

Why Japan Matters

Celebrating Ten Years of Elgin Heinz Outstanding Teacher Awards

Editor: *The Elgin Heinz Outstanding Teacher award, named for the late Mr. Heinz, who was a pioneer in Asian studies education, is sponsored by the United States-Japan Foundation. Winners receive this award based upon their national leadership in teaching about Japan. The objectives of this print and online special segment are 1) To stimulate readers to reflect upon why the study of Japan is critical for global understanding, 2) Provide teachers and professors who are seeking new ways to teach about Japan with pedagogical ideas and resources, and—on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the award in 2012, 3) Honor the master teachers who have been named Elgin Heinz winners. Each past Elgin Heinz winner in the two award categories, humanities and Japanese language, was asked to contribute a short essay titled “Why Japan Matters” and to compose an abstract of his or her favorite commercial curricular materials or send along a self-created teaching idea. Space limitations in the print version make it impossible for us to publish all of the nineteen essays we received, but what follows are representative samples of the collection. The excellent additional commentaries are available online at http://www.asian-studies.org/EAA/16-2_EHWinners.html. The print special segment also includes short abstracts of outstanding curriculum materials about Japan, selected by Elgin Heinz winners.*



Japan Matters: Promoting World Peace through Education, Science, and International Partnerships

By Patience Berkman

First winner, Humanities Category, 2002

Headlines in 2011 have trumpeted China bypassing Japan as the second-largest economy in the world. Japan's move to number three was not surprising, nor should it be alarming. What is remarkable is that Japan, with limited resources, smaller than the state of California, maintained a position of economic dominance for so long. After the devastating earthquake and tsunami, Japan, far from being in free-fall, continues to be a committed and adept global player in many respects. There are numerous reasons why Japan still matters on the world stage. Americans and Japanese have special global ties, given our mutual commitment to democracy and human rights. What follows in this essay constitute only a few examples of why Japan matters.

GENEROUS WORLD CITIZEN: Committed to international peace, Japan has been involved in reconstruction in countries devastated by manmade or natural disasters. Active in Cambodia since 1968, Japan has provided assistance in health, education, technology, and agriculture to that country and engaged in similar foreign aid efforts in the Balkans, the Sudan, and the Middle East, as well as other regions. Japan has been a generous international partner in the rebuilding of Iraq, working to restore electrical, water, and sanitation infrastructure, and provided aid more recently in Afghanistan. In December 2010, Japan committed to the “1000 Classrooms Project,” collaborating with UNICEF to construct fifty-eight schools in and around Kabul. Japan is the second-largest contributor to the United Nations budget, underscoring its responsible global stance.

ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE: Japan may have slipped to number three, but it remains an important global economy. China is now Japan's main trading partner and is increasingly important as a consumer of electronics and automobiles,

bolstering the fortunes of Sony, Honda, and Toyota. Both the US and Japan are heavily invested in each other's economies, and the US supplies the large majority of Japan's corn and wheat imports. Despite the recent disasters, Japan will be important for both the American and world economies for a long time.

INNOVATOR IN MEDICAL SCIENCE: Building on traditions that date back to the early nineteenth century, Japan is now a world leader in global health and medical technology. Hanaoka Seishū, a Japanese surgeon of the Edo period, was the first to use general anesthesia; combining Dutch and Japanese surgical techniques, he operated on breast cancer in 1804. In recent years, the Japanese government has assisted in raising awareness of three killers at G8 summits, facilitating the creation of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Japan committed approximately US \$21.7 billion to fight these diseases in 150 countries. Its scientists have achieved dramatic advances in next-generation robotics. Manufacturers have built on brilliant research, producing an intelligent wheelchair; homecare and life support robots; and even a furry pet seal robot that coos, bringing comfort to patients with dementia.

WORLD LEADER IN GREEN TECHNOLOGIES: In 1997, Japan initiated its first Eco-Town project, based on the premise “no emissions.” The town developed techniques for treating Persistent Organic Pollutants (POP's), hardy organisms spread globally through long-range transport. The government established an Eco-Model Cities program in 2008, setting aggressive goals that target recycling and sustainability strategies in thirteen diverse cities and towns. Japanese diplomats have been in conversation with officials in Kosovo about POP's and solid waste management and have plans to work with the Indian government to construct several green cities in the proposed Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor.

Japan's contributions to the US and the world will matter for a long, long time. ■

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