

Dear President Miyahara,
Dear Vice President Suzuki,
trustee Prof. Hashimoto
and prof. Tutsji

Dear organizers and participants in this Osaka University Forum 2007

More than 180 years ago, in 1823 the famous Dutch author Jacob van Lennep went hiking through the Netherlands for 3 months. He was accompanied by his friend Van Hogendorp, a liberal thinker in those days. A diary of their adventures gives interesting observations on Groningen and the Province and people that lived there.

“From a distance we had a beautiful view on the city of Groningen” Van Lennep wrote in his diary. *“The high towers of this town predominate the skyline”*. They visited the Academy and some of the professors and were impressed by the anatomic collection and the collection of tropical and rare animals. The liberal ideas of Van Hoogendorp, however, were not shared by the student population in those days and caused a little riot in the hotel where the two gentlemen were accommodated. Professor Van Swinderen, a famous scientist and professor of natural history, recommended the gentlemen to go and see the villages in the Province of Groningen, talk to the modern and well to do farmers and get informed on the waterworks, dikes and polders. And so they did. They were impressed by the prosperous outlook of the farms and villages. They characterised the people as hardworking, modest but not very outgoing

It was in these same days, shortly after the French Revolution that the first roots were laid for Economic Sciences at the University of Groningen. A period in which the Netherlands counted 3 million inhabitants (at present nearly 17 million) and agriculture was the main economic activity. The first pioneers in rural economy and political economy tried to establish a firm basis for good governance for the newly created Kingdom of the Netherlands. Prof. Uilkens and Prof. Van Hall were the founding fathers of political economy in Groningen. Since the nomination of Prof Uilkens in 1815, rural and political economy was studied as an academic subject at the University of Groningen. His chair was in the Faculty of Law.

The second half of the nineteenth century was dominated by the industrial revolution in Europe. The Netherlands made a relatively late start in this respect. In Groningen, a separate Faculty of Economic Sciences was not created until shortly after the Second world War followed by a Faculty for Management and Organization some 25 years later. Famous international professors like Jan Pen laid the foundations for basic research in these fields. By now, Groningen can

boast a very good reputation in this field, which is fostered and cherished by future generations of economists.

The cooperation between our universities started bottom-up from the Faculty of Economics. The research interests of prof. Sterken and prof. Ogawa in macro economics and banking matched very well. They managed to establish several joint projects involving their departments, students, and PhDs. As a result, from next August onwards, two assistant professors from Osaka will stay with us for a longer period. This will create new opportunities for joint research and training activities.

Also in the field of Nuclear Physics, long lasting contacts exist in which many scientists from the Research Centre for Nuclear Physics and the Groningen KVI have participated in the past 25 years.

It is five years ago now, that a university wide agreement was concluded between our two universities. This was a firm basis for the establishment of staff and student exchange university wide. New opportunities occurred for Groningen students to take part in the Osaka University Student Exchange Programme. The opportunity for taking individual research courses worked out very well in the field of natural sciences and medicine. It is advanced Master students and PhDs who take advantage of this.

The internationalisation of education and research is rapidly taking shape. New opportunities emerge, stimulated by European Programmes like Erasmus Mundus. I was very pleased to learn that in two Erasmus Mundus programmes, Osaka University will be our partner. Cooperation and competition between universities increases. It will be the challenge for both our institutions in the coming years to join forces in attracting the best students and PhDs and give them adequate opportunities to gain international competences and skills.

In October 2005, the University of Osaka opened its Centre for Education and Research in Groningen. We are very honoured that you have chosen Groningen as the location for your European Office. We hope to prove once more in the coming years that you have made the right choice. Your office is located in the heart of our Science Facilities: easily accessible for scientists, staff and students who want to find out about the possibilities in Osaka. Our International Relations Office can help introduce you to networks and partners in Europe. Your presence here will undoubtedly lead to more research possibilities and the expansion of your international network.

In October 2006, a Groningen delegation visited Osaka. This visit was a great success. Twenty representatives, deans and directors from our faculties and graduate schools took the opportunity to map out the next steps in cooperation in

their specific fields of research and education. Since then quite some visits were planned to further elaborate the details.

It was mid January 2007 that I received a letter from president Miyahara, proposing to have the 7th Osaka University Forum in Groningen. I considered this to be a great opportunity and a perfect moment to emphasize the cooperation between our two universities. Therefore, the Board of the University gave full support to this event.

Thanks to the dedicated work of the Institute of Social Economic Research of Osaka University and the Groningen Faculties of Economic Sciences and Management and Organization it has been possible to organise this Forum in such a short time. They managed to convince a number of internationally renown experts to share their views with a wider audience in the coming three days.

It is for the cooperation with the University of Osaka that we try to involve the city and province of Groningen and Government of the Prefecture of Osaka as much as possible. We exchange views and discuss opportunities for university-enterprise cooperation. Relations in these fields have to grow. But I am convinced that through the discussions and exchange of information we have, trust and confidence will grow. Only on this basis sustainable cooperation activities can take place.

In 2008-2009 there will be two more major celebrations, commemorating 400 years of trade relations between the Netherlands and Japan, and 150 years of diplomatic relations. I hope this Forum will give you inspiration for new suggestions and activities that may highlight these memorable events.

A warm welcome to all of you in Groningen!
I hope you will take the opportunity, like Van Lennep and Van Hoogendorp 180 years ago, to see more of Groningen than just the town and university. That you will take some time to reflect on what this university, town and province can mean to you.

For today and the coming days, I wish you very fruitful deliberations. I am sure that the Osaka University Forum 2007 will give important input to cooperation in the field of Economic Sciences and will boast the renowned name of your Institute for Social and Economic Sciences.

Thank you