

Welcome Speech on behalf of the University of Copenhagen

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Welcome Speech on behalf of the University of Copenhagen

Ulf Hedetoft

Dear Director General Komatsu, dear conference participants,

As Dean of the Faculty of Humanities it is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to the University of Copenhagen and to thank you for the interest you have shown us and our Asian studies programmes with the jointly organized Overseas Symposium: *Rethinking “Japanese Studies,” from Practices in the Nordic Region*.

I am delighted to see that it has been possible to organise such an ambitious and comprehensive symposium across geographical, institutional and academic boundaries—it is exactly this kind of international and interdisciplinary collaboration which the University of Copenhagen strives to strengthen and encourage.

Indeed, improved international relations, both in education and research, are crucial strategic focus areas for the University and the Faculty of Humanities.

An important step towards a more internationally oriented University of Copenhagen was taken when, in 2005, we joined the International Alliance of Research Universities—commonly known as IARU—which comprises ten of the world’s leading research universities: Yale University, The University of Cambridge, and the University of Tokyo—just to mention a few. All IARU member universities are committed to establishing structures that give researchers and students the opportunity to engage in international research and teaching.

One such structure at the University of Copenhagen is the Asian Dynamics Initiative, one of the co-organisers of this symposium. When the Asian Dynamics Initiative was launched in 2008, it was with the express purpose of creating a common platform for new, interdisciplinary Asian studies. The initiative was also designed to coordinate existing research and teaching initiatives and forge new international partnerships.

That Asia was chosen as a focal point for a strategic initiative such as this at the University of Copenhagen was, of course, not a coincidence: for Denmark and the Western World, Asia has become increasingly important as a powerful and influential player on the global scene—politically, economically, culturally and scientifically; and in order to grasp the dynamics of Asia, we need to both understand *and* learn from the continent’s vast variety of cultures, languages, societies, peoples, and histories. This requires, for example, a re-orientation towards intra-Asian relations, since in the West we tend to forget that Asian countries and cultures influence each other as much as they influence us. Just as Western countries and cultures influence each other.

The Asian Dynamics Initiative is helping us understand those complex Asian relationships, e.g., by collaborating with distinguished institutions such as Nichibunken and by bringing together scholars from different fields and cultures.

This is not to say, of course, that we did not engage in Asian Studies before the advent of the Asian Dynamics Initiative. Quite the contrary: the Asian Dynamics Initiative would not have been possible without the university's strong tradition for Asian language and area studies.

Indeed, the history of Asian Studies at the University of Copenhagen dates back fifty-two years to 1960, when Chinese Studies was established as a study programme, shortly after followed by Japanese Studies in 1968. Today, Asian Studies covers teaching and research within a wide variety of Asian countries and languages. It is on this solid platform—together with the research on Asia that has been conducted in disciplines such as anthropology, geography, political science and economy—that the Asian Dynamics Initiative stands.

These new movements and approaches to Asian and Japanese Studies, which you will be discussing over the next couple of days, are also noticeable elsewhere at the University of Copenhagen. Subjects and study programmes are being re-thought and re-organised across this 500-year-old university, sometimes at a dizzying but also necessary pace.

In other words, these developments are inevitable, and now more so than ever. The global challenges that we face call for interdisciplinary and international collaboration in order to be properly addressed, and we can no longer think of research subjects and study programmes as discrete, separate entities.

Nichibunken's Overseas Symposium is thus a prime example of the necessary and continuous discussions that researchers must have with each other about their subjects, in the true spirit of international and interdisciplinary collaboration.

I wish you all a fruitful and stimulating symposium and trust you will enjoy a pleasant stay in the capital of Denmark.