Nationalization, Internationalization, Functionalization: My Twenty Years at SRC

Ito Takayuki

I. Introductory Remarks

This year we celebrate the 60th anniversary of SRC. I worked at SRC from 1972 to 1993. My years at SRC occupy one third of SRC's entire lifetime. That is the time of a great transformation of SRC. This coincides also with the most active part of my academic life. Today I would like to talk about what this transformation was, how it came about, and what I contributed to it.

The topic is related not primarily to Slavic studies as such, but to institutional problems of academic research in Japan. I see here on the floor many young colleagues and also foreign guests. You may not be familiar with how the Japanese state university functioned some forty years ago and how it changed. My talk may be a kind of introduction into the political economy of institutional reforms at the state university in Japan.

I joined SRC in 1972 and left for Waseda in 1993. During these twenty years I had served twice as Director: 1981–83 and 1987–89. My experiences as Director are the basis for my talk today. Four years' experiences as Director may not be enough to speak about such a topic. At SRC, however, we had a system of rotation. Director's position was rotated among the staff at SRC. That means, all the staff must be concerned about administrative problems even when you are not Director.

Thus, I was compelled to concern myself about management problems all the time.

When I joined SRC, I did not know what kind of institution SRC was, or to put it more generally, what kind of institution a Japanese state university was at all. I guess young colleagues and foreign guests in the audience today are not much different from me forty-three years ago. Let me first share with you some general knowledge about how Japanese universities functioned at the beginning of the 1970s.

What is a "state university" in Japan. We have three kinds of universities: state, public and private. A public university is a university that belongs to a local government like prefecture or city. A Japanese state university is not like an American state university. It belongs to the national government. That is why it is often called "national university."

The state university was financed by the central government. All the state universities were under the control of the Ministry of Education (Monbusho) in Tokyo. Almost all Japanese intellectuals were critical, even angry about the control by the Monbusho. Before I joined SRC, I thought that the Monbusho's control is very authoritative and strict. With the passage of time, I learned that it is not the case. The late Samuel Huntington was right when he said: All the controlling organs tend to represent the interests of those to be controlled. That means, they tend to become a sort of trade union. I came to understand that the Monbusho controlled us, but at the same time tried to represent our interests vis-à-vis the central government, the Ministry of Finance, and other ministries. Anyway, state universities were controlled and protected by the state bureaucracy just like public institutions in the former Socialist countries.

State universities were not only controlled by the Monbusho, but also provided with far-reaching privileges for self-government. We could decide on personnel management and use of budget with little interference from the Monbusho. There were of course certain limits to our freedom, to which I will soon come back.

There were many units within the state university like faculty, department, research institute, research center, research facility, chair, etc. Every unit was more or less self-governing, but there was a certain kind of hierarchy among units. Some were more self-governing than others. The highest unit for self-government was the faculty rather than

the university itself. Smaller units were subordinated to the faculty or to the university.

The official naming of SRC, when I joined it in 1972, was "Research Facility of Slavic Studies." It had been so since its incipiency in 1955. Research Facility was the smallest unit of self-government. As such, it must be attached to some faculty or research institute. SRC was attached to the Law Faculty.

Institutionally speaking, there was a strict division between education and research at the Monbusho. Faculty was a teaching institution where there were students, while research institute or research facility was a research institution where there were no students. The top office for university level education at the Monbusho was the Department of Higher Learning (Kotokyoikukyoku), while the top office for research was the Department of Science and International Affairs (Gakujutsukokusaikyoku). Although we were attached to the Law Faculty, we were subordinated to the different top office at the Monbusho level. Lawyers were controlled by the Department of Higher Learning, while we Slavists belonged to the Department of Science and International Affairs. We thus enjoyed a relative freedom from the Law Faculty.

For every unit at the state university the size was determined in advance. For the teaching institution like faculty, the number of students was a parameter for its size. For the research institution it was the number of chairs. The concept of "chair" was imported from the German system: *Lehrstuhl*. A complete chair was supposed to consist of one professor, one assistant professor, one lecturer, and two assistants. Often a lecturer or an assistant was missing. Then it was called an "incomplete chair." There was also a difference between "experimental chair" and "non-experimental chair." An "experimental chair" has additionally one more assistant and a technical assistant (*gikan*).

The number of chairs was very important, because it determined the budget. The more, the greater. An experimental chair obtained twice as much budget as a non-experimental one. If I remember correctly, SRC had only two chairs, all non-experimental. So that there were two professors, two assistant professors, and two assistants with no lecturers, altogether 6 people with two technical staff: one librarian and one accountant. The budget was very small. We could not afford to purchase

foreign publications, not to speak of inviting foreign guests. You may understand how modest an institutional life we led at that time.

II. Nationalization

Given this starting point, our main concern was: How to get more budget, how to make SRC bigger. Since the budget was determined by the number of chairs, you must first increase the number of chairs. How to do it? How to convince Monbusho bureaucrats of the necessity to increase the number of our chairs? Of course, we had to emphasize the importance of Slavic studies. How important were they? Would bureaucrats understand our arguments? This is the problem we faced at that time.

I believe that there were three directions or strategies of reform: Nationalization, internationalization, and functionalization. Let me explain them one by one. Of course, nationalization does not mean the introduction of state ownership. SRC belonged to a state university from the very beginning. Nationalization means transforming SRC from a research center attached to the Law Faculty of Hokkaido University into an all-national center. If SRC has a nation-wide status, you may expect a corresponding budget increase.

The original idea was not nationalization but upgrading SRC from a Research Facility to a Research Institute. There are a number of state universities that have Research Institutes. They were supposed to engage only in research, but not in teaching. Research Institutes are institutions specific to Japanese large state universities. I guess that there are no US or European universities with pure Research Institutes. Comparable institutions are only research institutes of the academy of sciences in former Socialist countries. Kyoto University boasts of having as many as 14 Research Institutes, and the University of Tokyo of 11 (as of December 2015). They are of variegated origin. Some of them were set up during the war for war-related research, but others are of postwar origin. Low personnel costs at that time made it possible to found and maintain such institutions. Since the late 1960s, however, it became increasingly difficult to set up new Research Institutes. Without knowing this, until the mid-1970s we continued to make the proposal to the Monbusho to upgrade SRC to a regular Research Institute. Our model was the Insti-

tute of Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University. They started later than we, but they could manage to become a Research Institute in 1965. Seemingly we had missed our chance forever.

We started to look for another opportunity. As I told you, SRC was a Research Facility attached to the Law School from the start. We planned to reorganize it into a university-wide research center. Since the mid-1970s we started to make a new proposal to the Monbusho in this direction. Finally in 1978 we got the prize: We obtained the status of university-wide center with one more chair, one more technical person, and a correspondingly larger budget.

Then we set a new objective: to reorganize SRC from a university-wide center to an all-national one. It took many years for us to persuade Monbusho people of the necessity to establish SRC as an all-national center. Finally in 1990 we achieved the goal. We became an all-national center with independent technical staff. The faculty staff reached 14 persons, and the technical staff added three more.

To tell the truth, SRC was conceived from the very incipiency in 1955 as a kind of all-national center in spirit: We had an institution of External Fellows. We appointed a number of distinguished Slavists outside Sapporo as External Fellows and held a regular national conference twice a year. By nationalization we institutionalized this system and provided it with a solid budgetary basis. We had also tried to build up a Slavic library for all-national use, but did not have enough budget for it. Now we could justify our demand for more library resources by being an all-national center. We started also a bibliographical service on Slavic studies in Japan. We started to compile a List of Japanese Slavists every five or six years. The Suzukawa Fellowship program made it possible for young Slavists in the rest of Japan to come and spend some time for research in Sapporo. All these services were intended for the SRC to perform its function as an all-national center.

III. Internationalization

Our ambition was to make Sapporo not only an all-national center of Slavic studies, but also an international one. Internationalization was necessary not only from the scholarly point of view, but also for our purpose to increase the budget.

Japan was a geographically very isolated country. Today, thanks to technological advances, it is easy to cross all oceans and continents. It was, however, very difficult up to quite recent times. Foreigners may imagine that Japan's location is comparable to Great Britain's: if you cross the channel, you are already on the continent. The Tsushima Channel, however, is far more difficult to cross than the English Channel. It was very hard for our ancestors to get to the Korean Peninsula or to Mainland China. Thus, we were doomed to cultural isolation for many centuries. We had a long tradition of China studies, but our sinologists suffered terribly from isolation from China itself. They could not get into contact with Chinese people. Without knowing how to pronounce Chinese, for instance, they had to study Chinese literature and history.

The same applied to our specialists in foreign civilizations after the Meiji Restoration as well. Most of them did not know how to pronounce English even if they were specialists of English literature, simply because they had no opportunity to get acquainted with the living language. The situation was even more terrible in the case of Slavists. They had little contact with Slavic countries, including Russia. The Second World War made the situation even worse: a whole generation of Japanese Slavists was completely cut off from Slavic countries. This is why our scholarship tended to be deeply provincial, out of touch with both current trends and actual events abroad. This was fatal for area studies whose main task is to deal with things abroad. Slavic studies in Japan shared the same fate for many years.

So, I considered internationalization, strengthening of international scholarly contact, as one of the main tasks SRC faced. I had, however, personally one serious problem: I was German-educated and Polish-specialized. I was 30 years old when I joined SRC. Up to that time I did not speak a word of English. I had not needed the speaking knowledge of English up to that time. In addition, practically I did not know Russian. Such a person as me is not fit for the task of internationalization, as the knowledge of English and Russian is crucially important for it. Fortunately, however, we had senior colleagues at SRC, such as Professors Tsuguo Togawa and Hiroshi Kimura, who had accumulated rich experiences in international contact. Actually they made a key contribution to the SRC's internationalization. I also tried to be helpful by improving my

English and learning Russian, though my knowledge of both languages still today leaves much to be desired.

There were four processes of SRC's internationalization to which I made some contribution: inaugurating a Foreign Visiting Fellowship Program, convening international symposia, launching a new journal in European languages, and finally appointing foreign citizens as colleagues at SRC. These processes did not take place in this time sequence. Some were preceded by others, but some were followed. They occurred more or less together and mutually reinforcing. None of them was an easy undertaking. All of them were rather long-lasting, painstaking, strenuous processes.

In 1978 when the SRC was reorganized into the university-wide center, the Monbusho granted our request to invite two research fellows from abroad on an annual basis. This was an extremely generous decision on the part of the Monbusho, because it meant that we could invite foreign scholars of our choice at the expense of the Monbusho. The notification of the decision was rather unexpected, and we did not know at first what to do with it, although it was we who had asked for it. In addition, it was not clear whether the fellowship would be continued in the following year. So, we started to administer the program rather on a half-hearted and *ad hoc* basis without announcing it externally. When we got assured that the fellowship would be renewed every year, we decided to institutionalize it. We started to announce it to major centers of Slavic studies abroad and to recruit applicants. I do not remember exactly when it was. I guess it was around 1981. At first there were applicants only from Western countries. With the passage of time increasingly more scholars applied from Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and even from Communist China. It coincided with the perestroika and democratization movements in the Eastern Bloc. The program enjoyed increasing popularity among scholars concerned.

Today it is a daily occurrence to have an international symposium in Sapporo. There is nothing special in it. In the 1980s, however, it was something special. Up to the early1980s, the SRC had never convened an international symposium. I presume that no department of Hokkaido University had had the experience of holding a full-scale international conference by that time. When we started to invite foreign scholars on

a regular basis, however, we had to do something for them. The first idea that came upon us was to let them present a paper at our bi-annual conference. It was in 1978 when we held this kind of bi-annual conference for the first time. We spoke English only on those sessions where foreign guests presented papers, while on all other sessions we talked in Japanese. Only in 1983 did we hold our first full scale international symposium in the sense that all the sessions were conducted in English or Russian. After that, we organized almost every year this kind of international conference.

In 1983 we launched *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, a new journal in European languages. We consciously chose a Latin title for it because we thought that there is no reason for us Japanese to entitle a journal dedicated to Slavic studies in English. Russian is not adequate, either, because naturally Eastern Europe should be covered. Latin may be more appropriate. None of us, however, was able to understand Latin. Professor Masayuki Iwata who newly joined us took the trouble to consult a colleague specializing in Latin literature about the title to be adopted.

The hardest nut to crack for the internationalization of SRC was to hire foreign nationals as regular colleagues of SRC. You may not believe, but it is true that until 1982 we were not allowed to do it by law. By coincidence I discovered that it was not possible for state universities to invite foreign nationals even as lecturers. Sometime in the late 1970s one of the colleagues of the faculty of economics turned to us with the request to recommend a foreign specialist in the Soviet agriculture to give a lecture in English at his department. I recommended to him a famous German specialist of the socialist agriculture, Professor Karl-Eugen Wädekin of University Giessen. Then we were told by the Rector's Office that since the Meiji period foreign nationals were not allowed to give lectures at state universities; during the occupation period the Monbusho was forced to accept American nationals as lecturers within the framework of exchange; this is rather an exception. As you see, the Monbusho's position was very nationalistic. Thanks to this position, however, we could escape from the fate of many Asian and African countries where university education is given in English or French even today. Monbusho people pursued this policy so consistently that they did not give it up even after we were defeated by the Americans in the Second World War.

It was, I guess, in 1982 when finally the Monbusho allowed state universities to appoint foreign nationals as regular colleagues. We were the first department to do it at Hokkaido University. Professor Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, an American citizen, joined us in 1983 this way. In 1990 Professor Shugo Minagawa, an Australian citizen then, followed. Soon arose another problem in connection with this. As we had a rotation system of directorship at that time, it was high time several years later for us to ask Professor Hasegawa to take over as director. When we asked the Monbusho about this, the answer was in the negative: no foreign nationals are allowed to occupy the position to exercise "public power"; deans or directors at state universities are supposed to do it. We deplored it very much, but had to postpone nominating a foreign citizen as SRC Director until the related law or the interpretation of the law was changed. I hear that it was done sometime in the 1990s.

Internationalization brought with it an additional burden to the faculty staff because the administrative service could not be carried out by the technical staff alone. In this country everybody is poor at English. The technical staff, civil service people, may be the poorest, because they have to deal with co-citizens first of all. Internationalization means that the faculty staff must do the job that otherwise the technical staff would do. For instance, the correspondence on terms of invitation or appointment, procedures for contract based on formal documents, arrangement of arrival and departure, mediation of accommodation, organization of social gatherings, etc., etc. With the passage of time some of those tasks may be entrusted to assistants or students. In the 1980s, however, there were few assistants or students. All the burden fell upon the faculty staff.

All in all, however, internationalization was very rewarding. It made SRC rather more famous abroad than at home. This was helpful because our bureaucrats were sensitive to reputation abroad. They became increasingly ready to help us. In retrospect, I suspect that that was intended when they granted our request to introduce the Foreign Visiting Fellowship Program. This was a very unique institution. So far as I know, no other state university had received such a generous grant.

SRC is a special place in the academic world in Japan today. Almost all people are fluent in two foreign languages: one of the Slavic languages and English, which is a rare case in this country. Already 23 years have

passed since I left SRC. I have never experienced elsewhere in Japan such a cosmopolitan atmosphere as at SRC. I am not so cosmopolitan, but I am very proud of being one of the architects of this cosmopolitan place.

This year the world congress of ICCEES was held in Makuhari, Chiba Prefecture. While I was in Sapporo, we were many times approached by ICCEES with the inquiry whether we were not willing to be a host to the ICCEES world congress. Each time we had to reject because we did not feel competent enough to do something like that. But I have the feeling that Makuhari is indirectly one of our achievements.

IV. Functionalization

In 1975 I was invited by the US State Department to make a tour to major US centers for Slavic Studies. I got a lot of impressions from it. One of them is that, although there are so many centers for Slavic studies in the USA, there are very few that have their own faculty staff. Typically, they have only a director and a secretary. Even the director belongs to one of the departments, but not to the center itself. Only the secretary is the proper staff of the center, but he or she is a technical staff. US centers for Slavic studies are shapeless, functional, or virtual institutions without their own faculty staff. According to Professor Robert Byrnes of Indiana University at Bloomington, US centers are holding companies without their own staff, but instead organizing professors of related specialty throughout the campus to be a pressure group within the university. Its main tasks are: to put pressure on individual departments to hire more Slavic specialists and on the library to purchase more Slavic publications, and finally to organize scholarly meetings from time to time.

Unlike US sister institutions, SRC has its own faculty, however small it may be. It is almost a department. This has its own merits and demerits. The greatest merit is of course to have the faculty staff that dedicates itself to the research task on a fulltime basis. The more numerous the staff is, the better. There is, however, a natural limit to resources. The Monbusho budget has to take care of so many fields, and the priority of Slavic studies is not very high; on the contrary, I am afraid, one of the lowest. This is the demerit of our system. It seems that the US system

makes more rational use of limited resources. There is something for us to learn from it, Isn't it possible to incorporate good points of the US system without throwing away the advantage of our system?

My conclusion was: We must be prepared to live with the structure which is doomed to be of minimal size under the Japanese circumstances, but at the same time we must try hard to maximize its functions. What do I mean by "structures" and "functions" which sound like concepts taken from systems theory? Under the "structures" I imagine something like hardware, something fixed, non-flexible and requiring long-term fiscal commitments, and under the "functions" something like software, something fluid, flexible and requiring only short-term fiscal commitments.

SRC was run just like a typical old style department of a state university in Japan, only without teaching load. There were a certain number of professors. They were all tenured from the start. Their main task was research. They were obliged to present a paper at the bi-annual conferences and to contribute at least an article to SRC's organ, *Suravu kenkyu*. There was no meaningful competition among them and between themselves and the outside world. Functions were all determined by this rigid structure and could not go beyond it. That is quite fine, as far as it goes. I increasingly felt, however, that it was no longer possible; there must be a fundamental change; we must read a sign of the times.

During the twenty years I worked at SRC, the number of professorships increased from 6 to 14. That was a considerable feat, but SRC was still very small in size. I had the foreboding that we had hit the ceiling. Unfortunately I was right in this, because the institutional size of SRC has been stagnating since then if I am correctly informed. What to do now? I felt that functions must be disassociated from structures, externalized, diversified, and made competitive.

For instance, research may be separated from the center and exposed to outside competition. Obligatory contributions to SRC's organs *Suravu kenkyu* or *Acta Slavica Iaponica* may be liquidated. Instead, the faculty staff should be encouraged to publish research results in refereed journals as far as possible. The faculty staff may also be absolved of the obligation to present papers at SRC-internal bi-annual conferences. Instead they should be active at national or international scholarly conferences. Information on the staff's research activities would be disseminated as

widely as possible. I am personally responsible for the launching of *SRC News* (in Japanese). The format of the publication I personally designed is still in use up to today. Careful readers may become aware that there is a column entitled "Who What Where Published?" This was intended as a kind of discrete control of the staff's research activities.

The organization of research projects financed from outside is another example of strengthening SRC's functions. From the very beginning SRC's activities could not be conceived without externally financed research projects. Every year staff members individually and/or as a group applied to the Japan Society for Promotion of Sciences, a government foundation, for research subsidies. Unfortunately, possibilities for fund-raising in Japan were rather limited. In most cases we applied to the above-mentioned government foundation. The subsidies themselves were modest. Notwithstanding, they were indispensable. If I remember correctly, up to the early 1980s raised funds were used mostly to purchase Slavic-related books or periodicals for the library, that is, a typical kind of hardware. Increasingly, however, they were used to finance international conferences. It seems that the large scale fund-raising became available only after I left SRC. I hear that today SRC is the largest fund-raiser per capita among humanistic and social science departments at Hokkaido University. This is, I guess, one of the legacies of the 60-year history of SRC.

There is, as it turned out, a certain limit to the structural growth of Slavic studies in Japan. But an endless functionalization of Slavic studies is not possible. I believe that the existence of a minimal structure is absolutely necessary for Slavic studies in Japan; the complete virtualization is out of the question. The core structure is necessary as organizers of Slavic studies. Without watchful eyes reminding the nation of the value of the studies they would fall into oblivion, as they are rather remote from the everyday life of the Japanese. It functions also as controller of the quality of research. Frequent scholarly conferences and high-level journals and publications organized by SRC help to keep the standard of research in the country very high. Last, but not least, the scholarly contribution of SRC staff members themselves is great and stimulating for other specialists, which is perceptible at every convention of Japan's national associations of humanities and social sciences.

V. Au lieu de conclusion

Not all attempts at reform I made at SRC were successful. For instance, towards the end of the 1980s I was enthusiastic about computerization and tried to introduce a local area network (LAN) at SRC. Although we invested a fair amount of money and time into it, it ended up in a great fiasco. We could succeed only in interconnecting MS-DOS computers and printers with each other by ethernet cable within the institute. We could not reach the outside world, and the outside world could not have access to our LAN. It was just too premature. There was neither university-wide LAN nor nation-wide internet-connection at that time. Whenever I take a look at SRC's internet site today, I cannot help admiring it. I think it is one of the best internet sites on Slavic studies in the world. The networking through internet is one of the most important functions SRC is performing today. From time to time I console myself by saying that I am one of those pioneers that prove their value only by failure.

I hope that at least the three things I helped to come to fruition at SRC—nationalization, internationalization, and functionalization—facilitated SRC to prosper further and develop along the lines that led to the present state of affairs. The story of my twenty years at SRC may be compared to the history of state socialism in the same period. The system of Japanese state universities functioned almost in the same way as state socialism in Eastern Europe. It was dismantled and placed on the new basis: market mechanism, almost at the same time as state socialism in Eastern Europe. It coincided with my personal fate: I moved on to a private university in 1993. I made a speech at the welcome party at Waseda University: I feel now as if I had moved from socialism to capitalism. Soon afterwards the same fate befell also those colleagues of mine that remained at SRC. As all of you know, in 2004 state universities ceased to exist. All state universities were transformed into independent administrative corporations.

I do not know much about "National University Corporations," as former state universities (FSUs) are now called. What I know is that the reform is one of the results of Thatcherism in Japan. The Government feels no longer responsible for the finances of FSUs. In return for it, FSUs are made free from the control of the Monbusho. Of course, the

change cannot be put into practice in one day. The budget for FSUs is cut by 1 percent every year. From year to year state subsidies become smaller and smaller. They will never be zero, but FSUs must prepare themselves for the day when they receive only so much from the state as private universities today. It is a question of time, if not years, but decades, that FSUs end up in financial collapse unless in the meantime they have managed to find other means than state sources. Formal institutional entitlements from the Monbusho that we have tried so hard to obtain at SRC do not help any longer. For instance, Professorial Chairs, National Research Center as status, Foreign Visiting Fellowship Program, etc., etc. are no longer on a secure basis. When a professor retires, there is no guarantee anymore whether you can nominate his successor. Untenured professorships or assistantships, something unheard of at FSUs in the old days, were introduced on a massive scale and are now a fairly widespread practice. In order to survive, FSUs must do everything possible to financially support themselves. Sometimes I have the impression that in their institutional behavior FSUs today are more audacious and more market-oriented than some time-honored private universities.

I understand that you, colleagues of mine at SRC, are now facing new challenges. I have full compassion for you. It is, however, my firm conviction that you will take up the gauntlet of the times and successfully overcome the crisis.