

**First Conference of the Science Council of Asia
8-12 May, 2001.
Sofitel Central Grand Plaza Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand.**

**Academic Symposium
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Presidential Address

by

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Welcome

His Excellency the Minister of Science, Technology and Environment
Distinguished representatives of International Council for Science, Inter-Academy Panel, Pacific Science Association and Federation of Asian Scientific Academies and Societies.

Representatives of member countries of the Science Council of Asia
Participants and observers
Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the organizers of the Conference, I would like to take this opportunity of extend to you all our welcome to Thailand and the Conference. Started as series of 8 meetings known as Asian Conferences on Scientific Cooperation or ACSC under the auspices of the Science Council of Japan, the spirit of cooperation has developed among the 10 participating Asian countries, namely China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. In May 2000, These countries decided to form the Science Council of Asia or SCA. As a new regional body, SCA has two objectives.

(a) To provide to scientists in all fields, including cultural and social as well as natural science and technology, a collaborative platform for promoting scientific exchange and cooperation in Asia for the improvement of human society; and

(b) To develop and to promote a holistic vision by integrating the emerging advances in science and technology with Asian wisdom, values and heritage, focusing on sustainable development and improvement of quality of life.

The First SCA Conference today and subsequent annual conferences will serve as the means to report on the progress in realizing the set objectives.

Asia and Global Sustainability

Prior to the establishment of SCA, the 10 member countries have been held discussion on various issues on population and the environment in Asia. In parallel, scientific academies around the world were planning to come together as Inter-Academy Panel focusing on the transition to sustainability in the 21st century. Through these efforts, it has become increasingly clear that global sustainability will not be achievable if Asia is unsustainable. Two key reasons lead to this conjecture. One, more than half the world's population are Asians. Therefore, global sustainability can only be realized when the majority of the world's people are doing what they can towards sustainability. Two, Asia is rich in diversities which include bioersity, social diversity, economic diversity and geographical diversity. So, global sustainability without preserving the wealth of the Asian diversities will be unsatisfactory. For these and other seasons, it may be argued that SCA has an important role to play in realizing the Asian sustainability and the global sustainability.

Strategic Choices for SCA

Having defined the objectives of SCA and its focus on sustainability, let me now examine the options and opportunities available to SCA in moving towards its goal of sustainability. While Asia has the majority of the world's population and the richness of diversities, there are also many constraints. Among them are huge gaps among Asian countries in their economic and social development and in their scientific and technological strengths. These economic, social and scientific devides (including the well known digital devide) limit what Asian countries can do to bring about the sustainability. In particular, I would like to propose for further debate some strategic roles for SCA in helping to realize the sustainability.

1. Education No doubt, raising awareness of the public and educating the next generation on sustainability will help mobilize Asians to work towards sustainability. Government, organizations and citizen groups in the SCA member countries have to be convinced the importance and the relevance of sustainable development. SCA member organizations should formulate activity programs to popularize sustainability as the "global religion of the future". They should address critical issues such as relationship between sustainability and development, wealth creation, and human dignity. In the process, it should be also noted that sustaining the parts is vital to the sustainability of the whole. Global sustainability needs sustainable countries which in turn need sustainable people. By the nature of the current SCA member organizations, they should be well suited to promote sustainability awareness and to develop sustainability science for schools and universities.

2. Scientific and technological advances Since SCA has many scientific academies and organizations as its members, SCA may promote the advances of science and technology which are relevant to the transition to sustainability. These may include biotechnology, genome science, energy

alternatives, material reuse and recycling, low impact manufacturing technology, green technology, bioethics, and economics of sustainability. In the process, the SCA member countries will have to recognize the fact that the world's strength of science and technology lies with the Western countries. Therefore, proper integration of the western scientific and technological progress with the Asian wisdom and culture in order to build sustainability be challenging for the SCA member countries in the years to come.

3. Monitoring As a young regional body, SCA has to recognize its limited resources and its uncertain future. Very importantly, SCA has to find its niche position in the world scene. One unique niche position that should be considered is for SCA to develop a monitoring system to encourage the progress made by countries towards sustainability. This will require SCA to develop indicators for sustainable development and apply them to monitor the transition to sustainability of nations. Reporting the annual advances to the public should bring public pressure upon responsible national authorities to intensify their efforts for sustainability. To start transforming this idea into action, SCA should first undertake assessment of other related indicators such as development index, living standards and quality of life and develop a new set of indicators for sustainability. To be useful, the new sustainability indicators must be simple and easily understood by the public. There should be only few key indicators which convey the real meaning of sustainability.

The Ways Forward

While it will be nice to implement these strategies fully, SCA has to be mindful that their member countries differ in their development and resources. So each SCA member country has to decide which strategy will be suitable at the initial stage and moves on from there. During the process, networking and cooperation with others will be beneficial. Each year, the annual SCA conference will be used as the platform for exchanging the experience and the lessons learned in each country. Hopefully, value addition during future SCA conferences will attract more active participants and move us closer to our goal of sustainability.

Acknowledgments

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