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TOWARD COMMUNITY BUILDING

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Remembering Tadashi Yamamoto: Intellectual Dialogue for a New Era

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ON APRIL 15 2012, Tadashi Yamamoto, the founder and president of the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), passed away. To me personally, he was a close friend of many decades and a cherished mentor. With a shared sense of purpose to confront the challenges facing Japan, East Asia, the Pacific, and beyond, we collaborated on countless projects and international meetings.

Yamamoto's Legacy

Yamamoto will be missed not just by those who knew him personally but also by Japan and the broader international community for his lifelong work strengthening international cooperation through intellectual dialogue in East Asia and around the world.

He established JCIE in 1970, a time when creating a wholly independent international affairs institute in Japan was considered revolutionary. He worked with a great sense of mission and the conviction that independent organizations are best positioned to facilitate international intellectual exchange and

strengthen mutual understanding between countries. Government-to-government relations can easily be affected by frequent personnel changes. But an international network of experts constructed over the long term and committed to exchange and intellectual dialogue is able to forge a deeper engagement and mutual understanding, approach challenges from a long-term perspective without the political constraints of government, and hold resolute against anti-foreign and protectionist trends.

Yamamoto also recognized that Japan, which grew to become the world's second largest economy, occupied a position of responsibility. His work ensured that Japan lived up to these responsibilities and played a role in international affairs in a world that had been largely centered around the United States and Europe. He played a central role in strengthening US-Japan bilateral relations and in tackling global problems, especially through the Trilateral Commission; international parliamentary exchange programs; wisemen's groups in East Asia, Europe, and North America;

and his work with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The Need for More Intellectual Dialogue

Looking toward the future, and at the way in which the global balance of power is already shifting, it is evident that international exchange and intellectual dialogue are more necessary than ever. Challenges such as optimizing the role of the United States in Asia's economic and security milieu, managing the rise of emerging nations such as China and India who seek a place at the global governance table, countering the proliferation of nuclear weapons, mitigating climate change, and establishing new financial architecture and strengthening the global trading system in a post-Lehman shock world all require international exchange and intellectual dialogue. The world must be better prepared to tackle the regional and global challenges we face in the most cooperative and effective manner possible, and this requires a strong civil society to complement the efforts of governments around the world.

The Need for New Financial Resources

But as regional and global challenges are intensifying, funding for international exchange and intellectual dialogue continues to decrease amid the global economic uncertainty. Governments around the world are cutting budgets and implementing austerity measures as they deal with the fallout of the global financial crisis and the eurozone crisis. In the private sector, too, donations are not as forthcoming as before, particularly in Japan. CEOs of large corporations are increasingly forced to present immediate results to board members and stockholders and are given little leeway for philanthropy or long-term investment in the friendly international relations that play a critical role in creating the environment that businesses need to be able to prosper in today's globalized world. In this climate, international exchange and intellectual dialogue is falsely accused of not being cost effective. Long-term initiatives to conduct intellectual dialogue among nations and their far-reaching impacts are neglected.

New financial resources will be needed to enable JCIE and other nongovernmental organizations to maintain Yamamoto's legacy of international exchange and intellectual dialogue. For the fundraising activities to be successful, they need to represent the spirit of international cooperation and innovativeness that characterized Yamamoto and be oriented toward contemporary regional and global challenges. In doing so, the participation of new companies and young leaders should be aggressively courted. This is also an ideal time to increase dialogue with emerging nations to serve the dual purpose of bringing in new resources while also invigorating the dialogue process with fresh ideas.

Japan as the connector

As the emerging nations walk the path to becoming great powers, Japan has an important role to play. It occupies a unique position as an Asia Pacific nation that can bridge East Asia and the West, bringing together developed and emerging nations alike. On the one hand, Japan has deep historical, cultural, and philosophical connections with the rest of Asia. And on the other hand, Japan is the only Asian nation that has become an advanced industrial democracy with an economic and social structure similar to that in the West. Moreover, Japan's post-war reconstruction and rapid economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s provide important lessons for the emerging economies. Japan must utilize this unique position and act as a great connector, facilitating international exchange and intellectual dialogue.

In particular, Japan should continue to strengthen its ties with other advanced democracies by reinventing the cross-sectoral dialogue and exchange efforts that seem to have lost steam in recent years. At the same time, new parliamentary exchange programs and bilateral wisemen's groups with emerging nations should be established. This format of international exchange and intellectual dialogue at the civil society level, which Yamamoto promoted tirelessly throughout his career, has proven effective and must be expanded beyond the economically developed

democracies. Emerging countries are equally connected to the regional and global challenges we face, and engaging them will help to improve their governance and institutional capacities and to involve them constructively in the international community.



While Yamamoto's death is a great loss, the legacy that he worked so tirelessly to bequeath to the world must be continued and strengthened. His legacy must lead

to an important step in funding new programs and dialogues that connect both East and West—and developed and emerging nations—as we confront ever intensifying regional and global challenges in an increasingly interconnected world.

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East Asia Insights

East Asia Insights is an occasional newsletter focusing on East Asia community building from the Japanese perspective.

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