

Thoughts on Leaving Surugadai University

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Paul McCarthy

My first impression of Surugadai University in 1987 was that it was very far from central Tokyo, where I live, and that the campus was spacious and beautiful and the faculty offices and lecture halls handsome and well-appointed – far more so than Rikkyo in Ikebukuro, where I had been teaching as an Associate Professor for five years. Now, more than twenty years later, those impressions are even stronger.

The campus is even more impressive now, with a fine, up-to-date Media Center and other new buildings, and with a variety of trees and shrubbery, some of which have been contributed by graduating classes over the years. In spring especially, when the cherry trees blossom, the campus is stunningly beautiful; and the autumn leaves make a fine backdrop for the return to classes that takes place in the fall.

On the other hand, I find myself asking why the same commute that used to seem so easy now takes so much out of me. Part of the reason is that I have moved a little further away, and that the average number of days I must come to campus has risen from three to four, as is the case for almost all the faculty. But the real reason is, of course, age. One's energy level in one's sixties is not the same as it was in one's forties or fifties. And that is the real reason I am leaving SU a few years earlier than is strictly necessary. In the last semester of this, my last year, in particular, I have felt unable to give as much of my energy to the university as I had in the past. Since the Administration of this university has always been extremely generous to and considerate of me, I felt it would be unfair to continue to teach at less than full energy or in mediocre health. The Dean of my Faculty, Dr. Kunihisa Yoshida,

the various officials in the Administration, and, above all, the Chairman of the Board of Regents, Mr. Takahisa Yamazaki have all been most gracious and understanding of my situation and made it possible for me to “retire gradually,” by leaving full-time teaching as of March 2011 but continuing to teach one or two courses in the literary and cultural fields that are my true specialty for one more year. So I will not have to say a final farewell to this beautiful campus, to the kind and helpful administrative staff, and to my respected colleagues in the various Faculties for another year.

Still, I am retiring as a full-time professor, and so I do look back on the past two decades, and the people who helped make my time here both meaningful and pleasant in large measure. I will not venture to give the names of any faculty members who are still in this world, for fear of forgetting some who should be included; but I cannot keep from expressing my deep debt of gratitude to one who has left both the university and this life – the late Professor Nobuyuki Takei. He recruited most of the first-generation of English language and culture faculty, including myself, and could be said to be the true founder and “begetter” of this part of our curriculum. I was on sabbatical abroad when Professor Takei passed away, and so was unable to attend his funeral; but I shall always think of him with the greatest gratitude and affection.

Those same feelings I extend also to many of my colleagues, and ask their pardon for not mentioning them individually here. I hope to continue to see you, both on campus and privately, for as many years as I am able to stay on in Japan.