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UNIVERSITIES AND THE PACIFIC RIM

Second Pacific Rim University Presidents Conference

President David P. Gardner
University of California

Bangkok, Thailand
November 27, 1990

Ladies and gentlemen:

I wish to begin by extending warm thanks to President Charas for his marvelous hospitality in arranging this second Pacific Rim Universities Conference here at Chulalongkorn University. This is an especially appropriate setting for our discussions, and I wish to express my deep appreciation to President Charas and to Bill Fuller and the Asia Foundation for their efforts in making this second conference possible.

Let me also say how pleased the University of California was to host, in cooperation with the Asia Foundation, the first Pacific Rim Universities Conference last year, and how much we welcome the opportunity to be a part of the second. When we began planning for the first conference a few years ago, we had no idea whether the notion of bringing together university heads from the Pacific Rim would be a success or a failure, whether we would have much or little to talk about. We quickly found that we have very much in common and very much indeed to talk about, and I am most grateful to the Asia

Foundation for the creative and catalytic role it has played, and continues to play, in this endeavor. In doing so, the Asia Foundation has encouraged us to believe that the issues and problems and opportunities confronted by the heads of leading Pacific Rim universities might be considered, discussed, and reasoned through on a more regular basis. And as a result, we are met here today to continue the conversation we began in San Francisco more than a year ago.

We are meeting at a time when the winds of change are blowing hard and reshaping the economic, political, and social dimensions of our world. Let me mention briefly what some of those changes are:

- Established ideologies, and what were thought to be enduring political principles and economic systems that have prevailed for much of this century in various parts of the world, have been yielding to demands for more political openness, economic development, and the enhanced use of technology, all of which bear upon the prosperity and personal freedoms that peoples throughout the world are more and more seeking. Most startling, perhaps, is the recent unification of Germany, dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and those now underway in the USSR, as well as the winds of change that are also blowing across Asia, albeit within very

different cultural and historical contexts than those at work in Europe.

- Today the East and West are struggling less with each other than they are in common struggling with what the Arab philosopher Hichem Djait (Hee-CHEM Jah-EET) has called the forces of modernity--the technological revolution, modern science, and the industrialization and urbanization of labor--forces that should not be confused with Western civilization, as is often the case. These forces are changing the world not just at the margin but at the core. And one of the most striking qualities of this change is its international character, as the discrete national markets with which we have long been familiar define less and less the world's economic order. For example, it is becoming increasingly difficult to buy American even if one sets out aggressively to do so. Production of a car can involve workers in four or five countries before the final product rolls off the assembly line in the United States.
- The past decade, as this audience knows well, has seen the emergence of the Pacific Rim as a potent force in the world's economy and the world's affairs. The economic integration of Western Europe in 1992 will be another major force shaping world

events; and one can only speculate about the impact on the global economy of the changes now taking place in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

- Moreover, ideas blow across political boundaries, even into the most insulated of nations and societies, disquieting, troubling, and indeed in some instances overturning even the most ideological and inflexible of established orders. Even the role and place of the military in this equation are coming under intense scrutiny. All of these forces--economic, political, ideological, religious, social, and cultural--are interrelated and global in their significance and effect.

Which will the leading nations be in this dramatically altered economic and political environment? According to investor Felix Rohatyn:

At a time when both superpowers have implicitly recognized the irrelevance of nuclear weapons (except as a deterrent), the real power in the world is coming to consist of surplus capital combined with national self-discipline, advanced technology and superior education. The leading nations of tomorrow, by those standards, are likely to be Japan and post-1992 Europe.

National self-discipline, advanced technology, and superior education--together they form a strategic triad fitted to meet the changes we are all confronting. We have already heard this morning about the importance of investment in human capital to countries that aspire to be major players in the competitive world marketplace. New knowledge, and not just the application of what is already known, will be the basis of the world's future economic order.

Knowledge and trained intelligence, in fact, are becoming a new form of capital. It is not the countries with the greatest natural resources that will be in the forefront of the emerging world order; it is those nations, developed and developing alike, that have invested wisely and well in their human resources. And obviously universities are indispensable to making the most of this investment.

Thus, we have several reasons to be talking to one another. Universities are increasingly vital to any nation's social, cultural, political, or economic well-being. Universities in the Pacific Rim have special opportunities in this regard, because whatever the ultimate shape of the new global order, this region will play a growing and significant role in its affairs. And given our common interests, patterns of migration and trade, the growing frequency of interaction among and between our institutions, those of us gathered here for this conference have much to talk about.

We need always to remind ourselves that, in addition to the research and scholarship we contribute to our societies, we have one further profound responsibility. Universities are, by and large, the institutions that prepare the next generation of leadership. Given that welcome fact, we should consider how best to offer our students a global rather than a parochial perspective--opportunities to travel, to study abroad, to visit not as a tourist but as one committed to understanding and comprehending another country, its peoples and culture.

My own country, after a long period of looking inward, is beginning to appreciate anew the significance of international education. It is possible to see welcome signs of new efforts to encourage the teaching of foreign languages, for example, and to increase the opportunities for American students to study abroad. But certainly we have a long way to go, and even countries with a far better record than ours of fostering an international perspective can do more, indeed should do more, because the future will require it.

For all of these reasons, it is good that we are meeting for these few days. This gathering offers hope for the creation, over time, of a regional set of capabilities and relationships roughly approximating those established by the Conference of Rectors, Presidents, and Vice Chancellors of European Universities or the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, by way of example.

However much our countries may differ in their circumstances or resources or aspirations or stage of development, we are bound together by patterns of trade, migration, finance, and a greater and greater sharing of our various cultures. Most of all, our common future on the Pacific Rim urges us to greater efforts to cooperate and collaborate with one another.

Our work is cut out for us. And I am confident that the years ahead will see the unfolding of many fruitful relationships between and among our universities in the growing, changing, dynamic Pacific Rim.