21st Century Version of Fulbright Exchange Program (1/2)

TIME, March 29, 1993 Advertisement T. Utsumi was a Fulbrighter from 1954 to 1957.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSON-TO-PERSON COMMUNICATION: A JAPANESE FULBRIGHTER TALKS ABOUT THE FULBRIGHT PROGRAM

Ever since 1952, when 31 Japanese Fulbrighters sailed to the United States and 17 American Fulbrighters departed for Japan, the Fulbright Program has played an important role in strengthening person-to-person links between the two countries. It has also been effective in producing leaders: many of the nearly 6,000 Japanese Fulbrighters have since become prominent figures in the fields of science, education, business and government.

After 40 years of enabling young Japanese and U.S. scholars to further their studies and deepen their understanding of each other's cultures, the Fulbright Program can point to a long record of accomplishment. But large problems still confront the U.S.-Japan relationship; despite decades of effort, trade friction persists and cultural misunderstandings abound. How much can this exchange program, which was first proposed to the U.S. Congress by Senator J. William Fulbright in 1945, best contribute to solving the problems of 1993? How can it best cope with the challenges of a New Media age?

Dr. Heisuke Hironaka, a 1957 Fulbrighter and mathematician who has been awarded the prestigious Fields Prize and is currently chairman of the Japan Association for Mathematical Sciences (JAMS), recently spoke on these and other topics, including his personal experience with the Fulbright Program and his own efforts to bridge the cultural gap between the United States and Japan.

Q: How did you become involved with the Fulbright Program?

A: I was awarded a Fulbright travel grant in 1957. At that time there weren't many applicants. That was lucky for me because my English wasn't very good (laughs). I was much more interested in mathematics. Language was a kind of tool; if it served my purpose, it was good enough.

So I didn't do well in the examination, but I had a very strong recommendation from a mathematician at Harvard. Nowadays it would be much more difficult—the competition is much tougher in the language test.

Once in the United States, I used to dream at night about having to return to Japan. In the dream I would say "I don't want to go," afraid that if I left I would never have the chance to come back [to the United States]. When I told other Japanese in Boston about this dream, they said that they'd had the same one (laughs).

The idea of the Fulbright Program was to invite foreigners to the United States to get an education, see America and perhaps have the experience of working there. When those objectives were achieved, the Fulbright Scholar was expected to return to his or her own country, but I didn't! I stayed, got married, earned a Ph.D. and found a teaching job.

It was a very exciting place to be then and it still is today. The [U.S.] university system is strong and diversified. It's not a cafeteria, but a sort of United States of best restaurants that caters to all different tastes (laughs).

Q: Do you think that the Fulbright Program has had a real effect on U.S.-Japan relations?

A: I think so. It's not there to produce a large number of people who love the United States, but it has produced a large number of foreigners who know the United States better, whether they are critical or understanding or supportive. Certainly there are Fulbrighters who are critical of certain aspects of the United States, but that is far better than not knowing [the United States] at all.

You can see the scenery of the United States on television or read books or look at photographs or join a tour many, many times, but these experiences lack something: individual acquaintance and the feeling of being there. If you stay in Cambridge for one year and study with a certain objective,

Dr. Heisuke Hironaka

collaborating with someone who shares that objective, driving around and seeing the autumn colors and feeling the coldness of winter, it stays with you. I can still picture it. It's not an edited TV program about the four seasons of New England. It's very different.

Also, having personal contacts is very different from reading books about American culture. You can read a hundred books and become an expert on American sociology or social affairs, but that alone doesn't give you a personal feeling for the people.

That kind of person-to-person feeling is cultivated through working together with the same objective, with the same feeling of joint failure (laughs) or joint success.

I would even say that, practically speaking, if you can create enough person-to-person contact between the people of the two countries, you may have economic conflict and so on, but you won't have full-scale war. I think it would be impossible. If people can picture even one person from the other country that they like—and the number of people who can do that is big enough—I don't think that you can have war.

It doesn't mean that those people become *shinbeiha*—pro-American. But the person-to-person contact can be the basis of peace. Conflict is going to

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