
 - Current status and issues of evaluation in the central government / local governments / ODA evaluation
 - Review of the course
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Note. Translated and adapted from “Program of 32nd Evaluator Training Program,” Japan Evaluation Society, 2023.

Influence on Evaluation Practice in Japan

Original Definition of “Evaluation”

Scriven made a well-known definition of evaluation. That is: Evaluation is the process of systematic determination of merit, worth, and significance (Scriven, 1991). Evaluation is e-value-ation, and thus it is different from research in principle. You need to make a value claim—for example, good or bad, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, and so on, and then you can say you completed evaluation. This basic definition became widely known in Japanese society, including among officials of central ministries and in the academic world. Now people in Japan know evaluation is different from simple research or study, and evaluation is widely practiced in Japan with value claims.

Basic Formula of “Evaluation”

Scriven proposed a formula like a mathematical formula, which is “Evaluation = Factual premises + Value premises” (Scriven, 1999). This formula has been widely accepted in Japanese society, and a report, if it includes the word “evaluation” in its title, consists of two parts: “factual findings” and

“value determination.” Inherently, professionals in Japan had not had a practice of making value determinations. They did not want to take responsibility for saying “good or bad” and “success or failure” of the public programs that their senior fellows managed (seniority!). Now the public officials in the central ministries understand that making a value determination is their normal duty, and they produce 3,000 to 4,000 evaluation reports each year.

Objectivity of “Evaluation”

This theme has long been debated in Japan. What is objective evaluation, and is it really possible? Still, it is discussed, and so-called EBPM (evidence-based policy making) is one of the hot topics in central government and the academic world in Japan. People seek the opportunity to do RCT (randomized controlled trials) in various sectors of public administration. However, Scriven clearly wrote, “Objective claim means an unbiased claim made through systematic process” (Scriven, 1991, p. 248), regardless of quantitative or qualitative evaluation. This is the clear answer for the question of an objective claim. RCT is just one type of such process. The central ministries, as well as the local government and various quasi-public organizations, prepared a manual of evaluation, including systematic

process of factual findings at first and then making value claims. I have observed its practice and suggest that it is influenced by Scriven's thoughts, even if they do not realize it themselves.

Japan Needs Graduate Program in Evaluation Study

Finally, and as one of the most important impacts, Scriven ran the doctoral program in evaluation study at the Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University. It is the center or the core of evaluation study in the United States and the whole world. Its curriculum has been strongly influenced by Scriven, and his thoughts have been reflected in each course. Unfortunately, Japan has not had a graduate program (PhD or master's program) focused on evaluation study, although several public policy analysis programs have been established, and they usually focus on analysis of specific sector policies and programs. Some foreign scholars had been wondering, "Japan has the professional certification program in evaluation but no graduate program. How is it possible?" I agree with the observation and Japan needs a true graduate program and a center of evaluation study, just like the Evaluation Center that was long led by Michael Scriven.

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