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## In Conversation with a Global Leader What Makes a Graduate Globally Competitive?

Dr. Oh Yeon-Cheon, the guest speaker at our 2013 entrance ceremony, is the President of Seoul National University (SNU). In keeping with our commitment to preparing students for active careers in global society, Hitotsubashi University has many Korean students—a total of 195 at undergraduate and graduate levels as of May 2012. Further, in September 2012 we held the Seoul Academia Symposium, our first Academia program to take place outside Japan.

The invitation was extended to President Oh in light of the increasing importance we are placing on exchanges with Korea, our nearest neighbor. His visit gave us the opportunity to ask President Oh to tell us about the strategic planning of SNU, which in 2011 was the first Korean national university to acquire corporate status, and to discuss his vision for universities in the global era.

# I See Cooperation as the



**Dr. Oh Yeon-Cheon**  
President, Seoul National University

After obtaining a BA in political science from SNU in 1974, Oh Yeon-Cheon completed an MPA and a PhD in public administration at New York University. He has since served in posts including chief researcher of the Korea Economic Research Institute, visiting professor at the University of Berlin, president of the Korea Taxation Association, committee member of the Planning and Budget Committee, and consultant to the World Bank in the field of privatization. Concurrently, from 1983 he taught at SNU's Graduate School of Public Administration, where he was successively assistant professor, associate professor, and professor before becoming dean in 2000. He was appointed to his current position as President of SNU in 2010.

## In Solving Problems of Public Finance, Public Consensus Is the Biggest Hurdle

**Yamauchi:** Thank you for kindly joining us at our entrance ceremony.

**Oh:** Thank you for inviting me. I have had the opportunity to learn a great deal myself during this visit. I was strongly impressed by the thoughtful attitude and the self-discipline of Hitotsubashi's students, and by the dedicated efforts of the faculty members in organizing this ceremony. When I'm back in Seoul, I intend to pass on these impressions to our own faculty and students.

**Yamauchi:** To begin with, Dr. Oh, may I ask why you chose to enter the field of public finance?

**Oh:** I majored in political science as an undergraduate, then passed a state examination and worked as a civil servant for several years after graduation, before going on to study in the United States and obtain a PhD. Political science is concerned with the collective response, based on power, through which



we pursue the public goals necessary to the running of the state, and public finances, as the means to those ends, are the key to that collective response. Thus, I chose to view the political process from the perspective of public finances because I found this the most persuasive approach. I see the securing and distribution of fiscal resources as the key issues in political decision-making.

**Yamauchi:** I see. Now, I'd very much like to hear whether, as an expert in public finances, you see any hope of Japan solving its fiscal burden, which is the world's heaviest?

**Oh:** I think a yes-or-no answer may not be appropriate, because, as I believe, what is crucial is to think about how Japan should go about resolving the problem of its public finances. The biggest hurdle is likely to be obtaining public consensus. It is difficult for politicians, as the people's elected representatives, to make unwelcome demands on the public, because they have the next election to think of. But if public finances are to be put on a sound basis, the question is whether politicians can muster the courage to take

# Essence of a University

## Susumu Yamauchi President, Hitotsubashi University

Susumu Yamauchi was born in Otaru, Hokkaido in 1949. He graduated from the Faculty of Law at Hitotsubashi University in 1972 and completed the doctoral course in law at the University's Graduate School of Law in 1977, receiving his PhD in law in 1987. He held positions as a Faculty of Law professor at Seijo University, and as a Faculty of Law professor, dean of the Faculty of Law, and board member at Hitotsubashi University. He served as leader of the 21st Century Centers of Excellence (COE) Program "Centre for New European Research" in 2004. He was appointed Executive Vice President for Finance and Outreach in 2006 and President of Hitotsubashi University in December 2010. Professor Yamauchi specializes in the legal history of Japan and of medieval Europe, and the history of legal culture. He was awarded the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities in 1998 for his book *Kita no jūjūgun* (Crusaders to the north) (Kodansha). His numerous other publications include *Shin sutoashugi no kokka tetsugaku* (The national philosophy of new stoicism) (Chikura Publishing), *Ryakudatsu no hōgainenshi* (A history of the legal concept of looting) (University of Tokyo Press), *Kettō saiban* (Trial by combat) (Kodansha), *Jūjūgun no shisō* (The ideology of the crusaders) (Kodansha), and *Bunmei wa bōryoku o koerareru ka?* (Can civilizations overcome violence?) (Chikuma Shobo).



a medium- to long-term view and make demands on the public. The need to win votes conflicts with what it takes to achieve healthy public finances, and we have to try to reduce this conflict to a minimum. I think every nation in the world—not just Japan—faces this issue. The point is that politicians must not only tackle the immediate issues, but must have the courage and wisdom to think ahead for the sake of future generations.

## Creating Universal Value Is the Role of the University

**Yamauchi:** That's a very interesting insight. Yes, the world certainly faces a number of issues that are universal, and I hope to have the opportunity to explore these topics in depth through symposiums and so on. Your words are a reminder that universities have an important role to play in that regard.

SNU is, of course, Korea's pre-eminent university, renowned around the world. What do you consider its finest points? What are you most proud of?

**Oh:** Well, I don't want to blow our own trumpet, but I think our students' greatest strength is, in a word, their originality. The education we provide focuses on how they can create new value. This involves two perspectives: one is what might be called a humanistic approach, focused on the individual's foundation as a person, and the other is global-mindedness. A global outlook requires elements such as an appreciation of diversity and an open mind, things which I believe equip us to fulfill our social responsibilities. By reducing inequalities, through understanding the need to pay special attention to the disadvantaged and the



issues faced by developing countries, we can seek to coexist and to thrive together within nations, regions, and the international community. I am convinced that the creation of universal value is possible only when a basis of this kind exists.

**Yamauchi:** An excellent point. It is certainly true that universities play a major role in developing global-mindedness and creating universal value.

**Oh:** In my view, we should share the value criteria we aim for in the global dimension

not only among the faculty who guide and evaluate students, but also among societies and governments. We should start by bringing the students' attitude to their studies into line with these criteria. Then we need to try to bring the expectations of their parents and guardians into line with the students' particular abilities and aspirations. While teaching specialized subjects is an important part of a university's work, I think it is also vital that each instructor teaches according to globally shared criteria of value. I don't expect this to be simple, though.

## Developing Global-Mindedness

**Yamauchi:** Japanese universities might find it difficult to teach to unified standards of value, because our teachers tend to express their own individuality in their teaching styles, but I agree that we should keep in view the idea of equipping graduates to help create universal value. Indeed, preparing graduates for active careers on the global stage is a goal of ours here at Hitotsubashi, and, in its simplest terms, this goal finds expression in our policy of encouraging study abroad. We take the view that the first thing students should do is go overseas, see a variety of things, and have a variety of experiences.

**Oh:** In English, both Hitotsubashi and SNU are "universities," which is a cognate of "universe." Hitotsubashi is in Tokyo, we are in Seoul, but wherever in the world a university is located, I think the term signifies a place where people can acquire knowledge that is shared globally. That is, global-mindedness is already implied in the concept of the university, due to the historical process by which it came into being.

Recently, economic, energy, and human rights issues, together with climate change, have emerged as problems on a global scale. When such issues are



addressed in terms of competition between states, the possible solutions are limited. They clearly need to be addressed on a global scale. If approached in that way, I think they can be tackled by universities in every country. The essential point is the importance of having an open mind and an appreciation of cultural diversity, and foreign study is one means to that end.

**Yamauchi:** Yes, appreciating diversity and having an open mind are key elements of global-mindedness. Are you taking any specific steps at SNU based on that awareness?

**Oh:** This September, we are launching a program that provides the opportunity to faculty members of major universities in developing countries in Asia to pursue PhD degrees at SNU. This has been created recognizing the global social responsibility of SNU. I hope that Hitotsubashi University will become involved.

**Yamauchi:** That is a very exciting initiative, the epitome of open-mindedness, and we will be glad to cooperate.

## **T**he *Nationes* Come Together to Form the *Universitas*

**Oh:** I heard that your specialty is medieval international law, Professor Yamauchi. Your field must be closely related to the origins of the university in medieval Europe. At that time, belief in the existence of God was the universal value, and, as I understand it, laws came into being in response to the need to create order so as to enable the pursuit of that universal value. Thus, the original university disciplines were theology and law. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the old universal values gave way to a secular substitute: competition between states. I think universities must once more build a system of cooperation capable of pursuing essential values. Inviting the president of an overseas university to your entrance ceremony is a sign of true global-mindedness, and I hope Hitotsubashi University continues to stand out among the global higher education



institutions to take the lead in cooperation in Asia and beyond.

**Yamauchi:** You kindly mentioned my specialty. The English word “university” is derived from the Latin *universitas*, whose meanings include “universality,” “association,” “totality,” and “world.” The oldest *universitas* in the world is considered to be the University of Bologna, which had its origins in associations of students from every part of Europe, associations that were known as *nationes* or “nations.” The word “nation” comes from the Latin *natio*, “birth”; thus, a nation is an aggregation of people who have the same origins by birth. And as the *nationes* come together and form a *universitas*, what we have is, precisely, a world that is a community, in which countries with distinct traits form a single whole while bringing out the best in one another. The importance of the “universal value” of which you spoke becomes very clear in that context. What this means is that the proper sphere of the university is the diversity-based pursuit of universal truths.

**Oh:** You’re absolutely right.

## **T**he Purpose of Incorporation: To Pursue Research and Education that Have Value

**Yamauchi:** Turning now to another topic: Japan’s national universities became corporations in 2004, and I believe SNU incorporated in 2011, becoming the first Korean university to do so. What was the rea-





son for this move?

**Oh:** All the national universities were given the option of incorporating, but only SNU made that choice. The core purpose is to secure autonomy. We are still under the indirect control of the government, but as it has ceased to be direct, the university gains in autonomy. And I think autonomy is essential, because a university, as an institution engaged in education and research, must be able to give free rein to its special nature, which is different from that of a general administrative body. Incorporation is not an end in itself, but neither is gaining autonomy by incorporating. The ultimate purpose is to pursue research and teaching that have value, and autonomy is a vital means to that end.

**Yamauchi:** Were you influenced by the incorporations in Japan?

**Oh:** Yes. But in Japan all the national universities incorporated at the same time as part of administrative reforms, whereas in SNU's case the government passed special legislation, the Law for the Incorporation of Seoul National University, which had the basic goal of securing the university's autonomy, and which specifies that the government guarantees its finances. In this way, while securing the existing government financial support, the way was opened for the additional fund-raising that is necessary to the university's development. I think this is different from the situation in Japan, where since incorporation the government's outlay for the national universities has been cut by 1 percent annually.



**Yamauchi:** It's true that the Japanese national universities' budget is on a declining trend. This has us

racking our brains at times, but the primary purpose of incorporation in Japan, as at SNU, has been to gain autonomy. We have become independent administrative bodies, but of a fairly special nature, and university self-government is protected by law.

**Oh:** I think autonomy includes elements of both sides of the coin. I like to compare it to the relationship between parent and child: when a child gets married and sets up house, on the one hand there's a gain in freedom, away from the parents, but on the other hand, he or she must take responsibility for the new household. Similarly, an incorporated university has been given autonomy but has obligations to the public that it must fulfill. Having incorporated, SNU must overhaul its organization and develop further. It's as if the public has ordered us to do this.

## More Opportunities Will Come the Way of Those Who Study in Japan

**Yamauchi:** Incorporation of a national university is a very big change, and I'm guessing it didn't go entirely smoothly for SNU, either?

**Oh:** No, it didn't. The parliamentary opposition objected, and some faculty and students were also opposed. The fact is that we members of SNU's executive leadership made tremendous efforts to win these opponents' understanding and support. We also launched a campaign for donations by the general public by setting up the Seoul National University Foundation, as we want to secure funds, over and above the government budget, to ensure still greater managerial autonomy and to finance new initiatives. We took on two or three roles each and persevered in our efforts to make people aware of the vision and mission of the university and to win their support.



**Yamauchi:** You have my sincere respect for your very dedicated efforts toward autonomy.

I'd like to mention next that at Hitotsubashi University we have 195 Korean students, counting both undergraduates and graduates. There are 124 undergraduates, far more numerous than the Chinese undergraduates, who are in second place at 41. What do you advise these Korean students to learn and experience while they are here?

**Oh:** In the past, Korean students who wanted to study abroad had a strong tendency to choose American or



European universities and graduate schools. Some of those who are now studying in Japan may feel insecure about not having chosen the United States or Britain, but I can assure them that they needn't worry. Korean students with credentials from Hitotsubashi and other Japanese universities are likely to find more career opportunities. I say this because the rapid changes—political, economic, and social—currently under way in Korea mean that, in future, there will be even greater demand for graduates with a core of cultural diversity and with experience gained in different parts of the world. I foresee more career opportunities opening up for students who have received an education in Japan, Korea's nearest neighbor and a country with which we have both cultural affinities and deep economic ties.

**Yamauchi:** Those kind words will encourage us in our work, too.

## Japan Played a Role in the Asianization of Science and Technology

**Oh:** It seems to me that, since the mid-nineteenth century, the academic work of Japan has been founded on the basis of modern Western sciences, and Japan played a role in Asianizing this traditional science and technology. In this respect it is of great benefit for Korean students to study in Japan, where they are able to study within a system or body of knowledge based on an Asian tradition of scholarship. For example, in the field of public finance, many Korean faculty members study at Western universities, but Korea's system of public finances is actually more similar to Japan's in many ways. In the social sciences, an understanding of cultural and geographic attributes is valuable in one's studies, which suggests to me that it is quite meaningful for Koreans in the social sciences to study in Japan. And Hitotsubashi is one of Japan's top-ranking universities in the social sciences. Last year, you held the first Seoul Academia Symposium, and this year's symposium will be on the theme of ageing populations. As

Korea is also about to become an ageing society, I believe there is much we can learn from Japan, which began experiencing this phenomenon twenty years before us.

**Yamauchi:** We are happy that the first Seoul Academia was well received last year, and we would appreciate your help in continuing the series. Lastly, is there anything you want to see from Hitotsubashi University?

**Oh:** The Seoul Academia Symposium was a positive step, and Korean universities were also involved. In this way, Hitotsubashi University is deepening its ties with other Asian universities. I think this is an excellent thing. I certainly hope you will continue in future, and I would like to see Hitotsubashi and SNU work together to nurture global-minded students by sharing ideas, not only in research but also in education. I think intellectuals of both nations are responsible for expanding what the people of our two countries learn from one another and share with one another. I look forward to our continuing collaboration.

