



Embracing Diversity and Opportunities for the U.S. and Japan

“Embracing Diversity and Opportunities for the U.S. and Japan” was one of two panel discussions held at the CULCON Seminar held in Washington, D.C. on September 27, 2015.

Panelists:

Moderator:

Dr. Sheila Smith, Senior Fellow for Japan Studies, Council on Foreign Relations; U.S. CULCON Panel Vice Chair

Panelists:

Gen. Koichiro Bansho, Commanding General, Western Army, JGSDF Retired

Maj. Gen. Charles Frank Bolden, Jr., Administrator, NASA

Dr. Junko Hibiya, President, International Christian University

Ms. Susan Morita, Partner, Arnold & Porter LLP

Introduction:

When CULCON was created by President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ikeda in 1962, it was a time when many in Japan were questioning the U.S.-Japan relationship. The United States was dealing with the upheaval associated with a national civil rights movement, and Americans were questioning themselves about their own tolerance. Today, in our globalizing world, our two countries face very different challenges, and a discussion about diversity continues to be relevant. What do we mean by diversity? What is its evolution? What are its benefits? What do we mean by equity and inclusion? How do we recognize bias and discrimination? These are some of the issues that were explored in Panel 2.

Summary:

The panelists represented four distinct professions and areas of expertise, and discussed the importance of diversity as it relates to the military, international space exploration, education and the workplace.

The experience of the Japan-U.S. military partnership demonstrates how diverse nations can effectively work together for mutual support. For more than 100 years, the two nations have worked together in times of war as well as during responses to natural disasters in both the United States and Japan. Since the end of World War II, the two nations have supported each other in frequent operations, from reconstruction efforts in Iraq in 2003 to a response to the Fukushima earthquake and nuclear disaster in 2011. The collaborative efforts by our two military forces over the years demonstrates what individuals from different countries, with diverse languages, cultures, and military structures, can achieve together. These experiences have also demonstrated that military personnel can often be more effective when they adapt to the culture of and develop ties to the local population. The future holds many challenges for both nations, from global warming to new

security issues. As Japan and the United States work together on these challenges, the successful partnership of our two military forces – who found strength in diversity -- can be instructive.

International space exploration is another arena in which diverse nations and people working together have achieved what no single nation could have done alone. For the past 15 years, the international space station has been operated by an international crew, including Americans, Russians and 11 Japanese astronauts. At the same time, the space station mission has provided new opportunities to -- and benefitted from the skills of -- women and minorities. However, the numbers of women and minorities participating in space exploration and other science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) occupations are still small. To attract a more diverse workforce, the United States will not only need to provide positive role models, but we will also need to actively recruit young people and make sure they know they are wanted in these fields. Finally, to take full advantage of diversity, we should continue to encourage participation in the liberal arts, both to ensure that our young scientists have an understanding of the broader world, and so that specialists in the arts, history and design can “make technology beautiful,” and inspire young people to look toward space exploration. Diversity is not only making sure that all of our citizens have an opportunity to serve, but it is also welcoming the broader expanse of cultures, skills and viewpoints they have to offer.

A liberal arts education and opportunities to connect with individuals from different backgrounds are both important in preparing young people to be globally-minded citizens. That is the philosophy of the International Christian University (ICU) of Japan. ICU, which opened in 1953 with support from both Japanese and American organizations, is truly an international university. The current student population comes from 52 different countries, and one third of the faculty is non-Japanese. The University was also the first four-year liberal arts college in Japan, and it still keeps that tradition. Through a liberal arts education, the university aims to ensure that students are critical thinkers who can reevaluate their own attitudes and beliefs. Combining this approach with opportunities for students to form connections with their peers from around the globe, the university aspires to cultivate students who respect cultural, linguistic and religious differences while opening their minds to others.

In the United States, particularly in education and the workplace, there has been an evolution in the way we approach diversity. While in the past Americans have focused on numbers of participation, we now know that it is not enough to recruit or hire individuals from under-represented groups – we must work on retention and promotion if we want women and minorities to succeed in education and the workplace. Instead of talking about *diversity*, many Americans now talk about *inclusion*, which focuses on whether members of minority groups feel they belong and are valued, and *equity*, which focuses on giving all members of society equal access to resources and opportunities.

As we continue to work on these issues, the U.S. and Japan may face similar barriers. In the United States, studies show that many institutions and individuals have unconscious biases and prejudices, which can affect how we treat employees and students. In addition, different power dynamics still exist; for example, studies have shown that, in U.S. classrooms, boys raise their hands more frequently than girls, even when they don’t know the answers. Equity itself is challenging, because

equal access may mean providing special accommodations and programs for those who are underrepresented – and interpreting the need for and implementing such accommodations, especially in the workplace, may be difficult.

In the question and answer session, one participant suggested that future student exchanges should include more students from U.S. community colleges, which often have a high percentage of low-income or minority students. Another participant asked whether the high cost of college education has an effect on diversity. A panelist responded that while the high cost of a university education in the United States is an important issue, scholarships and other funding are available; however we will still need to help minority students feel comfortable at the university level if they are to persevere and graduate. Another participant noted that there is a need for more diversity among college faculty members in Japan, who are predominately male. A panelist agreed that is an important issue, and added that gender is a challenge in the Japanese military as well, noting that only 3 to 4 percent of military personnel are women, and the majority of them work in the medical corps or logistics unit.

Going forward, there are steps that both countries can take to build a more inclusive society. Continued conversations such as this one will be important. The experience of the United States, which has been struggling with these issues for decades, may be instructive to other countries. Educational exchanges and the development of cultural competencies are important, but we should make sure exchanges are structured so participants get as broad a perspective as possible. Finally, for change to occur within institutions, leadership must come from the top. It can be uncomfortable to face our prejudices; we need to become comfortable with discomfort if we are to make progress.