

Welcoming Remarks by President Toshio Hirano, Osaka University
on the occasion of the Opening of APRU Presidential Retreat
and 19th APRU Annual Presidents Meeting
Monday, June 29, 2015
Oh-en-ka Meeting Room, Hilton Osaka Hotel

Deputy Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Mr. Kihei Maekawa, Presidents, Chancellors and Vice Chancellors, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Good morning. It is a great pleasure and honor for me to see all of you here this morning for the opening of the APRU Presidential Retreat and 19th Annual Presidents Meeting. On behalf of Osaka University, I would like to extend a hearty welcome to the 25 Presidents, Chancellors and Vice Chancellors, as well as the staff of APRU member universities and the Secretariat, who join us today.

This is the second APRU Annual Presidents Meeting held in Japan after the one hosted by Keio University in Tokyo in 2008. This is therefore the first APM to be held in the western part of Japan. I am pleased that some of you already visited our Suita campus yesterday. We are happy not only to host you for this important meeting but also to have an opportunity to introduce you to our university in the vibrant city of Osaka.

Osaka is the second largest metropolitan area in Japan and has been a major commercial center and economic hub for centuries. Historically, Osaka was home to one of the oldest capitals of Japan, and its ports functioned as a primary gateway for the world beyond the sea. Osaka was a landing point for visitors from the Asian continent and a departure base for missions to China as early as the 7th century. With this interchange of people, knowledge, ideas and technology from China and Korea first entered Osaka. Thereafter such knowledge spread to the rest of Japan.

Later, during the Edo period, Osaka was known as “the nation’s kitchen” and has remained a key center of commerce and trade. In fact, the concept of trading in futures emerged in Osaka hundreds of years ago, anticipating a modern financial system. To this day, openness to new ideas and the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship characterize the city and its people.

Osaka University is a leading comprehensive national university located in this dynamic city. The university traces its history back to its school of origin, Tekijuku, established in 1838 by Ogata Koan, one of Japan’s eminent and foresighted educators. At this private academy of Dutch studies and Western medicine, young people gathered from all over Japan, regardless of social standing, to study and to excel, in an environment of friendly competition. It was Tekijuku where many of Japan’s leaders in the early Meiji period were educated. Subsequently, Osaka University was founded as an Imperial University with two schools, Medicine and Science, in 1931. Unlike many government schools of the time, Osaka University was established with the enthusiastic support and financial contributions of people in Osaka. Thus, the university has always been supported by and loyal to the citizens and traditions of Osaka. Open-mindedness, a passion for learning and an education that cultivates social awareness and a sense of responsibility are all legacies of Tekijuku that live on at Osaka University.

This conference is held under the theme of “The University as an Agent for Global Transformation.” I believe that universities in the 21st century not only respond to challenges of the global society but are more proactive in initiating positive changes. I consider this the “Century of an Explosion in Diversity.” The history of society is in many ways the history of diversity, and it is diversity which fosters innovation, the foundation of a prosperous human society. Diversity can also be a source of conflict, even war. Our world is getting smaller due to dramatic population

growth and vastly improved means of transportation and communication, and the negative aspects of diversity have become more apparent than ever. Overcoming this inherent conflict in the coming diversity explosion is essential for our survival. As a President and a scholar, I have strong faith in the universal language of scholarship. Much like art and sports, scholarship has the power to overcome conflict by engendering harmonious diversity. I believe that universities must disseminate values that transcend differences, while upholding their fundamental roles in education and research. Our common language of scholarship becomes a tool to overcome differences between languages, cultures, religions and political standings. Therefore I strongly believe that the mission of universities in the 21st century is to foster harmonious diversity through scholarship for the betterment of human society.

The morning session that immediately follows this Opening will feature prominent keynote speakers who represent the Japanese government, industry and academia. They will discuss the status and changing mission of higher education in Japan as well as challenges and prospects for the future. It will be followed by a panel session in which we will hear the voices of the leaders of Japanese research universities and their visions as “Agents for Global Transformation.”

All of us who gather here represent the leading research universities in the Asia Pacific, as the region continues its historic transformation and growth. Indeed, some predict that Asia will account for more than half of the global GDP by 2050. We train leaders and professionals of the next generation, and we pioneer innovations that will enrich our society. Unmistakably, our universities set the course for the growth and prosperity of this region and beyond. I once again welcome active participation of presidents and higher education leaders from the Pacific Rim. I hope all of you will have a fruitful and productive meeting. I also hope you will enjoy your time in Osaka. Thank you very much.