

After 3.11: Multinational Personal Networks in International Relations

The Wealth of Nations Depends Upon Investment in Human Resources



Author Robert Kei Yasui

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The aftermath of the devastation of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami has brought with it a renewed spirit among the Japanese people, and highlighted the importance of 20th century investment in international education. Accompanying the attention-grabbing three-arrow approach of Abenomics, the winds of change have enhanced the prospects for the invigorated renewal of Japan's resourceful pool of private and public sector human capital, both domestically and abroad. The outpouring of grassroots international support for the Tohoku reconstruction activities is itself a testament to the personal ties binding Japanese citizens to the international community — in many cases to citizens of other nations who are of Japanese ancestry (*Nikkeijin*). Recent travails in international diplomacy underscore the importance of personal international relationships and especially the maintenance of relationships nurtured abroad by Japanese politicians, bureaucrats and corporate leaders. In many cases, these relationships sprung from youthful foreign graduate study experiences that provided introductions to the elites of other countries — the direct results of personal academic achievement and career-mapping vision.

In this new age of Asia's 21st century renaissance, Japan plays an important leadership role regionally (and by default, worldwide) in political-economic security. With the advent of a shrinking and aging population base, reliance upon a well-educated, internationally connected, acculturated and multi-lingual domestic population appears increasingly critical. By promoting policies aimed at consistently strengthening and fully utilizing Japan's human resources, including professional executive women, policy makers can boost maximization of individual productivity. Such policies should also sustain institutions fostering multinational personal relationships, thereby ensuring pathways for domestic leadership development and, by implication, for enhanced international commerce, and dispute avoidance and resolution. Certain portals sustained via governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and corporate philanthropy form a powerful triumvirate for sustaining the development of these so-called Multinational Personal Networks (MPNs). In the wake of 3.11 and with the approaching international spotlight created by the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics, Japanese policy makers face challenging questions regarding the role of international education and experiential learning as contributors to per capita productivity, not to mention the national elite.

Reconstruction Efforts & the Value of MPNs

It is commonplace for the international community to participate in relief assistance following natural disasters. In Japan's case, recent examples include the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, following which teams of international disaster relief and recovery experts poured into Japan to lend helping hands. Within hours of the earthquake, the Los Angeles-based Japan America Society of Southern California

(JASSC) established the Kobe Relief Fund, ultimately receiving nearly 10,000 individual contributions totaling \$1.7 million, recognized by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama as the largest amount received from a grassroots campaign. The 104-year old JASSC has a long history of providing disaster relief assistance to Japan, reaching back to the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake and the 1959 Typhoon Vera. The JASSC's spontaneous and extraordinary support is rooted in the American Japanese emigrants and their descendants' bilateral ties to government agencies, NPOs, and corporate philanthropy — bound together by MPNs developed



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mainly throughout the 20th century. Following the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, the JASSC created the 2011 Japan Relief Fund, and together with Japanese corporate and grassroots support has committed \$750,000 of the nearly \$1.5 million raised to the Japanese Red Cross Society, Save the Children Japan, and Seikeijuku Tohoku Earthquake Fund. Through grants from its 2011 Japan Relief Fund, among other projects, the JASSC has supported the rebuilding of Iwate Prefecture's Ofunato city Ryori fishing port; the Archi+Aid "core house" modular home production project, including Miyagi Prefecture's Minami-soma city community center and solar power system; and with the assistance of the Tomodachi-NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program, hosting the first "pioneer" residents from Fukushima Aikuen orphanage to travel abroad in its 120-year history as part of the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program, collaborating with Living Dreams in Japan and the Los Angeles-Nagoya Sister City Affiliation.

The Japanese Diaspora

The Japanese emigrant diaspora (*Nikkeijin* or *Nikkei*) and its integration into other nations' mainstream societies demonstrate the importance of

MPNs, utilizing personal portals to build international relationships — both to strengthen commercial and diplomatic ties, and to maintain policies that strengthen investment in human capital through formal education and international leadership experiences at all levels. In the United States, *Nikkeijin* have integrated well into American society, making extraordinary historical contributions to national leadership in government, commerce, technology and social sciences, athletics, and the arts. In many instances, they have served and continue to serve as personal bridges for enhanced bilateral relations. For example, former US Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta, among others, has devoted a lifetime of leadership to strengthening Japan-America institutional relations. As chairman of the Educational Task Force of CULCON (US-Japan Conference on Cultural and Education Interchange), Mineta oversaw its recent report advocating renewed focus on bilateral student exchanges, noting that while the number of Japanese students in the US has dropped 57% over the past 15 years, the number of American students in Japan has tripled.

1st Annual March 11 Memorial Golf Tournament



Photo: Mutsuo Sato

The bilateral efforts of private citizens enhances the development of MPNs. This past October, Kanegasaki's Kurikoma Country Club hosted the First Annual March 11 Memorial Benefit Golf Tournament, where Japanese citizens from across the nation joined

Iwate leaders, NPOs and *Nikkeijin* in supporting the organizing efforts of a Los Angeles-based husband and wife team — architect Ted Tokio Tanaka and Ofunato-native Masako Unoura Tanaka — after they had arranged donations of 44 replacement musical instruments to local musicians through the Asia America Symphony Association in connection with the Love To Nippon Project 2013 (*Building Cultural Bridges Through Music*). With more than 200 participants, the tournament assembled an international community that included numerous volunteer Japanese women executives and business owners known as the “Legacy Women”. Since 3.11 these women have enthusiastically sustained support for youth-oriented programs that improve the lives of the young people affected. Several participants have observed that the affected Tohoku youth are being exposed to an extraordinary number of unique personal interactions with both Japanese nationals and members of the international community in their daily lives following 3.11 — and in turn are arguably developing personal skill sets and frameworks for adapting MPNs earlier than their peers in other parts of Japan. The ease of modern international air travel, when combined with social media, distance learning and the worldwide web, makes the potential of sustained MPNs all the more promising. One observer opined that the experiences of these young people, if tracked and sustained, would offer an MPN-building model for all of Japan.

Building MPNs

There is evidence that a nation’s gross domestic product (GDP) significantly correlates with its mastery of core educational curricula. In 2010, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) released a study demonstrating a positive correlation between standardized cognitive skills test scores among adolescents worldwide and regional growth in GDP. In this, there is an intuitive common sense

correlation between high economic achievement and the ability to develop personal productive MPNs via foreign graduate school study. US and other foreign graduate school experiences offer unique portals into privileged social leadership networks, in many cases providing a capstone to the building of MPNs for Japan’s leadership elite.



Photo: Mutsuo Sato

(L-R: Robert Yasui, JASSC President Doug Erber, Margie Kuwamoto, Tomio Murakami)

As seen by the career maps of past and current leaders, it appears that formal foreign graduate education remains valuable for enhancing leadership development and, in turn, the MPNs of Japan’s future business leaders and politicians. However, in view of such evidence, it is astonishing that the public and private sectors are not actively accelerating the refinement of their ventures supporting NPOs and academia — the policy goal being to reverse the otherwise declining trend in Japanese enrolling in American and other foreign universities, thereby supporting MPNs to sustain multilateral economic, political and technological leadership (*Building Cultural Bridges Through Education*). Interestingly, the latest survey of the US Council on Graduate Schools reveals that the proportion of first-time enrollees from China, India and South Korea dominates the pool of non-U.S. enrollees. One-third of foreign-born US graduate students now originate from China.

Prospects for the Future

Assuming the continued desirability of MPNs as part of the career-mapping strategies of the national elite, the general population will necessarily benefit from international ties fostered through personal interactive programs sponsored by governmental agencies, such as consulates and diplomatic missions, and NGOs, as well as interactions with private individuals providing NPO volunteer assistance and interactive leadership opportunities. The private sector continues to play an invaluable role in supporting corporate citizenship through philanthropic scholarship assistance and experiential learning opportunities (*Building Cultural Bridges Through Commerce*), while validating the need for foreign university credentials as essential for career advancement. In Japan’s case, it has a unique resource pool of talented *Nikkeijin* who readily serve as bridges for enhancing and facilitating multilateral communication. By encouraging early childhood exposure to personal experiential learning opportunities via MPNs, policy makers can enhance the citizenry’s productivity while fostering multicultural understanding and simultaneously overcoming historical barriers through direct personal interactions. All in all, the renewed wave of reforms occupying national policy circles should encourage the development of MPNs, which by their nature may in the long run ease domestic support for the maintenance of Japan’s role as a regional and international leader, while allowing more flexibility for the adaptation of the domestic policy agenda to ever-fluctuating international leadership standards.

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Robert Kei Yasui is principal attorney of Los Angeles-based corporate law firm Yasui & Associates. He is a director of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, vice chairman of the Japanese American Treaty Centennial Scholarship Fund, and also founder of www.thezoku.com, a U.S. non-profit organization dedicated to Building Cultural Bridges Through Music, Education & Commerce.