

I. Historical Evolution of US-Japan Policy Dialogue and Study

In the decades leading up to World War II, a handful of institutions organized policy conferences and discussions on US-Japan affairs, but substantive policy dialogue between Japanese and Americans is in many ways a postwar phenomenon. In the late 1940s and the 1950s, a small group of internationalists on both sides of the Pacific took it upon themselves to build up institutions that could facilitate US-Japan exchanges and thus promote mutual understanding. Most notably, John D. Rockefeller 3rd used his own funds and his influence at the Rockefeller Foundation to establish the International House of Japan and revive the Japan Society of New York, helping build them up into prominent and vibrant institutions.

While these efforts to promote mutual understanding covered a broad range of areas from arts and culture to language education, they also included an element of intellectual exchange. It is difficult to characterize the intellectual exchange activities of the time as fully equal two-way interactions and it would be a stretch to describe them as full-fledged policy dialogues. However, they often took up policy issues and were colored, first by the desire to encourage the institutionalization of democracy in Japan, and then later by hopes on both sides to strengthen Japan's resistance to Communism.

In 1960, however, massive street demonstrations against the US-Japan security treaty and the specter of growing anti-Americanism in Japan shocked the American public, prompting Harvard professor Edwin Reischauer to coin the term "the broken dialogue" to describe

What is policy dialogue and study?

A subset of intellectual exchange, US-Japan policy dialogue can be seen as the transmission mechanism that relays ideas from the intellectual community to policymakers and among the policy communities of the two countries. It consists of substantive discussions and interactions among individuals with the ability to influence policymaking and it tends to be rooted, first and foremost, in the policy-oriented study of issues with bearing on bilateral relations. US-Japan policy dialogue and study includes a wide range of activities such as studies and task forces on US-Japan relations, Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, and exchanges for political leaders.

Although it often involves government officials, policy dialogue and study typically is facilitated by nongovernmental (or quasi-governmental) organizations that can operate with some degree of autonomy from the policy dictates of the day. While university experts and university research centers play important roles, most of the dialogue and study with the greatest direct influence on policymakers tends to be sponsored by independent think tanks and policy research and exchange institutes. These organizations' proximity to policymakers and their focus on policy outcomes tend to make it easier for them to maintain the types of regular interactions with government officials and political leaders that enable them to inform foreign policy decision making.

the state of US-Japan relations. Reischauer understood that US policymakers could not grasp the dynamics of political change in Japan when they only spoke with government officials and the Tokyo elite, and he argued that a concerted effort was needed to broaden dialogue between the two countries.

Over the next decade, a number of initiatives were launched by both sides to encourage greater intellectual exchange, including policy dialogue. The Japan Institute of International Affairs, which had been established in 1959 with government sponsorship, became a hub for policy discussions that involved government officials and other elements of the ruling elite. At the same time, however, the institutions promoting these exchanges, particularly American philanthropic foundations, became increasingly attuned to the importance of relying on nongovernmental actors that could operate with greater autonomy. The rationale for this was summed up in 1962 by a Ford Foundation official in an internal memo on US-Japan exchange when he noted, "Very often the effects of a given action or of a given visit will be entirely different depending on whether it was sponsored by the government or by a private group."

A watershed moment took place in 1967 when politicians, academic experts, business executives, and other societal leaders from both countries convened for the Shimoda Conference. For the first time, a range of influential Japanese and American leaders met in a nongovernmental setting to discuss the pressing challenges of the day. In a sense, this was also the first time that leaders from both countries could debate policy issues on an equal footing with one another. Even as Japanese universities were becoming increasingly polarized by the radical left, the conference augured the rise of a younger, more pragmatic breed of international relations specialists in Japan whose realist approaches better equipped them to engage in policy dialogue that could contribute in more concrete ways on bilateral issues.

In the 1970s, Japan gained international recognition as an emerging power, and a number of initiatives were launched to enable it to engage with its foreign partners in a more balanced and fruitful manner. In 1970, JCIE was established to facilitate interactions with the United States and other countries, especially among political leaders and other figures with a hand in policymaking. A purely nongovernmental initiative, JCIE differed markedly from that of other Japanese organizations active in policy dialogue, which had typically been created with the strong backing of, or directly by, the government. Two years later, in 1972, the Japan Foundation was established by the Japanese government to help promote the understanding of Japan overseas and support intercultural exchange. Another symbolic milestone was reached in 1973, when David Rockefeller and other prominent figures launched the Trilateral Commission, in order to engage Japan for the very first time in a private, multilateral dialogue as an equal partner with the advanced industrial democracies of the United States and Europe.

Then, in 1975, US efforts to build a stronger foundation for bilateral relations advanced with the establishment of the Japan-US Friendship Commission (JUSFC) with government funds from the reversion of Okinawa and the repayment of postwar assistance. Up until this point, US-Japan initiatives had been funded primarily by a handful of broadly gauged American foundations and internationally minded corporations from both countries, but this provided the first pool of permanent funding specifically dedicated to promoting US-Japan mutual understanding.

As Japan's economic growth continued apace through the 1970s, US think tanks began to show greater interest in studying its economic model. This came as American universities were establishing and expanding centers to study Japan, too, taking advantage of a new wave of charitable contributions from Keidanren and its member companies, as well as from the Japan Foundation. In 1980, the push to build up the nongovernmental underpinnings of US-Japan relations was given even greater impetus with the creation of the United States–Japan Foundation (USJF), the second funding organization dedicated specifically to US-Japan affairs and the only one to this day that operates completely independently from government involvement.

By the 1980s, Japan was perceived to be an economic superpower and expectations were growing for it to make greater contributions to the international community. At the same time, trade frictions were making the tone of US-Japan relations increasingly confrontational. These tensions only raised interest in bilateral policy dialogue and study, and it came to be expected that any American think tank with ambitions of being a major player in foreign policy would have a Japan program. Although many in the US policy community began to take increasingly confrontational and alarmist stances regarding Japan, numerous nongovernmental initiatives helped identify ways that both sides could overcome tensions in bilateral relations

Why is US-Japan policy dialogue and study important?

US-Japan policy dialogue plays a key role in building mutual understanding, ameliorating potential conflicts, identifying common challenges, and forging cooperation on issues relevant for both countries' policies. In doing this, it complements official relations in a number of ways.

For example, with domestic politics going through a fundamental transition in both countries, a sustained commitment by political leaders and the policy communities in both countries has become increasingly important in keeping bilateral relations on an even keel. Vibrant US-Japan policy dialogues and political exchanges play a central role in building support for the bilateral relationship.

Also, the most innovative ideas for bilateral partnership tend to emerge from outside of government circles, namely from nongovernmental dialogue. Without this fresh input on an ongoing basis, bilateral relations run the risk of becoming outmoded and stale.

Plus, nongovernmental policy dialogue serves an advance warning function, allowing leaders in both countries to get a better sense of one another's likely reactions to potential policy shifts. A declining level of dialogue makes government officials, no matter how knowledgeable and experienced they may be, more prone to misjudging the dynamics of their situations.

and work together more constructively. Equally important, the long-term investment of US and Japanese organizations in nongovernmental political exchanges that brought together key leaders from both sides paid dividends as former participants—including senior Congressional figures such as Thomas Foley, Lee Hamilton, and Bill Roth—worked to keep tensions under control in US political circles.

In Japan, the longstanding goal of catching up with the West economically had inspired a sense of national unity and had been used to justify government domination of the domestic debate about the broader public good. However, as it became clear that Japan had succeeded in its quest, government officials found it increasingly difficult to order and balance competing interests without greater input from civil society. A similar phenomenon emerged in the US-Japan alliance with the end of the Cold War. Opposition to the Soviet Union had animated the US-Japan alliance, but the sudden demise of the Communist bloc removed its overarching rationale, forcing Americans and Japanese to consider a broader set of more diverse aims to justify the continuation of the alliance.

In response to the shifts in bilateral relations and the global context, US-Japan policy dialogue and study gradually broadened its focus outward to explore the potential for US-Japan cooperation on regional and global challenges rather than primarily bilateral affairs. This trend gained momentum in 1991 with the establishment of a third major funder, the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP). At a time when Japanese funding was viewed with suspicion by many Americans as politically motivated influence buying, the fact that that CGP operated from an endowment created by the Diet rather than with annually appropriated funds subject to the Diet budgetary process gave policy experts at least some assurance that CGP funding could maintain a certain degree of independence from political influence.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, US-Japan policy dialogue increasingly aimed at finding ways in which the two countries could adapt to the growing complexities of the post-Cold War world. One major thrust of these dialogues involved initial attempts to redefine the role of the US-Japan relationship, and these efforts had considerable influence on the policy courses pursued by each country. For example, one initiative, the Armitage-Nye task force, helped lay out the agenda for subsequent attempts to strengthen bilateral security cooperation, and its recommendations were adopted wholesale by the incoming George W. Bush administration in 2001.

By the early 2000s, growing attention was also being paid to the shifting global and regional balances of power—globally from the West to newly dynamic powers such as the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), and regionally within Asia with the rise of China as well as India. These developments have given greater urgency to the post-Cold War effort to carve out a new role for the US-Japan relationship. Nonetheless, after peaking in the 1990s, US-Japan policy dialogue

has also felt the impact of Japan's two-decade-long economic slump and the shift of American attention away to other regions and issues. The result has been the erosion of the institutional infrastructure that supported US-Japan policy dialogue at precisely the point where it is needed to help both countries adjust to a radically changed environment replete with new risks and opportunities.