

**Graduation Occasional Address – Mr Murray McLean AO
Chair, Australia-Japan Foundation
Whitebrook Theatre, Lismore Campus, Southern Cross University
Saturday 4 May 2013**

Chancellor, the Honourable John Dowd,

Deputy Chancellor, Mr Trevor Wilson,

Vice Chancellor, Professor Peter Lee and in particular

Good afternoon to the graduates and their families and friends.

I am most honoured to deliver this graduation occasional address to you today - to graduates from

The Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples,

The School of Arts and Social Sciences,

The School of Environment, Science and Engineering, and

The School of Tourism and Hospitality Management

Today I will speaking from the perspective of my having been an Australian diplomat with over 42 years of service to our country, concluding that career in the position as Ambassador to Japan for seven years; as the current Chair of the Australia-Japan Foundation; as a contributor to the Government's recent White Paper, *Australia in the Asian Century* released late last year and as a Professorial fellow at Monash University.

I begin my remarks with special mention of one of Lismore's famous sons, Father Paul Glynn. Father Glynn addressed a graduation ceremony here at Southern Cross University in 2010. He spoke compellingly of the virtues of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation and the importance of establishing relationships of friendship and trust to ensure deeper understanding and goodwill between the people of different countries and cultural backgrounds.

It is a speech well worth taking the time to read online, as it is also a moving and very personal account of the history of Australia's very first sister city relationship with Japan – that between Lismore and Yamato Takada, a city near Osaka in Japan.

This year, these two forward-looking cities are celebrating 50 years of a very warm, special and historic relationship which grew from the ashes of the sorrowful past of World War Two. It is a relationship of great friendship and trust, one which has been an inspiration to the 103 sister-city relationships that now exist between Australian and Japanese cities.

I mention this for two reasons – first, I want to acknowledge Father Paul Glynn and his contribution to Australia-Japan relations and second, because his speech spoke of the power to be an influence for the good of others and, more broadly, the importance of Australians reaching out and building relationships of warmth and trust. I will return to this point shortly.

First – I warmly congratulate all graduates on their achievements. Today is an important milestone in your lives. You have all made sacrifices to complete your courses but you can now be sure you have made a significant investment in your future. Your family and friends, sharing this wonderful day with you, will all agree that undertaking higher education is a special privilege and a valuable gift in all our respective communities.

Whatever you do in coming decades, take every opportunity to continue learning. Our complex world is made all the more accessible by the dizzying speed of technological change and explosion of information. There will always be new, interesting and challenging learning experiences inherent in whatever you do. So while this day may mark the end of your formal education at this University, it will definitely not be the end of your learning and intellectual growth.

In the lead-up to coming here today, I reflected on my own formal study and my graduation in 1969, at the University of Melbourne. My university experience took place as another war was brewing in Asia – the Vietnam War, and it made us think at that time about Australia’s position in this region and how important it was for our nation to build constructive and peaceful relationships to ensure our security and prosperity. The developments of the late 1960s were critical to my decision to pursue a career as an Australian diplomat.

It was a privilege to serve a 42-year career upholding and promoting Australia’s international interests. It took me to many countries, but particularly those in the Asian region, notably Hong Kong, China on several occasions, Singapore, as a special envoy to North Korea to try to persuade it to drop its nuclear weapons program and then finally in Japan, from 2004-2011.

Since 1969, Australia itself, and our position in the world, especially in our immediate region, has transformed dramatically. Asia is by far our most important partner in trade and investment terms. Tremendous Asian diversity has been integrated into Australian communities at every level alongside increased travel, life and work opportunities in Asia for many more Australians.

So our security and prosperity are linked to Asia more than they have been at any time in our history. We have spent many decades debating the importance of Asia and learning about its diverse cultures and languages,

but Australians as a nation no longer have any option but to rev-up more than ever their engagement with this exciting region.

We are now in what is appropriately dubbed the *Asian Century*, a period already critical to, and which will only continue to grow in importance for, Australia.

The Asian Century White Paper pointed to Asia's extraordinary growth over the past several decades and how it has already changed the Australian economy, our society and our strategic environment. The scale of the change still to come presents a wealth of opportunities for Australia, but it also presents us with the important challenge of fully understanding the import of these developments and adjusting ourselves to the new realities of our immediate environment.

Within a few years, Asia will produce more than 50% of the world's goods and services, and be the world's largest consumer. It is already the most populous region in the world and will soon be home to the majority of the world's middle class. This trend is expected to continue.

So, I encourage and urge you take up this important opportunity to build our understanding and connections with this growth story. Some of you may choose to pursue further education perhaps learning an Asian language. Some of you may choose to travel, perhaps living and working in Asia. Some of you may choose to work here in Australia with a company or institution doing business with Asia. And some may choose – as I did – to enter the public service, where much work is being done on strengthening Australia's relationships with Asia.

You graduates and your colleagues all over Australia are the people that must grasp these changes and help shape Australia's engagement with the Asian Century. You are our nation's future. It is good that Australia starts from a sound position. Earlier I spoke of our long history of engagement with Asia. Our relationships are strong and robust but they can grow much more. Just as this region has much to offer us, we have a lot to offer the region. Our solid world-leading institutions, our multicultural and highly skilled workforce, and our productive, open and resilient economy are the foundation for us to engage even more deeply.

In short, the importance of developing partnerships with Asian countries and individual and personal exchanges and relationships amongst us, cannot be overstated in the context of the Asian century

Earlier I referred to Father Glynn and his moving story of reconciliation - a story of which SCU and Lismore can be proud, because of Lismore's early role in establishing a lasting relationship with Japan. It is a story of profound

mutual respect and goodwill and demonstrates what can be achieved through pursuing peace and strong relationships of reconciliation and trust.

The substance of the 50-year relationship between the city of Lismore and the city of Yamato Takada is one now replicated by many other cities of Australia and Japan. It is symbolic of the greater Australia-Japan partnership - a partnership built on shared values, common goals and deep people-to-people links built through the unstinting efforts of many hard-working Australians, such as Lismore's Glynn brothers and people like Mrs Tazuko McLaren in helping setting up SCU's Japan Centre. It is through these links and institutional connections that the Australia-Japan relationship functions so successfully and is a model for Australia to follow in all its other relationships with Asian countries.

These partnerships are the vehicles for so much of what I call the nitty-gritty of our relationships with other countries. The Isabella a Capella choir led by Dylan Curnow, through its performance tours has for example done much to raise funds for the people of the Tohoku region, which sustained the greatest degree of devastation following the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster.

These personal contributions are valued highly by the Japanese people. I see Professor Baden Offord here today. As a visiting Professor of Australian Studies at the University of Tokyo in 2011, a role which is funded by the Australia Japan Foundation, Professor Offord forged genuinely respectful relationships with academics and students during his time in Japan and through subsequent visits as a guest lecturer.

In any context - creating and nurturing good relationships through genuine mutual respect, is vital to ensure long-term success in professional spheres as well as a high level of personal satisfaction and happiness. But establishing cooperative partnerships will also achieve so much more that is constructive, than each of you can do alone as individuals.

In my past life as a diplomat, I realised how the importance of interpersonal relationships of trust could easily and imperceptibly determine desired outcomes. Trust is critical in achieving professional and personal success.

Once again, may I congratulate all of you graduates and wish you happiness, good health and every success as you embark on your post-university lives at this critical period in our nation and our region. Make sure you take up the opportunities that are before you, but also continue to learn and to be ready to adapt your thinking as challenges and opportunities emerge in the exciting times ahead.