



**PART III:  
THE JAPAN HOUSE  
YEARS**

## Reorganization and Expansion: 1967-73

The report of the Program Study Committee was ready by September and was presented on October 30, 1967, to the Board, which approved the recommendations. These covered cultural affairs, educational programs, public affairs, other activities, and space, staffing, and finances. The report gave special attention to mounting pressure for the Society to be more active in the public affairs and economic fields and to exert more vigorous national leadership.

It also recommended de-emphasizing time-consuming retail activities and concentrating instead on playing an innovative and creative role in the cultural area by identifying the artists and creative work that should be brought to the attention of American audiences. The exhibition space of the new Japan House should be utilized for loan exhibitions of high quality, but not of a type to compete with those of existing museums and commercial galleries. The traveling exhibitions, a retail service, might best be turned over to other organizations. The report further recommended that the Performing Arts Program should be greatly expanded. The feeling that the Society should not as a matter of policy accept money from the Japanese government as a regular part of its program budget should be stated policy. Cultural fellowships should be expanded, as should the Society's role in promoting the dissemination of Japanese literature.

On educational activities, the report recommended a gradual withdrawal from the distribution of materials produced by other organizations, and an emphasis instead on leadership in the improvement of school texts and other educational materials dealing with Japan and in the development of educational films. The Society should develop a national speakers' clearinghouse, but leave detailed arrangements to the host organizations. The in-service teacher training seminars might be expanded to educational systems across the nation, and the visitor sponsorship and hospitality programs should be strengthened so that wider national use could be made of visiting Japanese leaders and scholars for

speaking engagements and intellectual exchanges.

In public affairs, the report recommended that the Society encourage a dialogue and promote exchanges between Japan and the United States to improve public understanding of economic and political issues, particularly at the private leadership level. Program techniques might include co-sponsored programs, lectures, and panels, as well as small meetings and conferences. A survey might be made of top Japanese business leaders in New York to determine what interests were not already being met by other organizations. The seminars called "Doing Business in Japan" for young American executives should be continued, and similar ones set up for young Japanese executives coming to the United States.

Regarding space, staff, and budget, the report recommended that the Society retain full control over Japan House facilities, making them available to other organizations on a "guest" basis. To accommodate the expanded program and give it the best chance of being realized in a coherent way, the budget should be projected over a five-year period, 1968-72, and cover staffing requirements, salary costs, programs, and possible sources of financing. This should be done as soon as possible and then coordinated with the fundraising campaign.

The recommendations of the Program Study Committee of 1967, together with the decisions of Rockefeller and Overton to leave their positions and the commitment to build Japan House, constituted a sea change in the organization and program of Japan Society. From time to time over its sixty years of existence, it had revised its programs and organization, but no change had been so comprehensive as this one. The Society was establishing a permanent home, it was expanding its program significantly, it was being staffed with professionals, and it was growing into a New York institution, but one with a wide role throughout the nation as a catalyst and clearinghouse for a broad range of activities involving cultural and intellectual relations between Japan and the United States. Clearly, these were major breaks with the past.

While the new space was being planned and constructed, the leadership of the Society underwent

further transition. In June 1969, Rockefeller announced that he wished to resign as president, although he would remain active as chairman of the Board. Isaac Shapiro, who had been secretary since 1963, had assumed additional responsibilities after James Stewart resigned as executive director at the end of 1968. In July 1969, Shapiro worked out an arrangement with his firm to serve as an unpaid chief executive of the Society beginning in September for a maximum period of one year. He was formally appointed executive vice president as of September 1, and Daniel J. Meloy, the staff member who had been attending to day-to-day operations, was named deputy director. Squire N. Bozorth took over from Shapiro as secretary. It was thus Shapiro who in November 1969, under the direction of the Executive Committee, negotiated the final agreement with Turner Construction Company for the building of Japan House and signed the contract on behalf of the Society.

At a Board meeting in June 1970, Rockefeller officially announced his resignation as president after eighteen years of devoted and distinguished service. On his recommendation, Shapiro was elected the new president of the Society. He would serve as an unpaid volunteer, as Rockefeller had. The new executive director was to be a salaried staff person who would run the Society under Shapiro's direction, but no one had as yet been found for the position. The search committee was formally dissolved, and the quest was handed over to the new president.

In January 1970, Rockefeller had proposed a revision of the bylaws to provide for rotation in Board membership and a mandatory retirement age of seventy for officers and directors. At the annual meeting in October, the new slate of officers was elected by the Board on these terms. The Society by then also had a new executive director. He was Rodney E. Armstrong, a Japan specialist on leave from the State Department for up to four years. The officers for 1970–71 were Rockefeller, chairman of the Board; James Voss, vice chairman; Shapiro, president; Charles R. Stevens, secretary; and Tristan E. Beplat, treasurer. They and the other members of the Board, who were to remain the leadership group of the

Society until 1974, oversaw the building of Japan House, the Society's transfer to its new quarters, and the great expansion of activities that marked these years.

The decade of the 1960s had been a period of rapid development of both Japan and Japanese-American relations. Japan's gross national product passed the \$200 billion mark in 1970. A new sense of self-confidence and pride began to sweep the nation, and it finally recovered from the self-doubts of the wartime catastrophe. Political tensions began to relax, soothing frictions with the United States and encouraging Japan to seek a more positive role in helping to create a peaceful and prosperous world community.

During Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda's visit to Washington in June 1961, he and President John F. Kennedy had agreed to establish the United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON). This program, originally operated on the American side directly by the State Department, was set up as a high-level intergovernmental group that included private-sector leaders in business, the media, the arts, and academia to promote deeper cultural and intellectual ties between the two nations. In April 1968, Japan Society agreed to act as the secretariat to the American panel of CULCON, and it continued to serve in this capacity until 1981, when it became the American Subcommittee Program Office.

The establishment of CULCON was a significant step forward, but it was long overdue. Japanese-American relations had deepened during the previous decade and a half, but Japanese and American images of each other lagged far behind. Moreover, there was a profound imbalance between American and Japanese interest in each other. As was frequently remarked, it was as if Japanese and Americans were looking at each other through opposite ends of a telescope, the one appearing grossly magnified and the other absurdly small; nor were the images in good focus.

There remained much for Japan Society, CULCON, and other organizations and individuals to do to correct the images on both sides and bring them into better perspective. The task, however, was made more difficult in the second half of the 1960s by issues such as the sudden broadening of the

American involvement in Vietnam, the Japanese desire to regain sovereignty over Okinawa, and another renewal of the Security Treaty. These were hardly solved before Tokyo had to digest the bombshell of President Richard Nixon's overture to Beijing in early 1972. This move, followed by tough American trade demands, made the Japanese wonder if the United States had decided to "dump" them in favor of a closer relationship with China. Japan had long wanted the United States to normalize its relations with China, and the American rapprochement permitted Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka to recognize Peking in place of Taiwan in September 1972.

Despite these problems of the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, Japanese-American relations remained essentially sound, and Japan Society was able to expand its activities as planned. The Society participated with the Johnson Foundation in the successful Wingspread conference, *After Okinawa: Japan and the United States in the 1970s*, held on December 2, 1969, in Racine, Wisconsin. Conference proceedings were later published by the Society and made available to the membership. A full-day briefing for businessmen was held in Washington at the Department of Commerce and Department of State in May 1970. Public affairs and corporate services were becoming major new directions for the Society, and in late 1970, in recognition of the growing importance of these areas, the Executive Committee approved the hiring of a full-time program director for them.

The program budget for 1968-69 was projected at about \$250,000. There was a general tripartite division of the Society's programs into public and corporate affairs, education, and cultural activities. Among the items in the new Corporate and Public Affairs Program were monthly luncheons for corporate members addressed by distinguished experts, seminars on Japan in Southeast Asia for Japan Society and Asia Society members, and a proposal that the Society sponsor a study on long-term trends in Japanese-American trade. There were also off-the-record discussion meetings with Japanese and American government officials.

Cultural programs, of course, were not affected by delicate political and economic problems. In



Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger addresses guests at the Society's Annual Dinner in 1975. Photo © Thomas Haar.

March 1969, the Society began preparations for a major tour sponsored by the Japanese government of a kabuki troupe that was to bring the classic Japanese theater to New York in the fall. A kabuki print exhibit, staged with the Asia Society and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, ran at the same time, and the twelfth program in the "Japan Society Presents" TV series was called "The Art of Kabuki" and featured the touring troupe.

Another major cultural event in 1969 was the Society's presentation, with partial funding from Union Carbide, of the Smithsonian's exhibition *The Japan Expedition 1852-55 of Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry*, which drew more than 20,000 visitors during its five-week run at the Union Carbide Building on Park Avenue. The Japanese Film Festival, which opened on October 20, 1969, at the Museum of Modern Art with Akira Kurosawa's first film, *Sugata Sanshiro*, made in 1943, was another important event of particular interest to film buffs. Its success strengthened the Society's decision to make films a major part of the program.

In June 1971, the Annual Dinners were resumed with Secretary of State William P. Rogers as the main speaker. The subsequent speakers at these elegant and well-attended functions were all major

public figures, including Peter G. Peterson, the secretary of commerce in 1972; Foreign Minister and later Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira in 1974; Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1975; Thomas A. Murphy, chairman of General Motors, in 1976; Zbigniew Brzezinski, the assistant to the president for National Security Affairs, in 1978; former Foreign Minister Kiichi Miyazawa in 1979; and Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki in 1981.

## **The Building of Japan House: 1967-73**

The years following the decision to build Japan House were a time of unprecedented growth and reorganization for Japan Society, but the planning, construction, and transfer to the House itself were the central focus during this period. Including the land donated by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, the total cost of the House was \$4.75 million. The entire amount was raised by the time the building was opened due to the efforts of James Voss and other members of the Building Fund Committee. Money was sought on both sides of the Pacific. The Japanese contributed close to a third, largely under the aegis of the powerful Federation of Economic Organizations (Keidanren) and the Japanese government. Another third came from American sources, and the cost of the land made up the remaining third. A large plaque in the lobby just outside the auditorium pays tribute to the various major contributors, both American and Japanese.

When Japan House opened to the public in September 1971, it was an overnight success, but like most overnight successes, this was the result of much hard work. By late 1967, Junzo Yoshimura and George Shimamoto of Gruzen & Partners of New York had drawn up what was to be, with a few interior modifications, the final design for the Turner Construction Company to implement.

A Building Committee, chaired at first by Charles F. Scott of Mobil East and then by Gordon Braislin of the Dime Savings Bank, had been set up within the Society to oversee the work. James Voss continued to head the Building Fund Committee,



Architect Junzo Yoshimura with one of his drawings for Japan House.

which in 1968 was faced with collecting not the \$1.5 million first estimated in 1965, but a sum somewhere between \$3 and \$4 million. The building committee was also beginning to investigate the cost of maintaining Japan House, for which separate financial provision had to be made.

At the end of July 1969, the site was ready to be cleared. Two pairs of hands “wielded the spade” at the ground-breaking ceremony, Society president John D. Rockefeller 3rd and Foreign Minister Kiichi Aichi of Japan. Their joint action symbolized the importance of Japan Society as a “Pacific bridge” between the two nations.

The building was completed without long delays and at a cost only a little over budget. It also proved to be exactly what everyone wished it would be. This was due to the fine work of the Building Committee under Gordon Braislin, and especially to the dedication of the deputy director of the Society, Daniel J. Meloy, who oversaw every detail of the construction, from the steel beams to the doorknobs and the colors of the auditorium curtain, specially



ABOVE: Architectural drawing of Japan House, the new home of Japan Society.

LEFT: Foreign Minister Kiichi Aichi of Japan and John D. Rockefeller 3rd, president of Japan Society, break ground for the construction of Japan House in 1969. Photo © Laura Beaujon.



Japan House in the early years. TOP: Lobby, pool, and bamboo garden, with the library at the rear. Photo © Thomas Haar. MIDDLE: The outdoor garden, on a snowy day. Photo © Thomas Haar. BOTTOM: Night shot of the building exterior. Photo © Laura Beaujon.





Cover of the program for the September 13, 1971, opening of Japan House.



Visitors waiting to get into Japan House shortly after the building opened to the public. Photo © Thomas Haar.

woven in Japan. Construction took sixteen months from the ground-breaking. The staff moved into the new building in April 1971, and the House was officially opened to the public in a week-long celebration beginning September 13, 1971.

Japan House and its facilities were warmly received by the press and public. It was the first building in New York of contemporary Japanese architecture, although Junzo Yoshimura had previously designed some interiors: at Asia House, at the Motel on the Mountain in Suffern, New York, and for a temporary exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. The chief appeal of the building lay in its distinctively Japanese feeling, but this effect, remarkably, had been accomplished almost entirely with American materials.

Standing four stories high, the House conveyed a sleek, elegant image of modern Japan, from its black-painted façade with shapes and design elements of traditional Japanese architecture to its interior rooms, which opened onto gardens in typical Japanese style. Despite this emphasis on the traditional, everything was completely contemporary and functional. The first two floors and the lower level auditorium provided the public spaces housing the lobby, meeting rooms, and gallery. The staff offices and library were on the third and fourth floors. The library was originally on the first floor, but it was soon moved to the fourth floor to provide additional public space for meetings and receptions.

The entry to the building offered a serene expanse of polished black slate around a shallow pool filled with bamboo, over which rose the staircase to the second floor. So still was the water that a small alteration—the addition of a railing—soon became necessary so that visitors did not go squishing around the building in wet shoes after mistaking the pool for a shinier part of the floor. Another small problem was the difficulty in fireproofing the Japanese-style wooden grilles of the first-floor ceiling. The grilles were made of *hinoki* so that the aroma of Japanese cypress would subtly evoke Japan to anyone entering the building. But when the regulations of the New York City Fire Department had been complied with, the fragrance was gone.

These, however, were minor adjustments in a building that otherwise is a triumphant blend of traditional Japanese esthetic concepts and modern technology. It fulfilled everyone's hopes and was widely praised. It certainly met all the goals Junzo Yoshimura had set for himself:



Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Hitachi and Japan Society chairman John D. Rockefeller 3rd view the first Japan Society Gallery exhibition *Rimpa: Masterworks of the Japanese Decorative School* (September 18–November 14, 1971). Photo © Thomas Haar.

People the world over used to build their houses with local and traditional materials. Today, however, contemporary buildings all over the world use the same basic materials—concrete, steel and glass—yet different characters and nationalities can still be perceived among them.

In designing Japan House I have tried to express in contemporary architecture the spirit of Japan. . . . In Japan a house and a garden together make a sort of microcosm, and we Japanese feel a deep need. . . to be in close touch with nature. . . . Thus I have tried to arrange the rooms of Japan House around its gardens so that the interior spaces and gardens create a harmonious whole. . . . If the visitor to Japan House senses here the spirit of Japan, I shall be rewarded.

Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Hitachi, the Emperor's second son, attended the opening ceremony for Japan House on September 13, 1971. The Japanese Ambassador to the United States, Nobuhiko Ushiba, addressed the members of the Society, and the president of Keidanren, Kogoro Uemura, spoke to the corporate members at a luncheon. At another special luncheon the speaker was Jun Eto, eminent Japanese literary and social critic. The new Japan House Gallery opened with an exhibition of objects in the seventeenth-century dec-

orative style known as Rimpa, which attracted 22,000 visitors and much favorable comment in the press. The Tokyo String Quartet performed in the new auditorium, which was also the setting for a showing of *Dodeskaden*, Akira Kurosawa's most recent film.

With Japan House now officially open, the Society's staff was ready with a dazzling year of events for members and the public, described in the annual report as the "most ambitious program of projects and events in the Society's history." The annual budget was now over \$600,000, and the staff had expanded correspondingly. The program was divided into corporate services, performing arts, visual arts, general membership programs, public affairs, visitor services, and cooperation with related organizations. A well-equipped library under Tomie Mochizuki served visitors and responded to telephone inquiries. In addition, the *Japan Society Newsletter*, featuring articles on the arts, history, economy, society, and culture of Japan, was being distributed each month not only to members, but also to libraries and educational institutions all over the United States. Showings of classic Japanese films in the auditorium drew many persons interested in good films but not necessarily knowledgeable

about Japan. The performing arts events did the same for those whose interest was music, dance, or drama. Exquisitely mounted exhibitions in the Gallery drew thousands of others. Japan Society began to become one of New York's major cultural institutions, and its offerings were regularly reviewed in the local press and in national news magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*.

By Japan House's second year, the Society's projected budget was nearing \$1 million. The number of events within the various program areas had grown so large that the calendar in the annual report ran to nearly ten pages. There were, for example, eighteen corporate luncheons within a ten-month period, two separate series of five meetings each on "Doing Business with Japan and the United States," three series of eight films each, seven receptions, eleven lectures and demonstrations, a new series of public affairs dinners, lectures, and seminars, and two major exhibitions.

In addition, during 1972 the Society began to expand on the national scene. It received a grant from the State Department that year to help increase its services as CULCON secretariat and to develop and carry out new programs, such as the visit of seventeen American broadcasting executives to Japan for a joint conference and the First United States-Japan Television Program Festival, held at the Society and in Washington in March 1973. There was also some discussion at Executive Committee and Board meetings on how the Society might best proceed to become a truly national organization and on the possibility of developing a stronger affiliation with some of the other Japan societies across the country.

The Society sought grants from private foundations to enable it to enlarge its program to promote understanding between Japan and America. One such proposal was presented in March 1973 to the Sumitomo Group of companies. As a result, the Society received an extraordinary grant of \$1 million from Sumitomo for a series of studies on Japanese-American relations and policy questions, to be carried out by various institutions, administered by the Society, and known as the Sumitomo Fund for Policy Research Studies.

## Continued Growth: 1974-82

Economic problems during the 1970s began to affect the U.S.-Japan relationship, as Japan struggled with skyrocketing oil prices and the U.S.'s trade deficit with Japan steadily climbed into the billions of dollars. Robert S. Ingersoll, later chairman of the board of the Society, had placed great emphasis on



Novelist and University of Chicago professor Saul Bellow addresses a Society audience on his experiences in Japan as an Intellectual Interchange Fellow in 1973. Photo © Thomas Haar.



The seventh U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON), held in Tokyo in June 1973. Photo © Thomas Haar.

Japanese-American economic relations during his tenure as ambassador in Tokyo in 1972-73 and his subsequent service as Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and then as Deputy Secretary of State in Washington. His successor as ambassador, James D. Hodgson, who was also active in the work of the Society, showed an equally keen concern for economic matters while at the embassy in Tokyo from 1974 to 1977.

During President Jimmy Carter's visit to Tokyo in 1979, he and Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira set up a body unofficially known as the Wise Men's Group. This was a panel of experts, including Ingersoll and former Ambassador Ushiba as co-chairmen, with the function of monitoring the complex problems involved in Japanese-American trade. Despite these governmental efforts, however, friction over trade issues mounted, though the total volume of economic contacts between the two countries also continued to grow at a correspondingly rapid rate, and American awareness of Japan and interest in it grew even more rapidly.

While these great changes were taking place in Japanese-American relations, the Society continued on its chosen course, rising to meet new challenges and opportunities. By early 1974, it was again undergoing one of its periodic transitions in organization. Rodney Armstrong had resigned as executive director in December 1973, and in early 1974, the search committee asked David MacEachron, vice president of the Council on Foreign Relations, to become the Society's executive director. From the start, his skills and experience were invaluable, and they continued to be a happy match for the needs and goals of the Society.

The other officers for 1974-75 were John D. Rockefeller 3rd, chairman of the Board; Isaac Shapiro, president; Edgar Young, an associate of Rockefeller, vice president; and Tristan Beplat, treasurer. All had given long service to the Society. They remained its officers until 1977, when Shapiro, transferred to Japan by his firm, resigned as president and was succeeded by Andrew N. Overby, a director of the First Boston Corporation, who had had a long and distinguished career in international finance. That year too, Beplat was succeeded as treasurer

by Jackson N. Huddleston of the Chemical Bank and later American Express. Beplat retired from the Board to become an honorary director, and Lily Auchincloss, an active Society supporter, became a vice president along with Young.

The mid-1970s also witnessed considerable growth in the staff. In late 1970, it had numbered about fifteen persons; by 1976-77, it had doubled to nearly thirty; and in 1980, it was nearly forty. Many of these were specialists in their own fields, for Society activities were now at a level that required much staff initiative and specialized skills. There was a staff director for each of the major program areas (the Japan House Gallery, Performing Arts, Public Affairs, Membership, Films, and Publications); a financial and administrative staff; a library staff; and a building staff.

An expanded staff and increased programs naturally required more funds, and in 1974 the Board made plans for a capital fund drive, which was successfully completed by the beginning of 1978. The amount of time the executive director, finance officers, and directors spent on the budget and the care with which they solved the problems of financial management were well rewarded. Minor deficits in operating the new House were corrected by the Society's taking over its maintenance, and finances by the autumn of 1975 were in satisfactory shape. The Society's annual budget in the mid- and late 1970s grew from \$1 million to \$2 million and then to \$3 million. It was able to make these leaps comfortably and securely, to take on new programs and expand old ones, almost without missing a beat.

In 1974, the Board also felt the time had come for another systematic program review. The review committee, headed by John Hall of Yale, was made up of Board members and expert consultants. The results of the committee's work were an endorsement of the directions in which the Society was already moving: increasing both corporate and individual members by 50 to 100 percent; improving and expanding programs in the public affairs area (social, political, and economic); expansion of the publications program; development of the film program; increasing the effectiveness of the Gallery program

by having its important exhibitions shown elsewhere; and expansion of the Society's national outreach through its own programs and collaboration with organizations which had similar interests and goals.

The highlight of 1975 was the visit of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan to Japan House. The Emperor, in the fall of 1971, had become the first reigning emperor to leave Japan when the aircraft carrying him and the Empress on a visit to Europe touched down on American soil at Anchorage, Alaska, on September 26. President Richard Nixon was there to greet them, but a formal visit to the United States was considered too delicate a matter at that time. In 1975, however, Japanese-American relations were so strong and stable that a visit offered no problems.

On September 30, the Imperial couple left Tokyo for a fifteen-day visit to the United States. After two days in Williamsburg, Virginia, and three in Washington, they came to New York. On October 6, 1975, a proud group of Society officers and members welcomed them to a Japan House polished to its elegant best in their honor. Following the Society reception, the Emperor, a marine biologist, visited the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts. The couple then toured Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and Honolulu before returning to Japan.

To coincide with the Imperial visit, the Gallery mounted *Art Treasures from the Imperial Collections*, a stunning exhibition of objects, many of which had never before been displayed even in Japan. The exhibition was accompanied by a lavish catalogue produced by the Imperial Household Agency. It drew 27,000 visitors in seventeen days, a Society record, and was brought to the attention of millions of Americans through newspaper, magazine, and TV coverage by major American and Japanese publications and networks. The exhibition was also a signal triumph, for the Japanese government chose Japan House Gallery for its showing, and the Imperial Household Agency, the Agency for Cultural Affairs, and the Foreign Ministry of Japan—all formidable bureaucracies—had jurisdiction over the arrangements.

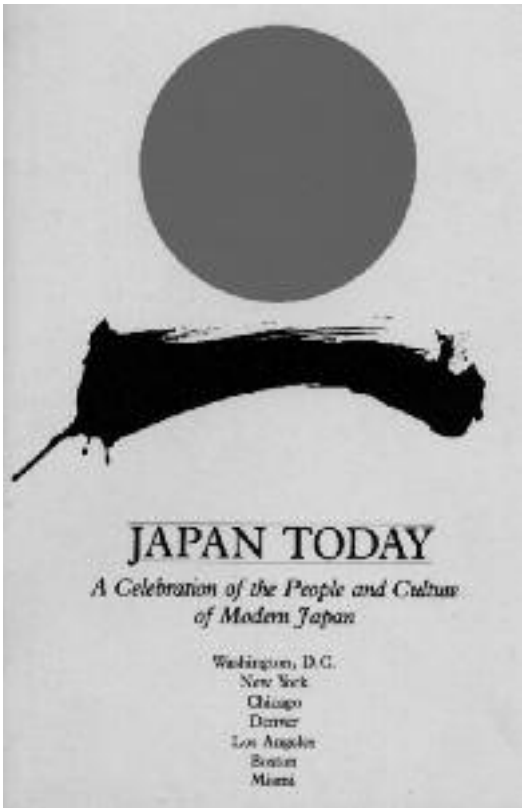


Their Majesties the Empress and Emperor of Japan with Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd during their visit to Japan House, October 6, 1975. Photo © Thomas Haar.

The year 1975 had other high points as well. Prime Minister Takeo Miki spoke at a Society dinner on August 7, jointly sponsored by the Nippon Club and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce in New York, and the first corporate luncheon of the 1975 season drew a record-breaking crowd of 160. A major project, *Colloquia on the City: A Comparison of Tokyo and New York*, held jointly in New York and at The International House of Japan, brought together experts from both countries to discuss common urban problems. This was the first in what was to become a large-scale conference series that generated a network of international contacts and a number of important publications. The film program in 1975-76 was extensive and imaginatively organized, drawing more than 10,000 participants. One series of twenty-four films, *Women in Japanese Cinema*, had Hideko Takamine, Japan's leading actress, as guest of honor at its opening and as a participant in several discussion groups on the films and the role of women. During the 1975-76 season, more than 200 events drew a total of 80,000 people through the doorway of Japan House.



Novelist Kobo Abe lectures on “Two Kinds of Japanese: Urban and Agrarian,” in 1975, with Columbia University professor Donald Keene presiding and interpreting. Photo © Thomas Haar.



In 1979, Japan Society offered the largest national program it had ever undertaken, in cooperation with other Japan Societies: *Japan Today*, a six-week program of 530 concurrent events in seven major cities—New York, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Miami, Washington, and Boston—presenting a panorama of the economy, culture, and politics of Japan to the general public.

On October 20, 1975, the Japan-United States Friendship Act was signed into law by President Gerald Ford. It created a Japan-United States Friendship Commission to administer a \$30 million American trust fund for the promotion of scholarly, cultural, and artistic activities between the two countries. The money represented a percentage of Japanese repayments to the United States attendant upon the reversion of Okinawa to Japan and for economic aid to Japan after World War II. Since the membership of the new commission overlapped that of CULCON, this extraordinary new effort to cement cultural relations between the two countries gave Japan Society an opportunity to broaden and deepen its activities.

During the second half of the 1970s, the Society moved firmly onto the national stage. It became active on several levels—individual, corporate, local, national, and international—as Japan-U.S. relations entered a new and more complicated era. Although increasing contact between these two superpowers raised unforeseen problems, the situation also offered the Society new opportunities. In its major program areas, it increased efforts to build networks and to set up data banks of specialized information in order to make the Society a national resource and a clearinghouse in these fields. The Society’s programs clearly reflected the now regular top-level exchange between Washington and Tokyo. It greatly expanded all its activities in public affairs and helped make it possible for many prominent Japanese political, business, and intellectual leaders to become known in the United States and to broaden their own direct knowledge of the country. In some ways, the Society’s increased activities constituted a new role for it; in others, it marked merely an expansion and formal structuring of the functions it had always performed.

At the height of its expansion in the late 1970s, the Society mourned the sudden death in an automobile accident of John D. Rockefeller 3rd, who had been the leading figure in its postwar restoration and growth. His brother, the banker David Rockefeller, who had himself been active in American-Japanese relations, was persuaded to become honorary chair-

man of the Board. Former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Robert S. Ingersoll became chairman. Andrew Overby remained president, but on reaching the mandatory retirement age of seventy the following year, he was replaced in October 1979 by David MacEachron as the first paid, professional president of the Society. The new vice president, John K. Wheeler, had joined the staff in 1978 after working with Time-Life Books in Tokyo.

The decade of the 1970s closed fittingly with the *Japan Today* program of 1979, which mirrored Japan's remarkable achievement in rising from post-war desolation to become one of the leading economic powers of the developed, democratic world. *Japan Today* also typified the expanding role of Japan Society in promoting a more realistic image of contemporary Japan in the United States.

*Japan Today* was a project initiated by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts. It consisted of art exhibitions, film series, performing arts events, and symposia held in several American cities over a six-week period. In late 1977, the Society, together with the Smithsonian Resident Associates Program and Meridian House International of Washington, D.C., was invited to sponsor and organize the undertaking. The Society served as the overall coordinator. *Japan Today* eventually came to have a budget of over \$2 million and involved more than 125 institutions and organizations in the presentation of more than 500 events across the country.

The programs ran concurrently in seven American cities from the inaugural ceremonies in Washington on April 17, 1979, until the last related event near the end of June. It proved to be a triumph of organization and ample proof of Japan Society's ability to mount an enterprise of this magnitude. In Washington, New York, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Boston, and Miami, there were panel discussions and lectures by American experts and teams of Japanese authorities, who traveled from city to city. Among the topics covered were changing Japanese life patterns, continuity and change in Japanese culture, the Japanese search for identity, the Japanese economy in the world, and politics in Japan. A book

of essays, *Japan Today*, edited by Kenneth Grossberg and based on the panel discussions, was subsequently published in 1981. There were film festivals and series with accompanying lectures. In all, there were over 130 film showings. There were also ninety performing arts events with related lectures; exhibitions of art, crafts, and technology with related lectures and courses; and events designed for young audiences, such as puppet shows, workshops in origami, poetry contests, and kite flying. Special events included lectures, courses, and affiliated happenings, such as a kite festival in Denver and the arrival in Boston harbor of a ship carrying a nineteenth-century Kyoto house as a gift to the Children's Museum for the twentieth anniversary of the sister-city relationship between Kyoto and Boston.

Special radio and television programs accompanied *Japan Today*. There were also department store window displays and exhibits, lobby exhibits in major business buildings, cooking demonstrations in restaurants, and even a benefit ball on behalf of the program in Miami. No one person could have attended all the events even in a single city, and it was roughly estimated that about a million people participated in at least one of the many events throughout the country. Media coverage was extensive; a number of radio and TV stations broadcast close to twenty-one hours of related programs. *Newsweek* devoted a major article to *Japan Today*, and a total of 261 articles, listings, and reviews are known to have been published in the American press.

The work entailed in organizing and coordinating this major national program fostered a growing cooperation among the various Japan Societies in the United States and strengthened the feeling that a permanent association of such organizations was desirable to encourage the sharing of resources and experiences. There had been a meeting in 1961 hosted by Japan Society, but it was not until a later gathering at Japan House in 1975 that real progress began to be made. The Japan-America Society of Washington invited the various societies to meet there in 1977, and at that get-together it was agreed that formal meetings should be held every other year, with the next one at Los Angeles in 1979. At that time,

the Associated Japan-America Societies of the United States (AJAS) was formed to serve the needs of all seventeen member societies. Virginia Petree, who had been national staff coordinator for *Japan Today*, became executive director, and the New York Japan Society provided office space and facilities. Former U.S. Ambassador to Japan U. Alexis Johnson served as chairman of the AJAS from 1979 to 1981; he was succeeded in 1981 by another former ambassador, James D. Hodgson.

The Society opened a year-long celebration of its seventy-fifth anniversary on September 14, 1981. Rapidly burgeoning economic, cultural, and political relations, which were fast making Japan the most important partner of the United States in the world, had catapulted the Society into a position of far greater significance and much broader responsibilities than its founders could ever have imagined. At the time of the celebrations, the Society had over 300 corporate and nearly 4,000 individual members.

Under the direction of Rand Castile, who won for his work the Mayor's Award of Honor for Arts and Culture, Japan House Gallery took the lead in developing its capacity as a national resource center, presenting exhibitions on aspects of Japanese art, many of which were new to American audiences. These were backed by scholarly research and accompanied by related lectures and educational materials. Full catalogues were produced for all the exhibitions by leading experts, both Japanese and American. The exhibitions were always beautifully mounted, and they were enthusiastically received and widely reviewed.

The existence of the Gallery owed much to Mrs. Jackson Burke, who generously donated the gallery space and for many years chaired the Friends of Japan House Gallery. The Arts Advisory Committee, made up of curators from major museums all over the United States and leading art historians, worked closely with Gallery staff to set policy and to choose and plan exhibitions. These exhibitions did much to promote good scholarship and to make Japanese art accessible and understandable to the American public. They helped to remove such labels as "exotic" and "strange" and to show Japanese art as the

meaningful expression of a culture Americans could appreciate and come to know.

Between 1971 and 1982, the Gallery held thirty-four exhibitions and probably produced more publications and exhibitions of Japanese art than any other American institution. Some of its landmark exhibitions, such as *Nihon Koten Bungei: The Courtly Tradition in Japanese Art and Literature* (1974), *Nippon-to: Art Swords of Japan* (1976), *Shinto Arts* (1976), and *Nara Ehon: Illuminated Manuscripts of Medieval Japan* (1978), made Americans aware of new aspects of Japanese art and culture and stimulated new fields for research, publication, and concentration by graduate students. Other exhibitions, such as *Namban Art* (1973), on the screens depicting the sixteenth-century Portuguese in Japan, and *The Tokugawa Collection: No Robes and Masks* (1977), were "firsts." So also was *Horyu-ji: Temple of the Exalted Law*, the exhibition of masterpieces from the famous seventh-century temple, which marked the opening of the Society's seventy-fifth anniversary celebration. Like most of the major exhibitions, *Horyu-ji* received the kind of extensive national media coverage that has enabled the Society to bring Japanese art to the attention of millions of Americans.

The catalogue that accompanied the *Horyu-ji* exhibition was the product of two years of staff research and contained not only information on the objects, their provenance, and historical background, but a supplement recounting the history of all exhibitions of Japanese art in the United States since 1893 that were accompanied by catalogues. This history makes it possible for anyone interested in mounting an exhibition to discover quickly and easily what has been shown, where, when, and how.

Another step in the expansion of the Society's role as a national resource was the establishment of the Japan Film Center in the autumn of 1979. The Center, under the direction of Peter Grilli, continued the fine film program for which Japan Society had long been known in the New York metropolitan area, and at the same time compiled series of Japanese films and documentaries about Japan and circulated them throughout the country. In this way, it presented new Japanese films to American audiences, intro-

duced Japanese filmmakers to their American counterparts, and also served as an information resource on Japanese cinema, providing educators with high-quality documentaries and films for teaching American students about Japan.

One of these fine documentaries was produced by the Society itself to complement the *Shinto Arts* exhibition of 1976. *Shinto: Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan*, a 48-minute color film, went into production in October 1976 and was released the following October with preview screenings in Japan and the United States. In Japan, the film was seen by His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akihito in a showing at the Togu Palace. *Shinto* won a number of awards and circulated widely among educational institutions as a classic introduction to Japan's indigenous religion.

The film series shown at Japan Society were themselves often innovative efforts in structuring film presentations. There were series on filmmakers such as Shohei Imamura, who until the showings at Japan Society was completely unknown in the United States; series on the work of cinematographers and composers, as well as directors; presentations of "best films" of the entire postwar period; and series on aspects of Japanese life and history. The Film Center worked closely with the Kawakita Memorial Film Institute (formerly Japan Film Library Council), under Kashiko Kawakita and Akira Shimizu. In October 1981, to mark the Society's seventy-fifth anniversary, the Center presented a complete retrospective of the films of Akira Kurosawa, probably the best known of all Japanese directors to American audiences. The presentation of this twenty-six-film series was an unprecedented success. Kurosawa himself attended the gala opening, commenting:

I am deeply grateful to the Japan Society for collecting all my films and arranging for them to be shown in the retrospective film series that is opening this evening. For a filmmaker, there can be no greater joy than to have his films seen widely and by as many people as possible.

Before the opening of Japan House, the Performing Arts Program had been forced to seek various stages for its dance and music programs, appropriate



On location during the filming of the Society's documentary *Shinto: Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan*, 1976-77.

showcases for talented young Japanese performers, and theaters for presentations. Despite this handicap, Performing Arts director Beate Gordon had shown much energy and ingenuity in bringing the contemporary and traditional performing arts of Japan to American audiences. The Lila Acheson Wallace Auditorium in the new building greatly facilitated those efforts. It was a welcome relief for the Society to have a permanent stage of its own for one of its most important programs. Among the artists who performed at the Society during the early Japan House years were Fusataka Homma, a Living National Treasure of Japan, who demonstrated noh theater techniques; prima ballerina Yoko Morishita; pianist Minoru Nojima; the Sadayo Kita Noh Company; the Kiza Troupe in a Japanese adaptation of *Carmen*; avant-garde playwright and director Shuji Terayama and his troupe; and the Tokyo String Quartet. The



Beate Gordon, friend and interpreter for artist/printmaker Shiko Munakata on his many visits to the United States, studies Munakata's *Self-Portrait by the Hudson River* at the Japan Society Gallery exhibition *Shiko Munakata (1903-1975): Works on Paper* (April 21-June 20, 1982). Photo © Osamu Honda/Japan Society.

Performing Arts Program provided a showcase for scores of talented young Japanese performers and American artists utilizing Japanese techniques or instruments. Among the Japanese artists resident in New York who performed at the Society were classical dancer Suzushi Hanayagi and modern dancer Saeko Ichinohe. Many well-known Japanese artists made their American debuts at Japan Society and often gave return engagements after their careers had been successfully launched. Society performances continued on other stages, as did cooperative endeavors with other institutions. Gordon resigned as Performing Arts director in summer 1981, and Rand Castile undertook direction of the program, continuing to lead the Gallery as well.

The increased national role of Japan Society was most evident in its Public Affairs Program. Under the direction of Ruri Kawashima, it developed major ongoing exchanges in the intellectual, social, and economic areas and jointly sponsored or served as coordinator for other significant international programs, holding luncheon and dinner meetings in New York each month to bring business executives together with leading authorities. Among the speakers were management expert Peter Drucker, economist and former Foreign Minister Saburo Okita, former Ambassador to Japan and chairman of the Board of the Society Robert S. Ingersoll, and

former Ambassador to the United States and later chief trade negotiator Nobuhiko Ushiba. These luncheons afforded opportunities for Japanese and American business leaders to exchange views in an informal setting.

Among the Society's innovative publishing and educational efforts in 1982 was the Business Education Program, begun in 1976 under the chairmanship of former Ambassador to Japan and Secretary of Labor James D. Hodgson. As the Japanese-American business relationship expanded and deepened in the early 1970s, it became clear that young American executives could deal more effectively with their Japanese counterparts if they had a better understanding of Japanese business and management systems. Several years of development and testing resulted in the publication of a series of comparative teaching modules on Japanese business for use in graduate business courses in American universities. The six modules—Business-Government Relations, Business Policy, Corporate Finance, International Business, Marketing, and Organizational Behavior—were developed and written by experts in these various aspects of Japanese business, and then tested, reviewed, and revised to make them effective teaching tools.

The impact of the Society in its international exchange work was greatly increased by its coopera-

Suzushi Hanayagi performs a program of Japanese classical dance at the Society in November 1974. Photo © Thomas Haar.



tion with a number of other organizations. Its work with CULCON, the Japan-United States Friendship Commission, The International House of Japan, the Asia Society, and the Associated Japan-America Societies of the United States has already been noted. In addition, the Society developed a close association with the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), which was founded in Tokyo in 1971 by a group of Japanese business and intellectual leaders to promote dialogue and policy discussions on international issues that involved Japan.

Cooperation with JCIE started in 1972, when Japan Society began to distribute to its members JCIE's publication, *The Japan Interpreter*. In 1974, JCIE invited the Society and the American Council of Young Political Leaders to co-sponsor a portion of a United States-Japan Young Political Leaders Exchange Program which it was developing, and the Society and JCIE also joined in formulating plans for a new effort, the Japan Caravan. The Caravan was designed to bring Japanese professionals to the United States for grassroots dialogues with Americans on political, economic, and social problems in cities where Japan-related programs were not frequent. JCIE selected the Japanese speakers, and Japan Society took responsibility for their itineraries in the United States.

On the first Caravan, three speakers visited four

American cities over a period of two weeks, which was about the maximum time a Japanese professional could take off from his duties. In 1976, another three speakers went to five cities in a two-week period. In honor of the Japan Society's seventy-fifth anniversary, a "super" Caravan composed of five teams of three speakers each simultaneously visited twenty cities. The amount of coordination required for the Caravan programs was enormous, but it was made easier after 1975 when JCIE's U.S. office under the direction of Hiroshi Kamura was set up at Japan Society in New York.

The Society also helped to publicize the work of the Japan-United States Economic Relations Group, colloquially known as the "Wise Men's Group," which was set up in May 1979 to recommend ways for both governments to manage their long-term bilateral economic relationship. The American chairman of the group was the chairman of the Society's Board, Robert S. Ingersoll, and the Japan Society in New York and JCIE in Tokyo were among the distributors of the group's published reports. The formation of the Wise Men's Group, and the Society's concern to spread its findings, were indicative of the new state of U.S.-Japan relations, one in which the two partners would face growing friction in their relationship. As before, the Society found itself uniquely positioned to play an important role in uncertain times.



**PART IV:  
A NEW RELATIONSHIP**

## Responding to a Changing Relationship: 1982-90

Japan Society entered its fourth quarter-century on the cusp of a dramatically changing U.S.-Japan relationship. Within a few years, Japan would vault to a position of being an economic superpower, and this would bring out a host of tensions in bilateral relations. The Society would ride this wave of interest in Japan, yet also carefully navigate among the sometimes treacherous waters.

Under the leadership of president David MacEachron, and building off the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration, the Society maintained a vigorous cultural events program, particularly in the visual and performing arts. Americans, who were becoming major customers for Japan's consumer goods, were increasingly interested in the culture of the society that produced such items. For most, such interest concentrated on traditional performing and visual arts, as well as cinema, which was still basking in the afterglow of popularity from Akira Kurosawa's breakthrough in the 1950s and 1960s. The explosion of interest was the subject of numerous media articles, which in turn helped stir up fascination with things Japanese.

The Society was quick to capitalize on opportunities to influence a national audience that was becoming more aware of Japan. For example, by 1982, it had distributed over 4,000 copies of a slim volume called *Learning from Shogun*, which contained essays by recognized scholars writing in response to the massive interest in Japanese culture occasioned by James Clavell's novel *Shogun* and the succeeding television miniseries. That same year, the Gallery hosted two groundbreaking exhibitions. The first, which ran from April through June, highlighted the early works of Shiko Munakata, the most important woodblock printmaker of the twentieth century and a long-time friend of the Society, who had some years before donated a number of his outstanding works to the Gallery.

In November, the Gallery opened *Great Age of Japanese Buddhist Sculpture, A.D. 600-1300*, which garnered major praise from *The New York Times* and



Living National Treasure Nakamura Kanzaburo XVII in *Renjishi*, from the Grand Kabuki tour in June 1982. Photo © Greg Cranna.

other media, and attracted nearly 20,000 visitors. Among the fifty-two works of art displayed during the three-month run were seven National Treasures, including *Bodhisattva on Clouds*, and thirty-seven Important Cultural Properties, from major repositories such as the Byodo-in and the Todai-ji.

The Film Center, as well, continued to be one of the Society's most active programs. During the anniversary year, five major film series were presented at Japan House, including a thirty-four-film retrospective of director Yasujiro Ozu, often ranked by the Japanese as their favorite filmmaker. With such attention-grabbing programming, the Film Center saw its audience double in the early 1980s, and it expanded its offerings by an equivalent amount to take advantage of the seemingly unending demand for Japanese movies.

Without doubt, however, the main event of the anniversary season was the two-week run of Grand Kabuki at the Metropolitan Opera House organized in part by Peter Grilli, director of Education, Film, and



Toshiro Mifune (RIGHT) with Robert DeNiro at a gala evening launching the film series *A Tribute to Toshiro Mifune* (March 7–April 29, 1984). Photo © William Irwin.

Performing Arts. This first major staging of kabuki in the United States was headlined by star Bando Tamasaburo V and comprised a cast of fifty-six performers and musicians. The show garnered major publicity, including a *Sunday New York Times Magazine* feature, that helped lead to sold-out performances. Sponsored by the Society, the Japanese government, and others at a cost of over \$1 million, the troupe went on to the World's Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

In the following years, the Society continued with several major cultural events, including a national bunraku tour in March 1984, which introduced puppet theater to numerous audiences, a forty-film series, *Tribute to Toshiro Mifune*, which included an event at the Society attended by the famous actor, and an exhibition of Tokugawa-era textiles from the world-famous Nomura collection.

The rest of the decade saw similarly popular and ambitious cultural programming. Rand Castile, director of the Gallery until his retirement, maintained a continuous stream of exhibitions, continued thereafter by Anthony Derham and Gunhilde Avitabile. These included *Masters of Japanese Calligraphy*, running from October 1984 through the following January, which covered over a millennium of Japanese letters, and *Spectacular Helmets of Japan*, focusing on the armor of the Tokugawa era, in October and November 1985, that included a catalogue with contributions from famed artist Isamu Noguchi and Yale historian John W. Hall.

From February through April 1990, the Gallery hosted a major exhibition entitled *Court and Samurai in an Age of Transition: Medieval Paintings and Blades from the Gotoh Museum, Tokyo*. Even more sweeping was the December 1990 mounting of *Japanese Archaeological Ceramics from the Jomon through Heian Periods (10,500 B.C.–A.D. 1185)*, which drew almost 100,000 visitors.

Nearly half the exhibitions during this period traveled to one or more cities, and major institutions such as the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco co-hosted with the Society. Continuing a long-standing tradition, each exhibition was accompanied by a detailed catalogue written by experts in Japanese art history that included high-quality color plates; the catalogues themselves often sold out, becoming collectibles in their own right.

Throughout the 1980s and into the last decade of the twentieth century, the Society brought innovative public performances to an ever-increasing audience. In 1984, Performing Arts was separated from the Gallery and combined with the Film Center under the leadership of Peter Grilli. Representative of the groundbreaking nature of the programming was the Society's co-sponsorship of the first Grand Sumo Tournament to be hosted in the United States. Over 13,000 spectators jammed Madison Square Garden in June 1985 to watch Grand Champion Chiyonofuji emerge triumphant. Society vice president John Wheeler, a sumo expert who had written a book on Hawaii-born champion Takamiyama, provided the public address commentary, and the tournament was covered in depth by *The New York Times*.

Other events were just as innovative, if not headline grabbers to the degree of sumo. In March 1987, the Society threw a "Taiko Celebration" with the drumming groups Kodo and Soh Daiko. This was one of the first large-scale taiko concerts in the United States, and it helped to popularize the music throughout the rest of the country. That same year, the Society responded to the growing interest in popular Japanese culture by hosting the first annual *New Films from Japan* series, which took place over a month in the autumn. This was followed by devoting the entire 1988–89 Performing Arts season to mod-

ern performance pieces, including major programs featuring Toru Takemitsu and Sound Space ARK, the Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra, and the performance of *Kiyotsune*, a twentieth-century noh play. However, Japan's traditional performing arts were not neglected, and in 1990, the first full performances of traditional noh and kyogen at the Society, by the Kita Noh and Nomura Kyogen schools, were held in the Lila Acheson Wallace Auditorium.

At the same time, the Society reached out to the growing Japanese population in New York, which by the early 1980s had topped 40,000 short- and medium-term residents. Throughout the 1980s, the *Hiroba* series continued its mission of serving as the only regular Japanese language program for Japanese residents. *Hiroba* was originally tailored for an often-neglected group, the wives of businessmen, many of whom did not speak English particularly well and suddenly had to cope with American society. The monthly meetings initially covered topics such as "How to Live in New York" and consumer awareness,

but eventually drew larger audiences for wide-ranging discussions on cultural, political, and international affairs, such as a 1983 talk by Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations Yasushi Akashi. By the early 1990s, the *Hiroba* series was held twice a month, and was often graced by New York's civic and political leaders, in addition to film producers, drama critics, U.N. officials, and others.

Perhaps best reflecting the growing interest in Japan in the tri-state area, the Society's language programs expanded dramatically during the 1980s. Begun as a club in 1972, language classes were formalized in 1981 under the leadership of Reiko Sassa. The Japanese Language Program (JLP), as it was then called, began that year with one twelve-week session offered at six different levels of proficiency; approximately 100 persons signed up for the first of the revamped classes. As Japan's economy expanded during that decade, New York-based business professionals flocked to the Society, and the JLP quickly became the most comprehensive program outside of student-focused university Japanese language programs. Just five years later, over 1,650 students registered for the JLP, and more levels of proficiency were added. By the late 1980s, enrollment in the language classes topped 2,000.

With Japan increasingly in the news, in the spring of 1984 the Board decided to bestow an annual Japan Society Award on a distinguished individual who had had a major impact on U.S.-Japan relations or who had made a significant contribution over many years to furthering understanding between the two countries. The Award became the centerpiece of the Annual Dinners, along with the keynote address, with the first one going to the late Ambassador to the U.S. and longtime Society supporter Nobuhiko Ushiba. Other early recipients included U.S. Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield (1985), chairman of The International House of Japan Shigeharu Matsumoto (1986), former Society chairman Robert Ingersoll (1987), Harvard history professor Edwin O. Reischauer (1988), and famed director Akira Kurosawa (1990).

Amidst this flurry of events, the Society was undergoing various changes during the 1980s, both administratively and in its policy programming, in



Poster for the Grand Sumo Tournament held at Madison Square Garden in June 1985, co-sponsored by Japan Society and the Asia Society.



Japan Society's 1983 Annual Dinner. ON THE DAIS, LEFT TO RIGHT: Dinner vice chairman William W. Scranton; keynote speaker Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone; Japan Society president David MacEachron; and Japan Society chairman Robert S. Ingersoll. Photo © William Irwin.

response to the changes in the U.S.-Japan relationship, which was becoming more complex and filled with tension. In 1985, Robert S. Ingersoll stepped down after nearly eight years as chairman and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance became chairman, a testament to the importance of the Society as well as the U.S.-Japan relationship itself. That same year, Rand Castile retired from his position as Gallery director, ending a fifteen-year period during which the Society's exhibitions became ever more impressive and professional.

Recognizing that the Society had entered a new era, at the end of 1985 the Board of Directors initiated a three-year, \$10 million capital fund drive, chaired by James D. Robinson III, chairman of American Express. Over the previous decade, the overall number of programs at the Society had tripled, while membership had jumped by over 85 percent. The *Japan Society Newsletter* had reached a circulation of nearly 6,000, while more than 75,000 copies of Society publications were distributed to members and the public.

Given these demands on the organization, which continued to raise 80 percent of its income annually, resources were strained and there was clear recognition that the Society's future growth and vitality required a more significant endowment. The drive reached its first successful step in September

1984, when the National Endowment for the Arts awarded it a Challenge Grant of \$250,000, and it was successfully completed on schedule, including a \$1 million leadership gift from the Japanese government. Recognition of the end of the drive was marked by a major social event, a gala evening in honor of Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko, held at the Society.

Yet more top-level change was occurring at the Society, most notably when David MacEachron stepped down as president in April 1989. He was succeeded by William H. Gleysteen, Jr. Though MacEachron did not have long to enjoy his retirement, passing away in January 1990, his influence on the Society continued for many years. In the last years of his presidency, MacEachron had begun to position the Society to address the increasingly contentious economic issues facing Japan and the United States. Since taking over the presidency in 1979, MacEachron and vice president John Wheeler had transformed the Society's policy and corporate programming, even as they continued to support some long-standing public affairs programs.

One such ongoing program was the *Shimoda Conference*, first held in 1967 in Japan under the joint initiative of the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) and the American Assembly of Columbia University and, from the fourth *Shimoda*

Conference onward, co-sponsored by JCIE and Japan Society. Focusing on major issues in the U.S.-Japan relationship, these periodic meetings played an important role in bringing together Japanese and Americans representing government, business, academia, labor, and the media. Indicative of the importance of the conferences, Society chairmen Robert Ingersoll and Cyrus Vance served as co-chairs along with Japanese such as Akio Morita of Sony, while keynote speakers included Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu (1990) and U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz (1987).

American participants in the *Shimoda* conferences included leaders from Congress, such as Senators Howard Baker, John Glenn, Edmund Muskie, and Charles Percy, and Congressmen Thomas Foley and Barber Conable, other political leaders, academics, labor leaders, senior media people, and business executives. On the Japanese side, prime ministers spoke at all but one of the conferences, and participants included top political figures and cabinet members, such as Kiichi Miyazawa and Shintaro Abe; prominent scholar-statesmen like Saburo Okita; academic leaders such as Fuji Kamiya of Keio University; media people such as Kensaku Shirai, foreign editor of *Asahi*; labor leaders such as Ichiro Shioji, president of the Confederation of Japan Auto Workers Unions; and numerous businessmen.

Equally important was the Society's continuing co-sponsorship, along with the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), of the U.S.-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program. Begun in the 1960s in Japan, the program brought together leading lawmakers in both countries for a weeklong visit and conference. The Society's sponsorship began in 1978, after the Ford Foundation discontinued its support, with major funding from the Henry Luce Foundation, among others. The program soon became a year-round operation, with constant communication and consultation among the Society, JCIE, and four American legislators who were the informal program advisors: Senators John Glenn and William V. Roth, Jr., and Congressmen Thomas Foley and Bill Frenzel. Other American participants included Congressmen Lee Hamilton, Donald Rumsfeld,



Sony chairman Akio Morita speaks on "Doing Business without Blame" in a 1987 lecture. Photo © Eric Kroll.

and Minority Leader Robert Michel. Japanese Diet members participating in the program included future prime minister Keizo Obuchi and Koichi Kato. Each group traveled to important cities and observed events such as American political primaries or national political party nominating conventions. Delegations from each country visited the other annually, and more than 120 members of the American Congress and almost as many Japanese Diet members were involved, making it the largest privately sponsored exchange between national legislative bodies anywhere in the world at the time.

Representative Foley, who later became both Speaker of the House and Ambassador to Japan, in summing up the value of the Parliamentary Exchange Program, wrote:

The Program has in my mind one major distinction that separates it from and places it clearly above all the others that exist: a commitment to substance and an intensity of contact with key Japanese political, economic, and cultural leaders



U.S. Representative Thomas S. Foley speaks on the 1976 Congressional Exchange to Japan at a 1977 dinner meeting. Seated to Foley's right are Henry H. Fowler, general partner, Goldman, Sachs & Co.; Ross Barzelay, executive vice president, General Foods Corporation; and Tadashi Yamamoto, director, Japan Center for International Exchange. Photo © Osamu Honda/Japan Society.

and their voices in the Diet. Because of this commitment to content and a cultivation of frankness in all discussions between the Parliamentarians, the Program has done an enormous amount to further an understanding and sensitivity in the U.S. Congress to the problems and concerns that shape Japanese governmental and public attitudes.

During these years, the Annual Business Fellowships in Japan program also maintained its role as one of the Society's important endeavors. Begun during the 1970s, it sent seven to eight first-year MBA students from leading American universities to Japan for internships for six weeks during the summer. Each student was paired with a host institution, and Japanese companies including Canon, C. Itoh & Co., Dentsu Incorporated, IBM Japan, Japan Airlines, and Nissan Motors participated by accepting the Fellows. Funding for the Business Fellowships program was provided by Marks Murase & White and the IBM Corporation.

Along with these marquee programs, however, Ruri Kawashima, director of Public Affairs, and the Society's leadership pursued new efforts. With mainstream media outlets such as *The New York Times* noting both increasing public interest and resentment toward Japan, newly innovative programming began to take up more of the Society's resources.

In 1984, the U.S.-Japan Leadership Program debuted with major funding from the United States-Japan Foundation. Designed as a fellowship for mid-career American professionals, it allowed eight to eleven recipients to spend three to nine months in Japan working on projects of their choosing with a host institution identified by the Society. The Leadership Program filled an important lacuna in U.S.-Japan relations. Whereas elected officials and business and academic leaders had numerous venues to encounter their Japanese counterparts, other professionals, many of whom were playing significant public roles, had little opportunity to learn about Japan. The Program, therefore, focused on public policy leaders and members of the media, attracting a set of prominent young Americans who otherwise would have had little exposure to Japan, and who were able to introduce aspects of the country back home.

From its beginning, the U.S.-Japan Leadership Program attracted promising young American professionals. Alumni included University of Wisconsin chancellor Donna Shalala, who went on to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services under President Bill Clinton; Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund; Peter Edelman, later Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services under Shalala; *Atlantic Magazine* correspondent James Fallows, who went on to write a series of groundbreaking articles on Japan's economic "miracle"; *Los Angeles Times* political reporter Ronald Brownstein; and *Newsweek* editor Jonathan Alter.

Another major initiative to appear during the 1980s was the Public Affairs Outreach Service. Initially funded with a grant from the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission, Outreach Services was the Society's main effort to promote Japan and U.S.-Japan relations programs at a national level. It collaborated with regional public affairs organizations, chambers of commerce, and universities to bring Japanese-themed events to cities from Anchorage, Alaska, to Atlanta, Georgia. Topics covered by Outreach Services ranged from bilateral economic issues to Japanese perceptions of the Soviet Union's military threat in northeast Asia. Speakers at



Astronomer Carl Sagan, the first speaker in the *Distinguished Lecturer Series*, shares his views on Japan's role in space technology in February 1987. Photo © Eric Kroll.

Outreach Services programs included leading academics, businessmen, and senior government officials from both Japan and the United States.

The Japan Caravan tours, which had started in the 1970s, continued to send three-person teams of Japanese experts to various U.S. cities over a two-week period to give talks on a wide range of topics. By 1983, the Society was collaborating with U.S. educational institutions such as the University of Pittsburgh to develop workshops on Japan for social studies teachers. The following year, the Society's first international conference was held in Boulder, Colorado, bringing together 125 business and government leaders from Japan, the United States, and the Middle East to discuss international energy issues.

In the 1987-88 season, the program organized lectures, panel discussions, and seminars in twenty-five cities, often working with local chambers of commerce and World Affairs Councils. Covering topics such as economics, trade, politics, regional development, and comparative educational and management systems in the United States and Japan,

these events often paired Japanese and American experts, thus providing a bilateral perspective on pressing issues. Japan Caravan members alone met with nearly 800 community leaders and members of the general public.

Not surprisingly, the majority of programs focused on business and economic issues. By the mid-1980s, Japan's economic system was identified as the future model for growth and prosperity. Americans started becoming nervous about the explosion in Japanese exports and the seeming inability of U.S. companies to adopt similar quality levels, management styles, and market success. Representative of programs during this period was one held in North Carolina, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia on "Japan as a Competitor: The Reasons Why, and What America Must Do to Compete." Outreach Services also regularly published the results of conferences held under its auspices, the first being *Japanese Direct Investment in the United States*.

The Society responded to public concerns over Japan's economic challenge not only by scheduling business-oriented talks, but also by organizing an "Executive Orientation on Japan" seminar that tripled in size during the mid-1980s, reaching a total of thirty sessions in 1990. The "seminars introduce and analyze for American executives the values and educational background of their Japanese counterparts, decision-making and the organization of the Japanese firm, Japanese business and social etiquette, and cross-cultural communications and negotiations," as the annual report of 1987 explained. Eventually, Outreach Services also launched a family relocation seminar for American executives and their dependents transferred to Japan.

By 1990, the Society had sent sixteen experts on U.S.-Japan relations on tours of thirty-four American cities. Far outgrowing the initial funding provided by the Friendship Commission, support now came from The Starr Foundation, TRW and Nippon Steel. There is little question that events sponsored by the Public Affairs and Outreach Services programs allowed Japan Society to reach an audience far larger than could be attracted to its facilities or even within the New York metropolitan region.

Even as the Society created such programs to increase knowledge of Japan among influential Americans, bilateral relations were souring, with an inevitable effect on Society programs. During the 1980s, trade frictions grew as American businesses complained about the difficulty of penetrating the potentially lucrative Japanese domestic market. Tensions reached a high point in the summer of 1987 when it was revealed that Toshiba Machine Company had sold sensitive computer technologies to the Soviet Union that could be used for military purposes; on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, congressmen used a sledgehammer to publicly smash a Toshiba radio. Under the guidance of vice president John Wheeler, the Society recast its policy and corporate programs to reflect these new realities facing the bilateral relationship.

During 1986 and into 1987, five major conferences were held, most with an economic or business theme, such as *Selling in the Japanese Market* and *Finance in China*. The year was capped by a November conference that was almost prescient in its subject: *The Next Wave of Japanese Investment in U.S. Real Estate*. Over 900 participants gathered in a midtown hotel on October 19, the “Black Monday” of the American stock market collapse, to hear about possible Japanese acquisitions of U.S. property. This sold-out conference took place almost two years to the day before headlines around America reported the sale of Rockefeller Center to a Japanese investment company.

The following year, the Society revamped its Public Affairs Program, renaming it the U.S.-Japan Program and giving it a mandate to “address important economic, political, security, and social issues in the bilateral relationship.” The new program took over the Society’s public lecture programs that were aimed at general audiences, in addition to outreach such as Japan Caravan. It followed a growing trend for Society programming during the late 1980s to explore U.S.-Japan ties in a global context.

Whereas many earlier programs had largely dealt with the bilateral relationship, they now increasingly presaged a future focus on globalization. The Society sponsored a series of lectures and sym-

posia on comparative post-industrial problems, such as health care, policing and crime prevention, and energy issues. There was also an increasing focus on Japan and U.S.-Japan relations in a broader Asian context, which included a number of events jointly hosted with the Asia Society. In June 1987, for example, Japan Society and the Asia Society, with support from The Japan Foundation, organized a conference titled *Japan, Korea, and the U.S.: Pacific Economic Power in the Coming Decade*, which featured an address by Ambassador Michael Armacost, then Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

The U.S.-Japan Program formally kicked off its activities with five conferences, ranging from the trilateral U.S., Japan, and European roles in the global economy to opportunities and obstacles for American lawyers in Japan. The new focus of policy programming at the Society was due to the recognition that popular U.S. images of Japan were turning more antagonistic. After the fallout from the Toshiba scandal and Rockefeller Center sale, among others, chairman Cyrus Vance was moved starkly to note in the 1989–90 annual report that “United States-Japan relations are going through a rough period.”

Despite such tensions, the years following the Society’s seventy-fifth anniversary were ones in which it truly moved into a national role. Responding to the unique circumstances of Japan’s economic might and American interest in the country, the leaders of the Society had transformed it from being a “type of club,” as one former high-ranking official put it, to a multifaceted innovator among international exchange organizations. It would, however, have to draw upon all its reserves and experiences to deal with the looming problems in the U.S.-Japan relationship and in Japan itself.

## **Challenges and Expansion: 1991-2002**

By 1991, the world around Japan Society had changed dramatically. Economically, the seemingly unstoppable Japanese miracle came to a crashing halt with the collapse of the stock market at the end of 1990. What had been the world’s largest market



Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter gives the *Ohira Memorial Lecture*, named for the late prime minister of Japan, in 1990. Photo © William Irwin.



U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata speaks on "Reflections on the World Refugee Problem and Other International Humanitarian Causes," in 1991. Photo © William Irwin.

shed more than 75 percent of its value over the succeeding years. Internationally, Tokyo earned the scorn of its American ally by its perceived ineffectual response to Washington's requests for support in the 1991 Gulf War with Iraq. Tokyo refused to send troops, based on the anti-war Article 9 of its Constitution, and dispatched instead a few minesweepers. Ultimately, it agreed to pay the extraordinary amount of \$13 billion for war-related operations, but its gesture was dismissed as "checkbook diplomacy." Politically, as well, the vaunted Japanese political system was wracked by a series of scandals, and the Liberal Democratic Party began to hear calls for reform. The world's next superpower, as many thought Japan to be, seemed to lose all its magic at once, and began a long slide into economic recession and political impotence.

The new conditions had a powerful impact on Japan Society, which now had to respond to a dramatic turnaround in Japan's image and in the questions being asked about the country. Two symbolic changes that seemed to sum up the new conditions facing the Society were first, the decision to publish the annual report in both English and Japanese, as a way to reach out to an increasingly important Japanese audience, starting with the 1990-91 edition; and more importantly, the retirement in 1992 of chairman Cyrus Vance after a decade of service. He was replaced by Michael I. Sovern, outgoing president of Columbia University.

Despite the problems plaguing U.S.-Japan relations, the Society was in certain ways perfectly positioned to shift gears and address new topics. Two new programs that had started in 1990 with the accession of Society president William H. Gleysteen proved to be increasingly important in the U.S.-Japan Program in the post-1991 world. The first was the *David MacEachron Policy Forum*, created in memory of the late president, which brought experts and opinion leaders together on an annual basis to examine policy issues of bilateral importance. The second was the *Distinguished Lecture Series (DLS)*, initiated in 1986 with funding from the Xerox Corporation, with internationally recognized leaders of thought and opinion speaking on issues of substantial interest to

both countries and the world. During its sixteen-year tenure, the *DLS* featured more than fifty outstanding speakers of diversified leadership, including astronomer Carl Sagan, Nobel Laureate Kenzaburo Oe, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata, former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, and author David Halberstam.

The *MacEachron Forums*, on the other hand, were large gatherings, often with twenty or more participants. More importantly, the *Forum* was truly binational and even regional in focus, drawing participants not only from the United States and Japan, but also from Korea, China, Indonesia, and elsewhere. Experts from government, academia, and business provided balanced and wide-ranging views on major topics. The first *Forum*, held in February 1990, focused on U.S. trade policy, and included Paul Volcker, Hugh Patrick, and Glen Fukushima, among others. The following year's topic was "Japan's Changing Role in Asia," with political scientists Robert Scalapino and Kent Calder, Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, economist Kenneth Courtis, journalist James Fallows, editorial writer Yoichi Funabashi, Ambassador and Consul General Masamichi Hanabusa, and experts from Korea and China in attendance.

By its third year, the *MacEachron Forum* had become a major event. The 1992 theme, "Finding an Expanded Role for Japan," focused on Tokyo's growing involvement in global affairs. The participants list read like an Asia policy *Who's Who*, and included professors Akihiko Tanaka, Gerald Curtis, and Joseph Nye, Japanese Ambassador to the U.N. Yoshio Hatano, *Washington Post* chief foreign correspondent Jim Hoagland, Dow Jones and Co. vice president Karen Elliot House, Japan Institute of International Affairs president Nobuo Matsunaga, National Security Council director for Asian affairs Torkel Patterson, Ambassador and Consul General Hiromoto Seki, and Council on Foreign Relations senior fellow Alan Romberg.

Despite its success, the *MacEachron Forum* would be held only two more times: in 1993, when it addressed the topic "Redefining the U.S.-Japan Security Relationship," and in 1995, for a discussion on "The Asia Factor in U.S.-Japan Relations."

Although the *Forum* was a recent innovation itself, it was superseded by yet another wave of reorientation and consolidation of the Society's policy programs that would begin in the mid-1990s and continue for close to a decade.

The first major change was the splitting of the U.S.-Japan Leadership Program into two components, after the 1995 season. The Program had primarily focused on policymakers and journalists, and it was felt that the interests of the two groups were better served by running two distinct initiatives, though both would continue to be under the direction of Ruri Kawashima and the U.S.-Japan Program.

Starting in 1996, journalists were placed in the U.S.-Japan Media Fellows Program, which initially selected four Americans and two Japanese for a two-month exchange. The launch of the program was preceded by a *U.S.-Japan Journalist Symposium*, in Tokyo during October 1995. Through 2006, the Media Fellows Program sent fifty-eight journalists from both countries on the exchange with support from the United States-Japan Foundation. Participants included Mark Halperin, political director of *ABC News*; Margaret Talbot of the *New Yorker*; Clifford Pearson, senior editor of *Architectural Record*; Jacob Heilbrun of the *Los Angeles Times*; and Cait Murphy, senior editor of *Fortune*.

The Society's focus on engaging with the media was underscored by its hosting a *U.S.-Japan Media Dialogue* throughout the 1990s, a series of conferences closely tied with the Media Fellows Program that provided one of the only opportunities for joint discussions by leading Japanese and American journalists. The Society also singled out special media leaders, such as its sponsorship of news anchor and author Robert MacNeil for a six-week visit to Japan in the fall of 1996 as an Intellectual Interchange Fellow. Returning from his sojourn, MacNeil noted at a sold-out lecture that "the Japanese may have a lot to teach us about how to live [on earth] harmoniously."

The other spin-off from the U.S.-Japan Leadership Program was the Local Government and Public Policy Fellowship. Intended to "expand interaction between Americans and Japanese with influence over public opinion and policy formation," the

Fellowship picked four Americans working at the national or state level, including state legislators, judges, labor leaders, directors of nonprofit organizations, and bureaucrats. Each participant was paired with a local co-hosting institution related to their area of expertise or interest. The Starr Foundation and various Japanese corporations provided the bulk of the support for the Policy Fellows. The program began in 1997 and ran through 2003, when it was cancelled along with the reorganization of the U.S.-Japan Program.

While these formal organizational changes were occurring, the U.S.-Japan Program continued to create new forums to address the myriad problems facing the bilateral relationship. One of the major focuses of the Society during the 1990s was on women's issues in both Japan and America. A 1992 symposium, *Women's Agenda for the '90s*, attracted nearly thirty leading female academics, professionals, and policymakers from both countries, including Susan Dentzer of *U.S. News and World Report*; Kiyoko Fujii, deputy director of the International Labor Organization; and Mariko Mitsui, member of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly.

In the 1993-94 season, a program on "Professional Women, Family and Social Change" was held, while in June 1995, a two-day symposium in Japan, *U.S.-Japan Women in the Environment*, explored the status of environmental initiatives in the United States and Japan, the role of NGOs, and opportunities for international cooperation. The next year, the environment symposium moved to Washington, D.C., and was paired with a panel discussion on "Japanese Women in Action."

Increasingly, the political nature of women's issues came to the fore. The Society sponsored the U.S.-Japan Women's Leadership Network in March and April of 1998 to host a public forum in Tokyo on "Women in the American Political System: Encouraging Participation and Representation," and two panel discussions on "Women Move America: Active Women Leaders Address Gender Issues" and "Women Changing the Twenty-First Century: Perspectives from American Women Leaders." These programs, as well as various talks given on



Nobel Laureate in Literature Kenzaburo Oe signs copies of his books before his 1995 lecture. Photo © William Irwin.

women's issues, placed the Society squarely in the forefront of the debate on the changing roles of women in Japan and the rise of a new generation of women leaders on both sides of the Pacific.

Despite the constructive and bridge-building aspects of many of the Society's programs, the worsening in bilateral ties could not be avoided. The Society recognized this fact by scheduling an increasing number of lectures on the problems being covered regularly by the mainstream media. In June 1992, the Society began an ongoing series of public lectures entitled, "Who's to Blame? Confronting Animosity in U.S.-Japan Relations." Speakers included Ezra Vogel, Jeffrey Garten, Glen Fukushima, and Chalmers Johnson, among others.

In addition to this regular series, numerous other talks began to reveal the underside of the Japanese economic miracle and highlight the various contentious issues plaguing Washington and Tokyo. While economic and trade tensions were uppermost in the public mind, the Society took a broad-based approach to educating Americans on a variety of issues. Topics of lectures in the early- and mid-1990s included "The Japanese Economy: A Miracle with Some Complications," and "Japanese Politics: Scandal or Reform?" (co-sponsored with the *Yomiuri Shimbun*), "Can Japan and the United States Fully Harmonize Their Interests in the Asia-Pacific Region?," "Restructuring Japanese Manufacturing," and "Japan: So Much to Gain, So Much to Lose."

Yet even as the Society adjusted to the new realities in the relationship, it remained committed



Toyota Motor Corporation chairman Shoichiro Toyoda (SECOND FROM RIGHT) with Society chairman Michael I. Sovern (FAR RIGHT), Society president William H. Gleysteen, Jr., and Society secretary Alice Young in 1993, during a tour of the newly opened Toyota Language Center. Photo © William Irwin.



The third Japan Society *Matsuri* on 47th Street, October 1999. Photo © Japan Society staff.

to the long-term ties between Japan and the United States. Never wavering from its position as the leading private, non-partisan U.S. organization focused on Japan, it sought even during the 1990s to increase programming and other operations. This meant upgrading the Society's physical plant and expanding its capacity to respond to continuing interest in Japan on the part of the public. Outgoing chairman Cyrus Vance and president William Gleysteen oversaw the first stages of a major construction project in the early 1990s that would benefit the Society's educational and arts programming in particular. The

crucial support of major corporate partners underscored the continuing relevance and strong ties between Japan and the United States even in the midst of difficult economic and political situations.

At the start of the construction, the sidewalk on 47th Street outside the Society's headquarters was excavated in 1992 and a new library was built underground, along with a teaching center, ultimately adding 2,300 square feet to the building. By the early 1990s, over 2,500 individuals were taking twelve levels of language classes, and space was urgently needed to adequately house the program. The Toyota Motor Corporation donated \$1.25 million for creating a space with modern classrooms and a library of language teaching materials. Named the Toyota Language Center, the new facilities opened in December 1992. That same month, the new C.V. Starr Library opened, containing a comprehensive collection of English-language books on Japanese history, culture, society, politics, arts, economics, and religion. The library was completed with major funding from the C.V. Starr Foundation, and by the end of the decade housed nearly 14,000 volumes, as well as a rare book collection of early English—and Japanese—language works on Japan.

At the Language Center, courses in business Japanese and mini-workshops in reading kanji, hiragana, and katakana were conducted several times throughout the year. In addition, teacher-training courses for those wishing to become Japanese language instructors were offered to native Japanese speakers, and English-language conversation courses for Japanese living in the New York area became very popular. Demand continued to grow throughout the 1990s, so that eventually advanced kanji, reading and writing, and speaking and listening courses were added to the curriculum, along with intensive weekend courses offering total immersion for two days.

The Toyota Language Center and the C.V. Starr Library were two spokes in the hub of the organization's expanding educational programming. During the 1990s, the Society increased its education programs, particularly through conducting teachers' seminars, such as the one in November 1991 on the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor. Another major

part of the educational program was school visits at New York City schools. These efforts were substantially boosted in 1994 with a major grant from The Freeman Foundation that underwrote the establishment of the Educational Outreach Program.

The new program, directed by Elaine Vukov, was designed to increase education on Japan in New York elementary and secondary schools. Its centerpiece was the *Educators Forum on Japan*, which selected seven teachers for a three-week study tour of Japan. Their journey was preceded by a ten-part orientation conducted by experts on Japanese culture, history, and language. A decade after its inauguration, the Educators' Study Tour, as it was then called, took up to twelve middle and high-school teachers to Japan.

In addition to the teacher training and visits to schools, courses and workshops for educators were offered on topics ranging from early Japanese literature to Buddhism in East Asia, each workshop being conducted by experts in the field. Nor were the students themselves ignored, as the Society ran several workshops, tours, and lectures each year specifically for the pre-collegiate age bracket. Programs for students included special gallery tours, performances of traditional music, haiku competitions, and language support in New York City schools.

The 1992 expansion that created the new library and language center also completely refurbished the Society's performing arts facility. A major donation from the Lila Acheson Wallace/Japan Society Fund, established by the co-founder of the *Reader's Digest*, provided new seating and carpet, an upgraded film projection, sound, and lighting system, and altered stage flooring and backstage preparation areas that transformed the auditorium.

The revitalized auditorium anchored the Society's performing arts and film programs, which were headed by Paula Lawrence and Kyoko Hirano, respectively. Both strove to present the full range of Japanese styles, from traditional to modern. Live performances of classic kyogen comedy and Kyoto-style dance were offset by cutting-edge butoh and jazz. Indeed, the jazz performances were so popular that the series was extended over seven seasons,



Butoh pioneer Kazuo Ohno performs "My Mother" at Japan Society in 1996. Photo © William Irwin.

showcasing some of Japan's top talent, such as vocalist Kimiko Ito, trumpeter Terumasa Hino, pianist Yosuke Yamashita, and composer and pianist Masahiko Satoh. Each year Japanese artists paired with their American counterparts, bringing the best in fusion to the Society.

Throughout the decade, the Performing Arts Program introduced artists whom American audiences either never saw or had little opportunity to catch in person. From avant-garde troupes to 300-year-old marionette theater groups, the breadth of contemporary and traditional Japanese performing arts graced the stage at Japan Society, and then often moved on to tour various American cities, bringing these artistic experiences to those unable to travel to New York.

Sharing the Lila Acheson Wallace Auditorium with the Performing Arts Program was the Film Center. After the 1992 renovation, the Center boasted

new 35mm and 16mm projectors and a state-of-the-art Dolby sound system in the auditorium, and cinema programming at the Society became perhaps the leading venue outside Japan for premiering new Japanese films and holding important retrospectives. The opening seasons saw major film series, such as *Films from the Meiji Period* in 1992, *Kaisha: Inside Japan, Inc.* in 1993, a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II through *Japanese Film in War and Peace*, and the popular annual *New Films from Japan* series. The programmatic balance of the Film Center's screenings was highlighted in 1998, when *A Tribute to the Late Great Film Giants*, commemorating Akira Kurosawa, Toshiro Mifune, Juzo Itami, and Shintaro Katsu, was followed by a thirty-five-film series entitled *Anime: The History of Japanese Animated Films*, which received funding from the Lila Acheson Wallace-Reader's Digest Endowment Fund and The Japan Foundation, among other sponsors.

In addition, the Film Center increasingly became a venue for Japanese directors and performers, as well as others connected to Japanese cinema, to meet American audiences. During the 1990s, the Center hosted speakers including the eminent critic Donald Richie, popular director Yoji Yamada of *Tora-san* fame, and the husband-and-wife team of director Masahiro Shinoda and actress Shima Iwashita. Younger and non-mainstream Japanese directors



Donald Richie and Susan Sontag share a moment at a reception following Richie's 1991 lecture on "The Structure of Japanese Culture." Photo © William Irwin.

also were hosted at the Society, adding a distinctive edge to the New York film scene.

The Japan Society Gallery continued in these same years to feature major exhibitions of traditional and contemporary art. Representative of the cutting-edge programming was the 1992 show *Japanese Folk Art: A Triumph of Simplicity*, which was described by *The New York Times* as "the most ambitious such show in New York." As one-third of a series devoted to exploring the arts and culture of Japan in the nineteenth century, the folk art exhibition presented eighty-eight objects shown for the first time in the United States. Other exhibits included a major retrospective in 1993 on the Tokugawa-era print designer Utagawa Kunisada and the first comprehensive show of its kind on *ningyo*, traditional Japanese display dolls, in 1994. As always, lavishly illustrated catalogues were published to coincide with the headliner exhibitions.

The following several years were particularly notable for the Gallery. To begin with, the 1995-96 season was devoted entirely to a single facet of Japanese art, lacquerware. Two chronological exhibitions were mounted during the year, the first on traditional lacquer boxes from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and the second on contemporary lacquerware. Demonstrations, lectures, and videos accompanied the exhibitions, adding a deeper element.

The following year, the Gallery was closed for an extensive renovation, the first in its twenty-six-year history. After raising the ceilings and installing new lighting and humidity control systems, the Gallery reopened in May 1997 with an exhibition entitled *Enlightenment Embodied: The Art of the Japanese Buddhist Sculptor (7th-14th Centuries)*, part of the Society's ninetieth anniversary celebrations. Less than a year later, in March 1998, Gallery director Gunhild Avitabile retired after eight years and was replaced by Alexandra Munroe, an independent curator and a MacCracken Fellow at New York University. Under Munroe, the Gallery hosted some of its most popular shows, including *Y E S Yoko Ono*, curated by Munroe (which toured in the United States as well as in Korea and Japan), and *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*.



Japan Society chairman Michael Sovern and president William H. Gleysteen, Jr. escort Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan to their car at the conclusion of their visit to the Society in 1994. Photo © Jack Vartoogian.



Catalogue for the Japan Society Gallery exhibition *YES Yoko Ono* (October 18, 2000–January, 14, 2001), the first American retrospective of the work of pioneering artist Yoko Ono.

The 1990s were a time of rapid change at the Society. Influences ranging from severe bilateral trade tensions to personnel turnover brought about an evolution in the Society, which became more than ever a central point of contact between Japan and the United States. The Society was particularly fortunate to deepen its relations with the Japanese Imperial family during these years. In June 1992, Their Imperial

Highnesses Prince and Princess Takamado toured the Society and observed the folk art exhibition. The following year, the Crown Prince attended a reception in Tokyo for incoming chairman Michael I. Sovern, who had traveled to Japan for a week of introductory meetings and discussions with leading Japanese political, economic, and cultural figures.

The most memorable symbol of the position occupied by the Society occurred in June 1994, when Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan visited the Society during their goodwill tour of America. Nearly twenty years after the visit of the Emperor Showa and the Empress Kojun, they were greeted by the Society's leadership, including chairman Sovern and president William H. Gleysteen, Jr., and met Society staff and guests at a special reception.

As the Society neared its ninetieth anniversary in 1997, new officers came on the scene and endeavored to make its expanded programs reach an ever-broader segment of American society. Most notable was the retirement of Gleysteen in 1995 after seven years in the presidency. He was succeeded by Ambassador William Clark, Jr., who had served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo during the early 1980s and later as Principal Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Beginning its tenth decade with a new president and Gallery director, the Society added the position of Corporate Program director, which was filled by Daniel Rosenblum. During these years, as staff increased and the Society's lectures and films were frequently sold out, the annual budget and space again became concerns. In response, chairman Michael I. Sovern and president Clark focused on building up the Society's infrastructure and ultimately increased the endowment by 50 percent, reaching \$75 million by 2003. Clark, although taking the reins during a tense period in U.S.-Japan relations, saw the troubles between the two nations as an opportunity for the Society to re-emphasize its traditional role of educating Americans on Japan. He pushed for increased student programs to engage a younger generation, and saw an opportunity, as well, for the national network of Japan-America Societies to cooperate in addressing pressing questions.



*Shomyo and Bugaku Ho-e: Buddhist Ritual Chants and Ceremonial Music and Dance, with the Reverend Gensho Tani of Tendai Chants Research Society at center stage, part of the Society's ninetieth anniversary celebrations. Photo © William Irwin.*

Yet local concerns were paramount and necessitated major planning to ensure continuing viability of the organization's mission. Space issues were resolved when the second phase of the Society's expansion and renovation created a fifth floor of offices, in addition to updating and enlarging the Gallery. The project garnered support from Japanese and American contributors alike. The completion of the \$10.5 million construction begun in 1992 was celebrated at a December 1997 special reception attended by Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Takamado.

Another long-standing concern had been to gain advice on the Society's programs from the Japanese perspective. Michael Sovern and William Clark saw the ninetieth anniversary year as the moment to institutionalize a Japanese presence that would bear testament to the unique relationships the Society had formed in Japan over the previous decades. Thus, the Society formed a Tokyo-based Advisory Committee, headed by Shoichiro Toyoda, chairman of Toyota Motor Corporation and former chairman of Keidanren. The Advisory Committee quickly became a key venue to engage the Society's Japanese supporters more directly into the organization's planning.

These changes carried the Society into the new millennium. The strength of Japan Society and its

programs were clearly marked during the 2000-01 season. Two Gallery exhibitions, *Y E S Yoko Ono* and *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Art of Japan*, broke all attendance records for exhibitions, and the Yoko Ono show won the first place award for Best Museum Show Originating in New York City from the International Association of Art Critics. In addition, the Performing Arts Program received a five-year grant of \$1 million from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and support from members old and new resulted in over \$1 million being raised at the 2001 Annual Dinner, at which Nobuyuki Idei, chairman and CEO of Sony Corporation, presented the keynote address.



Construction in 1992 during the Society's \$10.5 million expansion. Photo © Jeff Nemeth.

With the Japanese economy finally beginning a turnaround after a decade of recession, interest in Japan began to recover and the future looked bright for the Society. The Society's professional staff had nearly doubled, to fifty-five persons from thirty-three, and its annual budget went from \$5 million per year to \$9 million, reflecting the breadth and reach of its programs. These fundamentals held even against the backdrop of the stock market collapse in 2000 and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

## **Orienting Toward the Future: 2002-07**

Japan Society has continually evolved during its history, even while maintaining its core mission of educating the American public about Japan and serving as a bridge between the two countries. In the short half-decade leading up to its centennial, it went through another period of intense change that reflected both organizational development and new trends in the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship.

The years after 2002 brought many transitions, laying the foundation for future endeavors as the Society moved toward its centennial and the years to follow. During 2002, Ruri Kawashima relocated to Japan and became the Society's Tokyo representative; with her departure, the component parts of the U.S.-Japan Program were reorganized. Kawashima remained director of Exchange Programs, supported by Betty Borden in New York, and the Local Government and Public Policy Fellowship program was discontinued, leaving the Media Fellows exchange as the main effort of the Society along these lines. Lecture Programs, part of the U.S.-Japan program since its beginnings, became an independent program under the leadership of Katherina Belting.

The following year, a major new division, Global Affairs, was created. Headed by Daniel Rosenblum, Global Affairs combined Corporate and Policy Programs and Fellowships and Exchanges. Policy Projects publications were also included in the new department, and later on, the Lecture and Education programs. Also in 2003, Alexandra Munroe assumed the leadership

of a consolidated Arts and Culture division, which included the Gallery, Performing Arts Program, and Film Center (as well as the Lecture Programs for a short period).

The year of changes was capped off by the appointment of a new president, as William Clark retired after seven years of heading the Society. In his place, Frank Ellsworth, former head of Pitzer College in California, stepped in to lead the ongoing efforts. Seven months later, in June 2004, chairman Michael Sovern stepped down and was replaced by Sir Deryck Maughan, chairman of the Executive Committee.

Programming during these years reflected changes in Japan's place in the world. Capitalizing on long-term themes that had influenced policy and arts offerings since the 1980s, the Society dedicated three months of the 2002-03 season to an in-depth exploration of Japan-Korea relations, entitled *Bridging Change in Asia: New York Looks to Korea and Japan*, co-organized with the Korea Society. At the center of the program was a major exhibition, *Transmitting the Forms of Divinity: Early Buddhist Art from Korea and Japan*, co-organized by Japan Society and The Korea Society, New York; Gyeongju National Museum (Korea) and Nara National Museum (Japan); and The Japan Foundation and The Korea Foundation. This "unprecedented tri-national collaboration," as the 2003 annual report put it, was praised by the *International Herald Tribune* for being a turning point in Western understanding of East Asian history. The two Societies also hosted lectures, conferences, performances, a film series, and courses for educators that explored the historical and contemporary depth and importance of the Japan-Korea relationship.

Corporate and Policy Programs followed the multilateral focus during the year, hosting a *Global Security Roundtable* in September 2002, just weeks after Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited the Society for a special invitation-only reception. In April 2003, the Society continued the "Bridging Change in Asia" theme by co-organizing *On the Brink: Japan, Korea, and the Future of Regional Security in Asia* along with the Korea Society. Leading policy makers, journalists, and academics gathered at the



Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi addresses guests at a special invitational reception in 2002. Photo © Ken Levinson.

one-day conference to discuss the latest trends in regional politics and to consider future paths of Asian cooperation.

This theme lasted throughout the year, and in November 2003, a major roundtable conference was held in Tokyo, entitled *Redefining Japan and the U.S.-Japan Alliance*. Co-sponsored with The Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership and The International House of Japan, the conference extended throughout the entire season, hosting public symposia in Tokyo and in New York, Washington, D.C., and California during the spring of 2004. In addition, a conference volume was issued, continuing the Society's tradition of annual publication of in-depth studies or highlights from leading corporate and policy programs.

The 2003–04 season was notable, as well, for being the fiftieth anniversary of the Society's

Performing Arts Program. The celebrations included a March 18 gala that was held in conjunction with two stagings of *Noh & Kyogen: Masters of Performance*. Three Living National Treasures were among the twenty-five most highly ranked noh and kyogen performers gracing the Lila Wallace Acheson Auditorium stage. As always, the performances were accompanied by general lectures, now part of the independent Lecture Programs.

Lecture Programs, headed by Katharina Belting, offered a diverse array of themes, from the two-day *Technology and Tradition in Contemporary Japanese Architecture* conference to "Edo and the Essence of Japanese Cuisine," along with "The United States and Japan: 150 Years of Transpacific History." Such lectures remained a central part of the Society's outreach to a broader public, as did the work of the Education Department.

Education highlights during this period included a sixty-hour in-house course for educators, entitled "Japanese History and Culture: Using Primary Sources in the Classroom," the ongoing Educators' Study Tour, and a two-week offering of *Theater, Art & Music of Japan* for students. Responding to new trends in educational pedagogy, the Society unveiled its first major digital learning effort, *Journey Through Japan*, in February 2004, an "open-access educational website dedicated exclusively to teaching about Japan." Through such innovative efforts, the Society was evolving along with the instruction methods that reached ever-wider segments of society.

One of the Society's most highly attended exhibitions was held in spring 2005. Named Best Museum Show in New York by the International Association of Art Critics, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* garnered international attention and broke records on catalogue sales. That season, the Society also hosted its first Arts and Culture Gala Benefit, entitled *IMAJINÉ 2005*, with awards going to Robert Wilson, Takashi Murakami, and Yoko Ono. Later that year, Alexandra Munroe left the Society, having headed the Gallery since 1998.

Perhaps the most far-reaching programmatic change in 2005 was the inauguration of the *U.S.-Japan Innovators Project*, a collaborative exchange

designed to initiate dialogue between emerging U.S. and Japan leaders in business, culture, and civil society. Headed by Daniel Rosenblum, the *Project* planned on taking an “alternative look” at major issues facing American and Japanese society in the twenty-first century, including issues of sustainability, new technologies, and cultural evolution. Meetings throughout the spring of 2005 in both Japan and the United States brought the first group of innovators together for wide-ranging discussions.

With major new projects under way, the Society seemed to be reorienting itself for its second century. New faces began to fill Society offices, and by its centenary, the Society employed sixty full-time staff and five part-timers. In 2005, Kendall Hubert became executive vice president, replacing John Wheeler, whose quarter-century tenure was one of the longest and most important in Society history. In May 2006, Education and Public Programs were brought together, including the Lecture Program, under the leadership of Robert Fish. The same year, Yoko Shioya became artistic director, combining her existing role as director of Performing Arts with that of the Film Program. At the Board level, James S. McDonald, CEO of Rockefeller and Co., became chairman, succeeding Sir Deryck Maughan, who remained active as a director. Finally, in the spring of 2006, Richard J. Wood, former chair of the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission, replaced Frank Ellsworth, and began to focus on the Society’s next 100 years.

Today, despite the rapid transitions of the past decade, the Society’s core mission remains unchanged from its founding 100 years ago. Back then, farsighted individuals from both Japan and America realized not only that their two countries would help shape the new century, but also that their futures were inextricably tied together. They knew that dinners and social gatherings were one way of forging better ties between their peoples, but very quickly they realized that their new organization could play a far more important role, one that brought an awareness of Japan to Americans in all walks of life, from students to art lovers.

Japan Society is one of the most successful private exchange organizations in the relatively



*The Earth Spider (Tsuchigumo)*, from a 2004 restaging at Japan Society of *The First Noh & Kyogen Program Witnessed by Americans*. Photo © William Irwin.



The Society’s building was wrapped in a special banner throughout the spring 2005 Gallery exhibition, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*. (Takashi Murakami. *Eco Eco Rangers Earth Force*. © 2005 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All rights reserved.). Photo © Ken Levinson.

short history of such endeavors. It has continuously responded to changing conditions, evolving its programs and remaining politically neutral, and therefore an honest broker in a relationship that is at once both intimate and sometimes contentious. As it has grown and taken on ever more ambitious projects, it remains, as former president William Clark notes, a place to “try out things” that are intellectually and culturally significant. It brings people together in forums that are both stimulating and yet social, and it remains convinced that better understanding is the path to a peaceful future. Guided by these beliefs, it remains a core part of the U.S.-Japan relationship and a model for all cultural exchange organizations.



Japan Society in 1971. Photo © Tadashi Endo.