The Asiatic Society of Japan

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On the occasion of its 2017 Annual General Meeting, the Asiatic Society of Japan was deeply honoured to be graced by the presence of His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince of Japan, and had the great privilege of receiving His Imperial Highness's lecture. The Society was further honoured by the presence of its Patron, Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado and her daughters, Her Imperial Highness Princess Tsuguko of Takamado and Her Imperial Highness Princess Ayako of Takamado, and was delighted to be able to host the AGM in the esteemed surroundings of the Embassy of Mexico, in the presence of His Excellency Ambassador Almada and other distinguished guests.

The Society has been graced with His Imperial Highness's lectures on two former occasions: in 1992 when His Imperial Highness spoke to the Society about maritime transportation in the Seto Inland Sea in medieval Japan; and in 2009, addressing the topic "Edo and Water". In this special anniversary year marking 145 years since the Society's founding, the ASJ was deeply privileged to receive the Crown Prince's lecture upon the subject of "Completing My Term as Honorary President of the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) -Reflections on Water Issues in Japan and Asia-". This lecture encouraged its audience to consider the fundamental relationship between water and human life, from the viewpoint of Japan and the wider Asian region.

The Crown Prince's expertise in the history of global water-related issues dates from his studies at Gakushuin University, where he researched maritime transportation in the Seto Inland Sea in medieval Japan. His Imperial Highness subsequently developed these studies while at Oxford University, focussing on the River Thames in the 18th century. However, it was during a visit to Nepal in 1987 that his academic interests broadened to encompass the global significance of water. In a small city near the Himalayan Mountains, His Imperial Highness observed women and children with pots in hand, waiting to fill them from a tap that could extract barely a trickle of water from the earth.

Fifteen years later, in 2003, His Imperial Highness served as Honorary President of the 3rd World Water Forum when it was held in Kyoto, Shiga and Osaka Prefectures. The Forum is convened triennially by the private sector think tank World Water Council, in partnership with a host country. It has become one of the largest global conferences on water-related issues. His Imperial Highness gave the keynote speech of the 2003 Forum, in which he discussed water transportation on Lake Biwa and the Yodo

River in ancient and medieval Japan. His Imperial Highness described his participation in the Forum as an invaluable opportunity to learn how far-reaching global water issues are, including the extent to which safe water and basic sanitation remain inaccessible for many. The issues facing the international community include not only water shortages and contamination, but also extend to human rights and questions of labour and education.

In 2004 the United Nations established the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB), proposed by then Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan, and His Imperial Highness joined its activities as Honorary President in 2007. UNSGAB was active for eleven years, during which it held 25 global conferences for providing opportunities to share actions and measures and advocating various proposals. His Imperial Highness personally participated in two of these conferences that were held in Tokyo, and also gave speeches in two United Nations Special Thematic Sessions on Water and Disasters hosted by the Secretary-General.

Both a lack and a surfeit of water can endanger life. The tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 took many precious lives, and around the world, many perish every year from rainstorms. While in Japan drinking water is considered safe to consume, many people in other nations fall ill or die from drinking contaminated water. Fetching water can itself be dangerous, and exacerbates the problem of poor education in societies in which children must miss school to walk long distances to reach water. A lack of sanitary toilets also contributes serious global health problems.

Looking back at the history of water issues in Japan, His Imperial Highness cited a *choka* poem from the classical poetry anthology of the *Manyoshu*. During Japan's Manyo Period (approx. 7th to 8th century AD), people tormented by drought must have looked up at the white clouds in the sky and prayed for rain. People who had previously relied solely on rainwater came to dig ponds to irrigate their rice paddies, and later to construct irrigation canals to cultivate new paddies. One particular irrigation system constructed around the Kaseda Manor in Wakayama Prefecture enabled the total surface area of rice paddies there to double between the 12th and 17th centuries. In the Edo period, improved technology made possible the construction of the new Odai irrigation canal, which stretched approximately 33km from the Kinokawa River through the Kaseda region, bringing water to paddies with a total area of approximately 1000 hectares.

These developments in water resource management technology transformed Japanese society. Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune commissioned the director of the Odai constructions, Izawa Yasobei, to create an even larger scale system supplying water to 15,000 hectares, which became the Minumadai Irrigational Canal. It raised agricultural production and increased population significantly during the Edo period, creating the foundations of contemporary Japanese society.

After the Meiji Restoration, further progress in sanitation infrastructure effected a gradual rise in the availability of tap water from 1887 onwards. In 1921, Tokyo and Osaka cities began chlorinating their tap water, which significantly improved infant mortality and life expectancy rates. This point marks the establishment of a safe water supply in modern Japan.

His Imperial Highness turned next to water and sanitation in the wider Asian region, highlighting the cases of Nepal and Kyrgyzstan. In 1990, just 66% of Nepal's population had access to safe drinking water. By 2015, this was 92%. The number of deaths per 1,000 children over the same period also shows a decrease from 140 to 40. The establishment of a modern waterworks in Nepal has led to a reduction in diseases caused or transmitted by water, and the significant reduction in time required to draw and transport water has given women more free time.

In Kyrgyzstan, the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to install water pumps in rural villages has led to dramatic change. Previously residents relied upon children ferrying water back to the villages, often at risk of traffic accidents, but now many residents have access to safe water near their homes.

Elsewhere in Asia, however, there remain countries in which over half the population is unable to utilize toilets. Proper management of human waste is essential to public hygiene, since the provision of safe drinking water and sanitary toilets reduces the risks of infectious disease transmission and the contaminated groundwater that threaten these regions. His Imperial Highness expressed his sincere hope that undertakings will go forward that are appropriate to circumstances in each country.

His Imperial Highness turned to the relationship between water and natural disasters. In fact, nine major earthquakes caused by the movement of tectonic plates along the Nankai Trough have been recorded since the first records began in AD 684, up to and including what had been the most recent, the Showa Nankai Earthquake in 1946. The AD 684 Hakuho Earthquake on October 14th of that year is documented in the *Nihon Shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan). Further, in the *Nihon Shoki* record for November 3rd, 18 days later, there is a report from the provincial governor of Tosa (now Kochi Prefecture), detailing that a ship transporting tax revenue was swept away from the shores as the ocean billowed up and flooded the area with seawater. This is the earliest known historical record of a tsunami.

Turning to look in detail at one further incident, the Ansei-Nankai Earthquake of 1854, we may find remembrances of it in the famous historical story of the *Inamura no Hi* ("The Fire of Rice Sheaves"). This is the tale of the business owner Goryo Hamaguchi who, aged 35, happened to be visiting his home village of Hiro (now known as the town of Hirogawa in Wakayama Prefecture) on the day the earthquake struck. Looking down offshore from a hill, Goryo noticed the troubled waters in the ocean, so he lit a fire to rice sheave stacks in the rice paddies as a warning sign and led the villagers to safety, preventing great loss of life. In 1896, Lafcadio Hearn published Goryo Hamaguchi's tale in his work "A Living God", and forty years later it was adapted into a short story entitled *Inamura no Hi*, which for ten years beginning in 1937 was included in the textbooks of Japanese elementary school students.

Furthermore, believing that a tsunami was certain to recur, Goryo prepared against it by spending his own money to build a coastal embankment, and made major contributions to the reconstruction of Hiro village after the disaster. This Hiro Village Embankment is said to have minimized the damage from the later 1946 Showa Nankai Earthquake. In autumn every year, the town of Hirogawa holds a tsunami

festival and a *Inamura no Hi* festival to commemorate the accomplishments of Goryo and to engage in activities to enhance awareness on disaster prevention with regard to earthquakes and tsunami. Today, disaster drills to prepare against tsunami are conducted all over Japan. Some overseas nations such as Indonesia have also begun disaster drills in cooperation with Japan.

In his book *Hojiki*, the Kamakura period poet and essayist Kamo no Chomei gives a detailed account of an earthquake disaster. He then writes that "[…] as days and months went by, and eventually a year passed, no longer did anyone even mention the great earthquake or how we despaired about the evanescence of this world." We may interpret this as a reminder of the importance of preserving memories of disasters, to convey them to future generations. His Imperial Highness expressed his strong hope that the world will be fully prepared against future conceivable earthquakes and tsunami.

The threat of flooding disasters causing serious damage is also ever-present in Japan, and almost annually floods and landslides occur nationwide. The September 2015 flooding across Kantō and Tōhoku regions caused the Kinu river levee to be breached, and many areas experienced their greatest 24-hour rainfall in recorded history. Japan has already taken steps toward preventing the occurrence of such disasters, for example by constructing levees in areas where the potential threat of floods is high. However, given the context of increasing frequency of flooding in recent years, we must continue steadily to put into place effective facilities. At the same time, as residents, our community must accept a change of mindset, preparing against flooding under the assumption that it may indeed occur.

Beyond Japan's shores, the threat of water-related disasters persists. Some major examples in recent years include the September 2011 rainstorms in Thailand that caused the Chao Phraya river to overflow, resulting in the inundation of seven industrial parks, which interrupted supply chains and had a major impact on global economic activity. In October 2012, Hurricane Sandy made a landfall on New Jersey, which resulted in the New York subway system being flooded and down. Business activities ground to a halt during a blackout that affected 8 million households. In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan (or Super Typhoon Yolanda) hit the Philippines, causing massive damage and leaving more than 7,000 people dead or missing.

Japan has been engaged in addressing various water-related issues around the world. The impact of the Japanese government grant aid was felt in the Maldives during the Sumatra earthquake and concurrent Indian Ocean Tsunami that struck Asia with unprecedented impact in late 2004. The Maldives also suffered flooding damage in this disaster; however, the harm it suffered is believed to have been mitigated by the seawalls and offshore breakwaters that had been constructed around its islands with Japanese grant aid of approximately 7.5 billion yen. The Crown Prince was able to meet with Maldivian government leaders after the tsunami, and learn of their gratitude that their nation had avoided major tsunami damage because of these measures.

As well as larger scale government efforts, there are numerous examples of smaller Japanese organizations or individuals whose work makes a positive contribution to countermeasures against global water-related problems. Gakushuin University, where His Imperial Highness studied, has every

year since 1997 been engaged in an on-site grassroots project cooperation work in Thailand. This is organized by the Gakushuin Overseas Non-Governmental Organization Volunteer Activity Programme (GONGOVA) under the guidance of Professor Tatsuhiko Kawashima. In 2010 their trip involved spending three weeks in the village of Huay Hin Lahd Nai working on several projects, one of which was the construction of a small-scale water supply system.

We may also consider the work of Professor Satoshi Omura, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2015. His research led to the discovery of a drug to cure so-called "river blindness" (onchocerciasis) that was a serious problem in many African nations, where the disease was spread by bites of riverside-dwelling black flies.

In the final part of the lecture, HIH the Crown Prince turned to the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the UN at its 2000 Millennium Summit with the aim of eliminating poverty. The seventh goal, to "ensure environmental sustainability", included sub-goals of reducing by half the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water, and also without sustainable access to basic sanitation, by 2015. The former target has been achieved: the proportion of global population without sustainable access to safe drinking water fell from 24% in the base year of 1990 to 9% (or 0.66 billion people) in 2015. However, with regard to the latter target, the fact of the matter remains that approximately 2.4 billion people, or 32% of world population, still do not have access to better sanitation facilities.

Following the 2015 deadline for the MDGs, the UN has newly adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 6 is "To ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all". The Crown Prince reaffirmed his own commitments to continue his efforts in this regard, and expressed his sincere hope that the international community will continue to cooperate in moving forward to achieve access to safe water and sanitation for everyone.

In closing, His Imperial Highness reiterated the importance both of firmly embedding the lessons of past disasters in our memories, and of conveying them to future generations, as well as of always being prepared for new water-related natural disasters likely to strike. In closing, His Imperial Highness graciously shared with us the translation of his favourite haiku, by Fura Maeda (1884-1954):

Overlaying the quarter
Is Mt. Tateyama in the background
There, water is sprinkled
To cool the streets

This poem evokes a scene of people in the town of Toyama where majestic Mt. Tateyama looms high, cooling themselves by sprinkling water on the streets to ease the summer heat. The water flowing from the mountains bestows many blessings on us, such as drinking water and water for agriculture. However, too little or too much water may also cause great harm. His Imperial Highness concluded by reaffirming his personal dedication to bringing about a world in which, as depicted in this poem, everyone, everywhere, may co-exist peacefully and happily with water.