

Essays on History and Politics in honour of Ko Harada

Edited by Kazuhiko Okuda

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Japan's Quest for a New International Voice*

Soedjatmoko

Rector, United Nations University
Tokyo

President Okita,
Chairman Nakayama and Members of the Board,
Members of the Faculty,
Honoured Graduates,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I count it a privilege to be here and a distinct honour to address you on this memorable occasion of the first commencement of the Graduate School of International Relations of the International University of Japan.

I bring salutations to the graduates from the United Nations University which shares your international vocation, your search to improve our understanding of this modern world in all its diversity. I am pleased to see that this first graduating class includes young scholars from other nations, and I am sure that the International University of Japan will benefit greatly as that number grows in the future.

This is a proud day, and rightly so, for your President and my good friend, Dr. Saburo Okita, and for Mr. Nakayama your Chairman who have been such vital forces in bringing about this important response by Japanese education to

*Commencement Address at the Graduate School of International Relations, International University of Japan, March 15, 1985. We would like to thank Mr. Soedjatmoko for his kind permission to reproduce the entire text here. The Editor.

the demands of today's increasingly interdependent world. This is an exciting event also for all of us here today because it is another manifestation of Japan's determination to exercise of a more active and confident role in the affairs of the global community.

But I would like to take this occasion today to address you, the men and women of the first graduating class of this new venture which seeks a greater interdisciplinary understanding of the workings of our international systems — economic, industrial, political, scientific, cultural, and other.

We at United Nations University have a link with some of you through your participation over the past three years in the Global Community Lecture Series which our respective universities have jointly co-sponsored with Sophia University. We look forward to extending and deepening these ties.

Your studies here have taken you across many disciplines — through the thickets of international law and politics, of management and finance; into encounters with foreign languages and cultures and the exploration of the many aspects of international relations. But the learning is not finished. To succeed, wherever it is that you go to practice the skills that you have acquired here, you will need a continuing openness and receptivity to a life-long process of learning. This, in a very real sense, is only the Commencement.

You are entering, many of you re-entering, an international environment of constant, sometimes violent, change. About the only certainty you can take with you is that the world ahead will be quite different from the world of this 15th day of March in 1985.

The continuing integration of Japan into the world's economic and political systems — which is sometimes sought, sometimes forced — and the very considerable adjustments that it requires are factors that are bound to shape Japan's future and the future of these international systems. It is particularly fascinating, I find, to be able to observe the workings of this country at first-hand during this period which is commonly referred to as Japan's "internationalization". Though I am deeply rooted in my own culture, I am also the head of an international organization and it is from this vantage point that I wish

to remark upon some features of the world you are entering. But first I would like to join your teachers, the administrators of IUJ, and the organizations that are supporting it in congratulating you and expressing high hopes and expectations for the quality of the contribution that you can make in shaping Japan's relations with other countries.

Our human global society is today characterized by a mixture of promise and danger. Graduating from this university at this time, you have an opportunity — and perhaps, indeed, an obligation — to be in the front ranks of private or public service as Japan moves out more actively into the international arena.

The Japanese people have deep cultural ties to the other ancient civilizations of Asia, as well as close economic and scientific links with the modern industrialized world. These latter ties have, in recent years I think, tended to eclipse the former. Those like yourselves who will be participants in the internationalization process, whether in business or in government are uniquely positioned to help bridge the gap between the modern industrial societies and the populous developing countries of Asia.

This situation confronts Japan with a challenge as its leaders ponder the evolution of its role in the world, and particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. We live in an era of global transformation, in a world marked by contrast and heterogeneity, a world of wealth and poverty, a world in which the interests of large and powerful countries are inextricably tied to interests of the small or emerging countries. Ours is a world in which the fact of interdependence is increasingly recognized. But we are still very far from achieving the ability to manage change peacefully, though there is no doubt that change of a most profound nature will be a feature of the international environment for the foreseeable future.

Change in economic, political and social systems; change in values and aspirations can all be destabilizing and, by nature, threatening to the established order. Yet change is inevitable, and the challenge to your generation is to find ways to enhance the resilience of our societies in absorbing change, so that

progress is not stilled by a vain yearning for stability.

A far-reaching historical process is unfolding as the economic and political centre of gravity shifts from the Atlantic toward the Pacific.

It is said that the 21st Century will be the era of the Pacific and of the more than 20 countries that lie along its shores. These include the two super-powers as well as several other countries that are major powers in either economic, political or military terms, and many more countries that are poised for more influential roles. As China begins to emerge from its long economic stagnation and Japan emerges from relative political passivity, the human geography of the Pacific region is changing definitively.

It is tempting to draw parallels between the rise to dominance of the "old Atlantic community" and the "new Pacific community", but this is to risk ignoring the far greater historical, cultural, political and economic diversity among nations in this part of the world than among those which share the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

In Europe, nation-states emerged and power configurations were established in a more or less homogenous setting, growing from common religious roots, linked linguistic stocks, and similar modes of political organization. Kings and diplomats conducted affairs of state in French, scholars and scientists communicated with one another in Greek and Latin — from the Urals to the Atlantic coastline. Controversies raged for centuries over which view of Christianity should prevail, it is true, but there was, after the Middle Ages, minimal contention among totally different creeds. The same traditions and perceptions were the basis for the new societies in North America. In the Pacific region by contrast there are a multitude of profoundly different cultures, religions, languages, value systems and political modes of organization.

The gaps to be bridged, then, are many and large. The major one is surely the gap between rich and poor, both within and among countries. Other gaps — ideological, political, cultural — are also great, though perhaps more difficult to define. It is not enough to understand the different political and economic systems, for beyond these systems are different cultures and values, in the context of which you must be able to work effectively.

It will not be easy to do so. In the first place, the present generation of

Japan has never known poverty. You will have to learn how to live in poor countries and to respect those peoples and their cultures.

Secondly, the impact of rapid and pervasive technological and social change will be different in different societies, and so will be the responses to that impact. The powerful role that the resurgence of religion plays in many countries, shaping national as well as individual behaviour, is just one of the factors that Japan and the Japanese will confront in the course of their increasing interaction with different social, political and economic dynamics.

I understand that one of the goals of your two years spent in study here in Niigata-ken has been to acquaint you with, and sensitize you to, the need to bridge these gaps; to accept, respect and seek to understand the people in other countries, to accept that there are other, equally valid modes of being and doing. For that is a pre-requisite to your success in an international career.

The Western rim of the Pacific is now the most economically vigorous area in the world. East Asia as a whole has survived the global recession better than any other region. Its very success has given rise to a set of persistent frictions among the countries of the region as well as with other economic partners, both developed and developing.

The entire region is feeling the impact of technological advance, and particularly its impact on the location of industries. The combination of rapid technological change and rapid population growth is a volatile one, especially for the large and populous countries that are just beginning to industrialize. They can no longer assume that labour-intensive industries will relocate to take advantage of lower wage scales. Persistent unemployment in the West, the resulting protectionist impulses, and computer-aided automation are forcing the late-comers to rethink their industrialization strategies. Similarly, the newly industrialized countries are encountering more and more resistance to their diversification into more sophisticated industrial products.

The development of a harmonious community of interests in the Pacific region requires serious strategic thinking about the international division of

labour in the long-term. The United States and Japan may both have to relinquish certain industries in order to allow other countries to pursue their comparative advantage. It is in the universities, those with an international vocation, that such discussion should begin. Universities, which are the most open of our institutions, intellectually and socially, have a special role to play at this stage of human development when, more than ever before — to paraphrase H.G. Wells — civilization has become “a race between education and catastrophe.”

The role of the private sector, both entrepreneurial and non-profit, is also going to be vital in developing the concepts for understanding the dynamics and interpreting the significance of the processes of change now taking place. And it is my hope that this university will be an important participant in this process, contributing to the capacity to think in the longer-term. It is my hope that you, the graduates of today, will go beyond merely performing well whatever task is yours in whatever country you go to; that you will contribute to the long-term interests which Japan shares with other countries in this region.

Educational requirements are radically changing as we move into the post-industrial world, and Japan, along with other countries, has recognized the need to review its requirements and the plans to meet them. What is needed is a broadening beyond discipline-oriented education in science and technology, towards educational concepts and methods designed to bring out innovative thinking and analytical ability. I am talking here about a shift in educational philosophy aimed at enhancing our capacities for broad cultural, moral and social analyses which will be essential in making the future scientific and technological choices which will benefit both society and the individual.

Here, again, industry has a key role to play. Japan has already had much successful experience with continuing education within a company framework. But now that Japan has firmly established itself among the most advanced industrial countries, it too must consider new and more flexible modes of learning if it is to move successfully into the post-industrial world. Much has been made of Japan's technological advance — of its computers and its “smart” robots — but we must remember that they are not smarter than their designers and programmers, and are not likely to be helpful in solving

basic human problems.

Perhaps no other nation approaches Japan in its capacity for assimilating the ways of other peoples while preserving its own basic cultural identity and traditions. The adoption of things foreign is in fact a tradition in itself, at least from the time of the 7th Century when the government sent large groups of intellectuals — 500 to 600 scholars, statesmen and priests at a time — to learn from China. History is full of examples of cultures that were enriched and stimulated by the exposure to external influences. Continued openness will assume even greater importance in today's rapidly changing world, where creativity and innovative capacity are at a premium.

I believe Japan can bring a special contribution to the quest for a more viable human community, from which other countries may be able to draw lessons. For example, in its rapid economic growth, Japan has been able to avoid the pockets of severe poverty that are a blight and a burden on industrialized and industrializing nations alike.

The sense of mutual obligation among members of Japanese society seems to be bred deep in the Japanese psyche. The commitment to social harmony — to the harmony of man, technology and nature — is a part of the Japanese value system that has served it particularly well in the process of modernization.

We of other cultures have good reason to look to Japan for lessons about how to live with our fellow human beings in conditions of rapid economic growth and great population density, without losing our sense of beauty and while maintaining a high degree of social cohesion.

The doubts and uncertainties that are now beginning to surface in Japan are not necessarily signs of societal ill-health. Indeed, they may be harbingers of a nascent process of reflection, redefinition and revitalization.

This reflection goes on in the press and other media, in writings by Japanese scholars and in encounters with the writing and thinking of foreign scholars, in meetings of international experts, and on university campuses. The search involves two interlinked questions: What images do the Japanese people have of themselves, and how do they differ or correspond with the images of Japan held by others?

A nation's sense of identity is necessarily a composite of internal views,

external views, and actions. The choices that are made about actions, I might add, contradict the self-image of a nation as often as they reinforce it. In the case of Japan, the external views that have greatest impact on the process of self-reflection are views from the West, and they have often been regarded rather uncritically. Japan's sense of identity has been shaped very little by images reflected from the Third World.

To give Japan a truer sense of the international environment through which it must thread its way in the next few decades, it would be extremely helpful to have more views from the Third World. I am hopeful that, mindful of the tradition of sending Japanese scholars abroad to learn, other Japanese universities will follow the example set by IUJ and provide more opportunities for training for Third World students. These would, I hope, include many Japanologists who might provide another important dimension to the composite image of Japan. For out of honest interactions among the internal and external views can come a more secure sense of cultural identity and national purpose, as well as a global sense of human solidarity that transcends traditional national or ethnic perceptions and loyalties.

I would stress the importance of such interactions particularly for Japan because of the homogeneity of its culture. This homogeneity has made possible Japan's very rapid and creative response to the challenge of modernity. It has thus carried Japan a very long way without paying the price of cultural discontinuity and social fragmentation. But it also carries with it the risk of reduced sensitivity to other societies and other peoples.

This moment of history, I believe, carries an opportunity for Japan to draw upon its particular strengths and the uniqueness of its position to develop a new kind of leadership. Why is this needed? The old kinds of leadership, based on military power and competitive rather than co-operative relations have proven to be disfunctional and terribly dangerous — even threatening the survival of civilized life. But in contemplating a new kind of leadership, Japan is faced with a number of far-reaching questions. Allow me to mention a few.

How can Japan translate its economic strength into political influence without developing a major military capacity? This will strongly affect its ability to bring to reality the vision of a global society functioning with less resort to violence and lower levels of armaments.

How can the Japanese combine their technological advance with traditional values to assure that the human scale and the humane values are not overwhelmed and debased. I think Japan has a special role to play in the search for non-Western modes of modernization because of its long unbroken cultural continuity.

What, can the Japanese perspective offer the notion of common survival, common security and common international economic development in a pluralistic world where no nation can survive in isolation? Here again I think Japan has a particularly important perspective, as a country that is entirely dependent on international relations for its economic and political security.

The Japanese people have a very real, deep-seated commitment to peace, born in the ashes of atomic holocaust. How can this aversion to war be translated into active policies to promote more peaceful relations among nations, to shape an international environment where the role of arms is much reduced?

I see a number of steps that could be, and in some cases are being, taken to further Japan's commitment to improved international understanding and the cause of peace.

One step is to build up its infrastructure for listening and interaction with other nations — in its universities, research and laboratories. The development of Japan's wider role must go on, of course, not in isolation, but in the context of a search for clearer perceptions of the legitimate interests and aspirations of all nations.

Japan's future is bound ever more closely to her neighbours in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and other developing regions, and these relationships can only benefit from an increasing number of scholars with an intimate knowledge of Japan's culture, her history, politics and economy.

In any opening up of Japanese higher education to the world special attention, I believe, should be directed to Third World students, the future leaders of that huge portion of the world. Their educational experience in Japan

could significantly improve Japan's own capacity to work more closely and on a more sustained basis with the developing countries.

Japan's re-emergence as a world power has been extremely rapid. I sometimes feel that there is a time lag between the augmentation of its role and its assumption of the responsibility that is commensurate with its economic strength, strategic position and intellectual resources. This is, unfortunately, a period of retreat from multilateralism on the part of several of the major powers. It is terribly important that this tide be turned, but there is unquestionably a leadership void at the moment. I believe that many developing countries look to Japan to play a major part in reinvigorating international co-operation through the UN system, where Japan has assumed an increasingly important role.

Because Japan shapes so many economic and political interests with the West, there is, I think, some danger of under-emphasizing its position as an Asian power. Despite some tragic history, the rest of Asia, and indeed the Third World as a whole, recognizes Japan as the first non-Western country to modernize successfully. It is also perhaps the first in which modernization has not been equated with westernization, but has been accomplished while preserving its distinctive cultural identity.

A growing role in international organizations is only one aspect of a new kind of leadership—a non hegemonial kind of leadership. Such a role in the community of nations is well within Japan's compass. I have already mentioned some of the other aspects: a reduced emphasis on military power as a tool of policy, a co-operative search for a new international division of labour, a conscientious sharing of intellectual resources.

Who is to do the strategic thinking on these very important, long-term issues? It has to come from institutions like the International University of Japan, and from people like you, with your awareness of diversity, your commitment to internationalism, your sensitivity to other peoples' values and aspirations. In common with many other countries, Japan has not always valued its internationally minded and internationally experienced citizens. But I am struck by the importance of this graduating class, and those who will follow you, to Japan and the other countries represented among the graduates.

You Japanese graduates will not only represent Japan abroad; you will also bring back to Japan a window on other cultures that will benefit your own country enormously. Great challenges await you. I wish you luck, and courage, and wisdom in meeting them.

Thank you very much.

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