

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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Thank you for inviting me to deliver this year's keynote address.

I am truly honored, but also very nervous. Had I seen the list of the previous eight keynote speakers, comprising such eminent and well known scholars, statesmen and even royalty, I would not have accepted your invitation, no matter how tempting. But, having been lured unwittingly into accepting, I had to find a suitable topic to share with you, which hopefully will be of some interest. I do not have the scholarly depth of the late Yoneo Ishii or of Ayako Sono; the political understanding of Surin Pitsuwarn, Emil Salim or the late Corazon Aquino; nor the insights of royal intellectuals like Sultan Hamengkubuwono or Raja Nazrin Shah. So I thought I had better find some other niche.

In my search, I found inspiration in what The Nippon Foundation was established to achieve: *"the realization of a peaceful and prosperous global society, in which none need struggle to secure their basic human rights."* I was equally touched by the Foundation's sensitivity toward *"different value systems"* and cultures, and its goal to *"...transcend the political, religious, racial and national boundaries that divide the world."* And I could not agree more with your zeal *"...to grasp the essence of problems faced by humankind."*

Then I read Francis Loh's concept paper for this year's workshop where he talked of the *"likelihood that the API community can contribute toward new knowledge about globalization, changing identities, and the human condition and social justice ..."*

And I was delighted to see that the theme of your Workshop is **"Towards Transforming Society and Empowering People"**, with panel discussions on the poor, the marginalized, sustainable development, relationship with nature and cultural ideas.

Per my understanding of the above, I sense their focus to be "humanity", "society", "human rights", "values", "humankind". In short, we are talking about the humanities. Are not the concern of The Nippon Foundation and the purpose of the API Fellowships

Program, to seek an understanding of the meaning, purpose, goals and appreciation of historical or social phenomenon? Are we not talking of an interpretative method of finding "truth" rather than explaining the causality of events or uncovering the truth of the natural world? Have we forgotten that "narrative imagination" apart from its societal application, is an important tool in understanding history, culture and, indeed, humanity?

Yet what we see today is the decline of the humanities, and the technologization of everyday life. We are undergoing transformation in the hands of technological imperatives, such as rationalization, universalism, monism. We live increasingly in a world of technology, not a world of nature. Technological values have eroded human values instead of "humanizing" them.

The humanities are, to a considerable measure, about identifying, analyzing, critiquing and interpreting values. Through their dispassionate commentary and through great, passionate works of literature and the arts, the humanities present models and anti-models of behavior. They challenge us about where we stand on issues pertaining to the value of human life, the appropriateness of particular behaviors, the appreciation of beauty, the value of money! From the viewpoint of responsible citizenship, they pose the challenge not just of knowing one's rights, but of doing what is right—a particularly important attribute in an age when doing what is right, and doing what is technically lawful are entirely different matters.

The humanities are about the diagnosis of our human conditions and the consequential pathways, hopefully, toward the betterment of that condition. Is not this the objective of The Nippon Foundation, and the API Fellowships Program? If so, what can the humanities offer? The answer, which is also the problem and the threat to the humanities, is their offering what money cannot buy.

In 1980, the Rockefeller Commission on the Humanities stated:

*“Through the humanities we reflect on the fundamental question:*

*What does it mean to be human?*

*The humanities offer clues but never a complete answer. They reveal how people have tried to make moral, spiritual and intellectual sense of a world in which irrationality, despair, loneliness and death are as conspicuous as birth, friendship, hope and reason.”*

Thirty years hence, I do not detect much change.

The then Australian Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, was quoted as saying on 3 September 2008, *“Whatever they may be worth in the market place, it is the intrinsic value of the humanities, arts and social sciences, we should treasure them for. We should support these disciplines because they give us pleasure, knowledge, meaning and inspiration.”*

But in this materialistic, technological age, the humanities cannot take refuge in intrinsic values alone. Politicians, ministers and governments change; government funding does not equate with political rhetoric; and intrinsic value itself has its changing fortunes with public recognition. The humanities cannot afford to deny or shun commercial value, although (not) without compromising its own values. The humanities need as many friends and links as possible. What needs to be made clear is that humanities matter because individual people matter. Further, it is these people who, in their different ways, will contribute to the successful propagation of the humanities and humanistic values.

It is not impossible that the humanities representing intrinsic value, and innovation which is an economic value, become synergistic through the identification and interpretation of user needs, through the nurturing of creative people, through being part of industry, through their generation of smart new directions of the knowledge economy, as opposed to agricultural and manufacturing economies. After all, the commercial world is ultimately a reflection of the values of a culture. And the humanities are about studying “what it is good to desire and what our real needs are.” Business should focus on these same questions, for modern society should be a society in which a strong commercial instinct serves a mature conception of the “good life”.

But the humanities themselves are often their own worst enemy. Sometimes, humanistic values are not transmitted well, just at the time when they are needed the most. The traditional values of the humanities—defending freedom and cultivating dispassionate scholarship, for example—have sometimes become excuses for not communicating the crucial strengths of a crucial disciplinary area. The result has been the marginal place of the humanities in today’s society. Governments, industry and business turn to economic and political think tanks for answers to current questions about global directions; rarely, if at all, do they turn to the humanists who often have deeper answers to questions involving our increasingly distressed human condition. Economics rule over ethics; moral goods remain depreciated. While riots grow rife in the streets, little is done to address the needed change in the moral climate. And a great deal of the alignments we see—corporations and shareholders; policymakers and civil servants—have been found to be flawed because they are alignments of greed.

*“The interdependence of Science and the Humanities and Social Sciences has never been clearer in the fast-paced, technologically advanced world we live in. It is vital that we make sure these disciplines are sustained in order to protect our long-term interests as a nation,”* so says Professor Sir Adam Roberts, President of the British Academy in June of 2010A. It is in this context that we cannot slow climate change if we do not support work on how people change their behavior. And how can we make medical and scientific advances without analyzing their human and ethical implications? Fortunately, things are changing. In Birbeck College, University of London, for instance, There is now a Master Degree in Medical Humanities. This program is for clinicians and other healthcare professionals, focusing on improving patient care through a deeper understanding of the humanities which include literary studies, history, law, philosophy, art, film and visual studies. Through this program is offered the unique opportunity to encounter the rich insights of the humanities about culture and what it means to be human, as they have direct relevance upon clinical practice. And now there is the Association for the Medical Humanities based in the University of Glasgow.

Likewise, at Kings College, London there is the Centre for Computing in the Humanities. The primary objective of this academic department in the School of

Arts and Humanities is to study the possibilities of Computing for the Arts and Humanities. There are also postgraduate programmes in Digital Humanities and Digital Culture which explore the use of advanced technologies for research in the arts and humanities.

The humanities need to be proactive, not apologetic; they should embed themselves in society. Instead of residing in isolation, the humanities need to hook on to all sectors: government, business, industry, citizen groups, students, scholarly societies and even philanthropists. The humanities are challenged to demonstrate their worth, highlight their educational and research achievements, know themselves and know others, show their intrinsic and extrinsic value, and recognize their importance as part of the public and private sectors.

Above all, the humanities must also transcend the limits of the human condition by going beyond the technical issues to discover the soul. In this technological age of accountability and effectiveness, the humanities are needed to remind us that there is more, much more to human life than the everyday and the mundane.

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