

The 4th University Administrators Workshop
Building International Partnerships:
In quest of a more creative exchange of students

OPENING REMARKS

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Distinguished guests, dear colleagues old and new, ladies and gentlemen! Let me express, on behalf of Kyoto University, my warm welcome. You have kindly come all the way here in spite of the cold weather and the frozen global economy. I express my heart-felt appreciation!

Now, it is my honor to announce the opening of the Fourth University Administrators Workshop, the title of which is: *Building International Partnerships: In quest of a more creative exchange of students*. The point is as follows: to consider afresh what we really mean when we resort to such familiar words as ‘partnership’, while searching for better modes of international student exchange.

Why has this theme been chosen? – It is perhaps a natural outcome of the past three workshops held in Kyoto. Let me give you a brief overview of what we have been discussing during the last three years.

At the first workshop, in March 2006, things were still at the stage of experiment and general observation. The theme was *Enhancing the Quality of International Activities of Asian Universities*. Many reports in the sessions touched upon practices in promoting international cooperation based on university-level memoranda of understanding. Other topics were also raised, but not quite fully explored. These included: 1) how to train the staff of international offices; 2) how to develop multi-lateral exchange programs; and 3) how proper risk management can be carried out for student exchange programs.

The second workshop was held in February 2007. Its general theme sounded ambitious: *Innovating Universities through Internationalization*. The major topics

discussed were: 1) how to promote international research collaboration; and 2) how to strengthen international offices. The discovery of one common difficulty has been memorable — the difficulty experienced by almost all of the Asian participants whose mother tongues are *not* English; that is, how to recruit and train staff in international offices.

The third workshop held in January 2008 had an increased number of participants, with representatives from 16 overseas universities and 9 universities within Japan. On that occasion we gathered under a rather prudent theme: *Laying Firm Foundations for University Internationalization*. Initial discussions went on in two groups, one on *Networking to Promote Student Exchange*, and the other on *Advancing Campus Internationalization*. Those topics were further discussed in the following general discussions: 1) curriculum designing for joint degree systems; 2) how to promote good lectures in English; 3) risk management for student exchange; 4) creating a proper network among participating universities' international offices. It was in those second and third workshops that one distinct tendency gradually faded – a kind of defensive mode of self-introduction based mainly on each university's success story. Instead, an increasing number of presentations took a new approach, with a clear intention to share valuable experiences to promote understanding of mutual differences and commonality. Many participants began collaborating to search for constructive ways to promote something of durable value.

I hope that everyone can now understand the special nuance added to the main title of this 4th workshop, *Building International Partnerships*. The precious hours that we are about to share together on this occasion will be devoted to the enhancement of creative modes of student exchange. One new arrangement in this program is that there will be no splitting of participants into groups, but everyone will participate in the same room. As all the sub-topics are closely inter-related, we hope to share and accumulate, step by step, the valuable information and opinions expressed, and make a concerted effort to focus on the following three themes: 1) better roles that might be

played by international offices, 2) how to develop programs to better accommodate international students, *and* 3) our time-honored concern – that is, how to develop more cooperative types of risk management in international student exchange.

As regards the roles of international offices, one of our guest speakers, Mr. Markus Laitinen, Head of International Affairs of the University of Helsinki, will give us an insightful overview of the last 15 years of internationalization at his university. The University of Helsinki seems to have been successful in making the absence of a centralized international office somehow work more effectively than expected to make the university's internationalization more visible. Judging from his writings on the university web-site, I realize that Mr. Laitinen is a unique historian, with a clear and broad perspective in observing familiar things in a sober analytical mode, and often with sense of humor! All my colleagues have been looking forward to becoming acquainted with current Nordic campus life. *Kiitos paljon!*

Concerning the enhancement of international student exchange programs, we are privileged to welcome Professor Akira Ninomiya, Executive Vice-President for Research of Hiroshima University. Professor Ninomiya's scholarship on educational issues in modern Japan has shown a unique balance between idealism and realism – a balance possibly attained through his own broad perspectives of international comparison. So far as I know, he is one of the specialists who *do* exert an influence on Japanese government's policy-making to promote higher education in the increasingly global context. Professor Ninomiya and I met each other for the first time about a year ago, when I was giving a short speech on the decentralized characteristic of Kyoto University's campus, making efforts to explain why eccentric scholarship also thrives in Kyoto, Professor Ninomiya was one of the few who seemed to accept my theory. Thus, our invitation was sent to Hiroshima, which he kindly accepted, canceling, I guess, various other engagements during this pressing season at the end of the academic year.

As regards the third common theme, Professor Junich Mori, one of our old colleagues has been instrumental in raising this topic to shed a fresh light on it – a

familiar topic since the beginning of this series of workshops. In his view, there is one danger in addressing this topic: any serious discussion in this field tends to be highly technical and even defensive. Professor Mori wishes to remind every participant of the importance of the psychological and emotional elements in safeguarding the international students' precious days, months and years spent at their host institutions.

Perhaps I had better conclude my remarks shortly. Let me thank again the two guest speakers and the distinguished delegates of as many as 20 esteemed universities overseas, and 5 Japanese universities from Sendai, Tokyo, Osaka, and from within Kyoto.

The City of Kyoto, Japan's old capital, has had a history of ups and downs for more than one thousand and three hundred years, and has, as a result, developed a tradition of encouraging its inhabitants to keep in their minds civil considerations towards not only fellow humans, but also towards the non-human environment, such as birds, flowers hills and streams, thus encouraging enjoyable and sometimes creative combinations of various elements in their daily lives. Until the widespread emergence of the financial crisis last year, one-dimensional rankings of universities had been very much in vogue, and they are still a matter of grave concern for many university people. This taste for rankings has partly been supported by the last century's self-centered utilitarian thoughts. We must bear in mind, however, that the world academia has been in danger of falling into a trap of somber monoculture, leaving at the end of ceaseless running competitions, only a limited number of victorious but tired institutions to shine faintly. That is at odds with the idea of higher education. The greater the extent to which universities can develop their characteristics and find ways to coexist without sacrificing diversity, the more opportunities they will have to contribute to making the global community radiantly interwoven; that is the essence of the classical ideas of civilization. Every university is currently engaged in a quest for a new identity, and for such self-discovery, dialogues across the campus border are needed more than ever, and of course students, scholars and open-minded administrators are

major players in such open fields.

It is my hope that holding such a workshop in the old capital of Japanese civilization will enhance mutual understanding among us, and foster chances to promote valuable initiatives among the participating universities.

Thank you for your attention.