



Asian American Leadership Delegation  
Final Report

Delegate Reflections



**Representative Sylvia Luke**  
**House of Representatives, State of Hawaii**

When I first found out that I will be part of the Asian American Leadership Delegation to Japan, I, of course, had a preconceived notion of how the trip would turn out. What I experienced and learned during my one week visit to Japan far exceeded my expectations.

I would like to thank Irene Hirano Inouye for allowing me to be part of this delegation. I would also like to thank the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for sponsoring this program. The trip would not have been meaningful without my colleagues, Raj Mukherji, Sharon Tomiko Santos, Hubert Vo, and Donald Wong, whom I now consider my life-long friends.

As I said throughout the trip, it was fitting that the delegation began its visit in Kyoto where we learned about the beauty and spirit of Japan. You cannot begin to understand Japan without first having an appreciation for its culture and history. In Kyoto, the delegation experienced the changing of the seasons at Arashiyama garden, and saw first hand the love and dedication that went into creating a Japanese garden. However, the most meaningful was the visit to the Urasenke center to take part in the traditional tea gathering. The grace and beauty of the ceremony and the methods and movements used provided serene and peaceful atmosphere. This was one example of a developed nation recognizing the importance of its traditional cultural roots.



As the delegation moved from Kyoto to Tokyo, we had an opportunity to speak with several policy makers and business leaders. Expectedly, some conversations barely scratched the surface and we were often met with polite support for the current policies of the Prime Minister. From the accolades given by numerous people to Prime Minister Abe and his policies, one had to wonder why the Prime Minister had to worry at all about his popularity. The Prime Minister's call for a snap election was likewise met with overwhelming support.



One could mistaken this unfettered support as blind devotion to its leader due to Japan's highly nationalistic sentiments. However, conversations with members of the Keizai Doyukai and business leaders such as Mr. Tadashi Yanai, the President of Uniqlo, illustrated a deep understanding of Japan's people being fully aware of the impending need for globalization of Japan's

economy and willingness to embrace it. They also recognized that changes put forth by the Prime Minister was slow but was coming. Prior to arriving in Japan, I believed that it will be difficult for a homogenous society to change according to the demands put forth by Prime Minister Abe due to fear of losing its identity or culture. To that end, I too came to Japan with my own set of prejudices. However, what I found in Japan was an acceptance of diversity and willingness to adapt to changes such as transformation in the workforce, despite generations of gender divide. Now I understand that Japan will adapt to those changes because of its nationalistic sentiments not in spite of it. Because of its nationalistic positions, Japan will make sacrifices, such as adhering to new tax policies, and embrace the challenges put forth by its visionary leader for the good of the nation.

At the same time, I hope that the delegation was able to impress upon the people of Japan that diversification does not lead to dilution of culture or identity. Japanese Americans not only live their culture in the United States, they also share their culture with non-Japanese Americans as well, including a Korean American person like myself.

For all of the above reasons, I left Japan feeling more enlightened as well.



## Assemblyman Raj Mukherji General Assembly, State of New Jersey

I thought I understood the importance of the U.S.-Japan relationship, and more specifically bilateral economic ties between the world's third largest GDP and my home state of New Jersey, prior to participating in AALD. In actuality, I had no idea. I returned far better informed about the breadth and magnitude of the relationship and far better equipped to be a champion for what has the potential to be a defining economic, cultural, and security partnership of the 21st century – and by extension, better equipped to contribute to the goals of world peace

lauded by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

Witnessing Japanese innovation firsthand gave me a deeper appreciation for it: from riding the Shinkansen to an intimate meeting with the Chairman of JR Central who is seeking to give Americans in Texas and the NYC-DC Northeast Corridor the opportunity to enjoy the bullet train's advantages; from automated, heated toilet seats in our accommodations to electronic umbrella covers in commercial office buildings; from watching manufacturing processes in a clothing factory to seeing how Mitsubishi Real Estate Services (the parent company of The Rockefeller Group, a major redeveloper in my legislative district) creatively preserved historic structures in a dense urban downtown without sacrificing air space.



The seamlessness with which technology and innovation have been woven into the fabric of Japanese society has not, however, supplanted the richness of its history, ancient traditions, and culture. The importance of politeness, spirit of service and community, respect for other people, and punctuality remain adhered by every Japanese citizen we came across, whether it was a hotel bellman, UNIQLO founder Tadashi Yanai (Japan's richest man), captains of industry at our meetings with Keidanren and Keizai Doyukai, the Mayor of Kyoto, Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly leadership, Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, or someone simply serving us tea.

The trip was especially meaningful under the auspices of the NCSL, as traveling with my Asian American colleagues in other state legislatures gave us the opportunity to discuss shared interests and trade ideas in policy spheres spanning economic development to transportation to education. All five of our home states will collectively benefit when we delegates bring home these invaluable shared insights.



**Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos**  
**House of Representatives, Washington State**

The inaugural visit of Asian American elected officials to Japan was invaluable to me as an American state lawmaker and inspiring to me as a person of color with Asian heritage. Though I participated in the 2006 Japanese American Leaders Delegation (JALD), this Asian American Leaders Delegation (AALD) program holds greater relevance and meaning for me as a legislator. In particular, our meetings with Japanese elected officials and business leaders provided concrete ideas for future action, either for implementation in our native jurisdictions or for furthering our international collaborations.

State and local elected officials serve a different role from Members of Congress in forming and maintaining multi-lateral relations. To the benefit of both the United States and Japan, AALD taps into a vast network of state and local elected leaders of color, an underutilized resource with the ability to directly affect U. S. – Japan relations on multiple levels. Asian Pacific American, African American, Latino/Hispanic, and Alaska Native/American Indian policymakers can together contribute powerfully to a Japanese understanding of unity in diversity, both in concept and in practice, as well as to their grasp of the real and changing face of America.



This vision inspires me. I think its potential to serve the goals of the U.S.-Japan Council and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation is undeniable. The AALD program inherently recognizes the relevant role of state and local policymakers in promoting strong U.S. – Japan relations and, as an Asian American elected official, I look forward to deepening my involvement with this initiative.





**Representative Hubert Vo**  
**House of Representatives, State of Texas**

**First impressions:**

When I arrived in Japan, I was amazed by how polite and respectful people were, even the bus drivers and luggage handlers. They bow when the bus comes and when the bus leaves, they bow again. It seems like I have been away from my birth country for so long, I forgot about that custom. All of the hotel staff were also very friendly and welcoming to Japan. The next day at the train station, the crowd and the cleanliness of the streets were impressive. I saw many workers dressed in suits, from taxi drivers all the way to street workers and vendors.

I had the pleasure of visiting the garden designed by an 11th generation garden master. His work is a piece of art. We also had the opportunity to learn about Japanese tea ceremony from Urasenke Foundation, which is very different and something I enjoyed learning.

**Reflections:**

I think the culture is so beautiful. They still preserve the beauty of the heritage and tradition of Japan. I saw people, even children, walking the street wearing kimonos, and everyone was very polite. I hardly saw any graffiti or homeless people. Throughout Japan, I noticed the neatness and cleanliness of every city. I was also very impressed by the low crime rates. I am amazed that police don't carry guns, and only have a baton as a weapon. Even the Japanese police who guard the US Embassy on the outside perimeter don't have a gun on them.



I learned that Japan is the 3rd largest economy in the world, but it's facing some challenges regarding its shrinking workforce. Families are only producing one infant per family due to high cost of living and the population aging. Government incentives would go a long way to alleviate the financial burden on new and growing families. Subsidized nurseries and daycare would also be highly beneficial for working families. Japan also faces competition with other Asian countries in terms of cheap labor.

Japan has the option to modify Article IX of their constitution to equip the military defense force, but that's not the will of the people today. They don't want to be at war if they don't have to. In terms of national security, the US is still viewed as big brother.

In commerce, I can see the strong relationship between the US and Japan. Companies are relocating from Japan to America and vice versa, but I don't see much emphasis on small businesses, only large corporations. In contrast 80% of the US economy is from the small businesses. I think that Japan should create opportunities for small businesses to succeed.

In summary, I think the US-Japan relationship is as strong as ever in so many different aspects. For the US and Japan to survive with worldwide competition, they need to have a strong plan, new

ideas, and research. The universal challenge among both countries is competing with the cheap labor costs from other countries.

For future delegations going to Japan, I would have liked to gain a better understanding of Japan's policy for foreign businesses interested in moving into Japan and incentives, tax systems, labor costs, real estate cost, etc. It would be nice to meet more chamber members of small businesses instead of only bigger corporations. How are small businesses composed, and what do they do? If foreign investors want to come to Japan, what kind of businesses can survive? Is there information to give guidance for people interested in crossing the world to come to Japan or come to the US and see if they can have any opportunity to do business there--both large business and small business? (Real estate, transportation costs, etc.)



**Representative Donald H. Wong**  
**House of Representatives, Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

My expectations of this trip were more than I could have imagined. The people of Japan pride themselves on being punctual, respectful, kind, and courteous. We were treated with the utmost respect everywhere we went. The beauty of the people goes hand in hand with the beauty of the country.

When we first arrived in Kyoto, I immediately began to get the feel for the Japanese culture. A visit to the Japanese gardens of Arashiyama showed us just how important it is to the people of Japan to keep culture and traditions going. I especially enjoyed my time at the teahouse, where we had the pleasure of experiencing a formal tea ceremony. We also had the pleasure of meeting the owner of the Pagong screen printing company that still does everything by hand.

It was amazing to see how in Japan, like back home in Boston, they were able to preserve the older historic buildings as they built the new modern buildings in the spaces around them without destroying the architecture and designs. It is a country filled with technology, industry, and history.

As I reflect on our trip to Japan I see such great potential in the future of U.S.-Japan relations. The time I spent with my colleagues of the AALD was about being a part of a team with diverse personal, intellectual, and professional backgrounds all having the common goal of strengthening US Japan friendships.



I am so grateful to have been given this opportunity to have gone on this trip and given the pleasure to have made so many new friends and business contacts. With all I have experienced, I hope to continue to share these ideas and policies in the future.