Transformation of Australian Studies in a Globalising Age

Opening Remarks: ASAJ International Conference,

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Charge D'Affaires, Mr Connor, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen, before opening our conference, would you join me in a 1 minute silence for the 298 victims including 37 Australian citizens and residents, their families and the loved ones of the Malaysian Airlines MH17 which was tragically shot down in Eastern Ukraine, the largest air-accident involving Australia.

Silence, please. Thank you.

Again, Charge D'Affaires, Mr Connor, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to open our 2014 International Conference in commemoration of ASAJ's 25th anniversary, along with the Sophia Symposium. I'm Teruhiko Fukushima, Professor of Oceanian Studies at the National Defense Academy of Japan, and President of the Australian Studies Association of Japan. Thank you very much for joining me in 1 minute silence. Of course, the MH17 case is a sad tragedy which should not be overlooked, but I would like to draw your attention that around 100 victims, including renowned medical professors, were killed on their way to attend the international conference on HIV/AIDS. Although far smaller, our conference today is also an international one which is inaugural for the ASAJ. Without safe passage in air or sea, we won't be able to hold such a forum for free exchanges of ideas, which are essential for progress in academic studies. That is why I take this issue seriously.

Having said that, I would like to welcome today's participants especially those presenters who came from overseas. I thank those who have made it here. Let me just briefly explain why we are holding this conference this year. In December 1989, the Australian Studies Association of Japan was established in the University of Tokyo, Komaba campus. I remember about 20 people gathered for this setup meeting. I heard there had been strong encouragement from the Australia Japan Foundation to establish an academic circle on Australian studies in Japan, and for that I am thankful. From such an initial stage, we set up some principles: 1) to give chances for presentation to those students who wish to pursue Australian studies; 2) to keep the Association as multi-disciplinary as possible; that means: Let us listen to someone's presentation on Australia no matter how different its academic field is from our own and let's give comments; 3) all board members must contribute, we need no name lenders. So as only a young part-time lecturer, I put in a stint to keep the ledger as black as possible. We have done that for the past 25
years, with 200 to 230 members. We have held annual meetings every year and have published No. 1 to No. 26 of the Osutoraria Kenkyu, our academic journal. Its official English title is the Journal of Australian Studies.

About 10 years ago, voices emerged for making the ASAJ more outward looking, so we came to include special sessions by invited speakers from Australia in our annual conference program, in addition to the ordinary presentation sessions by our members. AJF has been generous in supporting such a move. These attempts were so successful that we came to the idea that now it was time for us to help students of Australian studies all over the world, so my predecessor Professor Yasue Arimitsu proposed holding an international conference and to call for papers. I think her name has become familiar to all of the presenters from overseas, through her tireless coordination. Owing to such efforts, now I can say we are open to the world. We are going to establish the bi-annual ASAJ best article award to be given to the best article by our members carried in No. 26 & 27 of our Journal of Australian Studies. We accept articles in both Japanese and English.

In order for us to reach this stage, of course, we received generous assistance from various institutions. The Australia-Japan Foundation, in close association with the Australian Embassy in Tokyo, has always supported us in not only financial but also various other ways. So my first thanks must go to the AJF and the Embassy represented today by the Charge D’Affaires, Mr Tom Connor. Location is always important for any event to be successful. Sophia University not only offered this centre-of-Tokyo campus – just look at 360 degree panorama – but also generous financial assistance and the opportunity to promote Australian studies through the name of Sophia Symposium. I must thank Sophia University’s vice-president, Professor Mika Sugimoto and also Sophia’s Professor Yuga Suzuki who has accepted the role as conference convenor. We also could receive the grant from the Resona Asia-Oceania Foundation that offers subsidies for research trips and fieldwork not only for Japanese, but also overseas graduate students or young academics, as long as the topics are related to Asia or Oceania. Its Secretary-General, Mr Hiroyuki Nii came all the way from Osaka.

Thus now we have offered a venue for presentation on Australian studies for overseas participants. But by making it more international like today, I think one of our main principles, that of multi-disciplinary approach, should be left intact. To the participants, there may be many people for you to meet for the first time here. There may be unfamiliar topics for you. But stay here, listen and give comments. Because we have one thing in common. Let’s talk about Australia. You’ll never walk alone. Thank you very much.

—110—