Toward a Nichibunken Interactive Alumni Network: A Personal Proposal

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Next year marks thirty years since Nichibunken was founded. Preparations are already underway for a number of special events. At this major milestone, we also face an important new challenge in the form of the proposed “Nichibunken Interactive Alumni Network (NIAN)” (tentative name) called for in the final report of Nichibunken’s committee on its Vision for the Future.

Since its founding, Nichibunken has welcomed a huge number of visiting faculty and research fellows from around the world. The network made up of exchanges among these researchers has the potential to become something that goes far beyond the mere accumulation of individual human capital. We must surely not let our thirtieth anniversary pass us by without making every effort to take advantage of these unique resources. Over the lifetime of the center, the
explosive development of the Internet has created the technical foundation for a new kind of international network that no one could have imagined thirty years ago. We can cultivate these new opportunities to link together research institutes in the field of Japanese studies around the world and establish a framework to provide mutual support for researchers who in some areas tend to become isolated. The bywords of "international," "interdisciplinary," and "integration" should inform all the activities that mark our thirtieth anniversary.

Establishing such a network will involve three elements. The first will be to build a truly effective online network of connections among Nichibunken faculty, the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU), and research and educational institutions that support the ideal of international Japanese studies within Japan. Positive discussions to this end are already underway at preparatory meetings for the International Japan Studies Consortium (tentative name) and other venues. Secondly, we need to achieve greater efficiency by unifying our frameworks for bringing information to the wider world; this will entail redefining the tasks and responsibilities of the Office of International Research Exchange. Its activities should help bring the faculty at Nichibunken together as one. These changes will be part of wider efforts to strengthen the functions of Nichibunken.

Most important of all will be the third factor, which involves the active participation and input of Japanese research institutions and individual researchers outside Japan. My idea is that Nichibunken can serve as a kind of hub, providing an environment that allows researchers in Japanese studies to make independent and active use of this platform from wherever they are in the world. Besides the usual Nichibunken lectures and symposiums, we should further develop new, interactive designs to realize international seminars and research meetings utilizing Internet communication technologies. My hope is that these ideas will receive a positive, intermediate evaluation in the third six-year midterm plan that started this fiscal year and will achieve concrete results by the final year of that plan. My proposal for an Internet-based alumni network is premised upon the improvement of such a basic groundwork.

I look forward to the input and proactive contributions from institutions and scholars in Japanese studies around the world in this endeavor.

Photo showing planned construction site of Nichibunken. The red line marks the area of the actual buildings. The area around the site was completely open 30 years ago.

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