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Press Coverage

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Japan's New Message to America: Alliance and self-support; Mountain of global-scale challenges to exchanges of talented people: Elites to be nurtured on grass-roots level

"New York is my hometown. Inuyama is my adopted home," said Bianchi Anthony in fluent Japanese, smiling in a friendly manner. The fifty-year old Anthony is a former vice chair of the Inuyama City Assembly in Aichi Prefecture. Inuyama is an old castle town with a population of 75,000.

When he was an English teacher at a municipal middle school in the city, he wrote a supplementary textbook so that Japanese and foreign teachers could cooperate more in helping students improve their English conversation ability. However, the school's administration was reluctant to adopt it, saying there was no precedent.

Bianchi, who once worked at New York City Hall, ran for a seat on the Inuyama city assembly in 2003. He was elected easily. He was able to have his supplementary textbook adopted in 2005. Middle schools in Inuyama achieved results 10 points higher than the national average in achievement tests conducted by a private organization in 2007.

Bianchi came to Inuyama on the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) program. Under that program, the government invites young foreigners who had graduated from universities in English-speaking countries to Japan for a year to work as assistant English teachers at local middle and high schools. The aim is to improve English education in Japan and bring an international perspective to local communities. The

program started in 1987. About 50,000 people from 54 countries have taken part in the program. More than half have been Americans.

When the program was started, trade disputes between Japan and the U.S. were at their peak. Executive Director Nobuo Ishihara of the Research Institute for Local Government, who proposed this plan when he was the chief of the Secretariat of the Internal Affairs Ministry, revealed that it was also intended to reduce Japan's foreign currency reserve.

The main agenda of Japan-U.S. relations during the Cold War were such bilateral issues as security arrangements and trade disputes. Participants in personnel exchanges at that time were mainly politicians and bureaucrats. The GARIOA (Government Appropriation for Relief in Occupied Areas) Fund and the Fulbright Program produced (eminent persons,) such as former Ambassador to the U.S. Yoshio Okawara and former Vice Finance Minister for International Financial Affairs Yukio Gyoten. Late former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Foley became regular participants in parliamentary exchanges, which the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) has been hosting since 1968.

Change came after the Cold War -- a time when the Japanese economy entered a stable growth phase and when China began to rise. The research report issued by the JCIE includes the following data. The number of U.S. Congress-related persons (legislators and staff members) who visited Japan on programs hosted by the private sector has been declining since the mid-1990s. For staffers, the flow of visits has dropped 80% over the past five years. Only nine U.S. members of Congress visited Japan in 2006. This number is less than half of those who visited China. Among think-tanks based in Washington, the number of Japan experts is now less than one-third the number of China experts.

Concern is mounting that exchanges among elites are declining. Global-scale challenges, such as environmental measures, have appeared in the 21st century. Broad-based private-sector cooperation that goes beyond the bilateral and government-to-government framework is being sought.

Director Sadaaki Numata of the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP) said: "Japan-U.S. relations will not deepen only through intellectual exchanges between elites of the two countries. Exchanges on the grass-roots and civic society levels are also important."

More than 20,000 Americans have come to Japan with the JET program. Some of them are now contributing to Japan's internationalization or engaging in diplomacy between the two countries. Marc Dillard (39) at the American Embassy in Tokyo wanted to become a diplomat when he realized Japanese and American people shared the same values. He thought he could work as a bridge between the two countries. Among diplomats at the American Embassy, about 20 of them have taken part in the JET program. Three of them are now serving as section heads.

Moves to use former JET participants are now under way. Yukio Tada, chairman of the CEPEX, who has lived in the U.S. for 15 years, is helping them find jobs at Japanese companies, setting up a non-governmental organization. The United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange will also look into a way to use former JET participants for bilateral cooperation in the private sector.

The late U.S. Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield, who served in the post from 1977 to 1989, once called relations between Japan and the U.S. the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none. Persons who will take a major role in the new bilateral alliance in the age of globalism will be nurtured on the grass-roots level, as well.

アメリカよ・新ニッポン論：第1部・同盟と自立／9

◆人材交流――地球規模の課題山積

◇エリートも草の根から

「ニューヨークは生まれ故郷。犬山はわしの選んだ故郷」人口7万5000人の古い城下町、愛知県犬山市の市議会前副議長、ビアンキ・アンソニーさん(50)は、流ちょうな日本語で人懐っこく笑った。元は同市立中学校の英語教師。日本人と外国人の教師がもっと協力し、生徒の英会話力を高めるために補助テキストを作ったが、学校側は「前例がない」と採用を渋った。

ニューヨーク市役所勤務の経験もあるビアンキさんは03年に市議選に出馬。トップ当選し、05年に補助テキスト導入を実現させた。同市の中学校は07年、民間学力テストで全国平均より10ポイント高い好成績を収めた。ビアンキさんが同市に住み着いたきっかけは、政府が外国人青年を招致するJET(Japan Exchange and Teaching)プログラム。英語教育の充実と地方の国際化のため、英語圏の大卒の若者を日本の地方の中・高校へ英語の補助教師として1年間派遣する。87年に始まり、54カ国からのべ約5万人が参加、米国人が半数以上を占める。

始まったころは日米貿易摩擦が真っ盛りだった。自治省の官房長で事業を提唱した石原信雄・地方自治研究機構理事長は「外貨減らしも結果としてあった」と明かす。冷戦期の日米関係は、日米安保、経済摩擦など2国間問題が主な焦点で、人の交流は政治家や官僚などエリート層が中心だった。代表的なガリオア、フルブライト留学制度は、大河原良雄元駐米大使や行天豊雄元大蔵省財務官らを輩出。日本国際交流センターが68年から行っていた議員交流では、故小渕恵三元首相やフォーリー元駐日米大使が常連だった。

変化が起きたのは冷戦後。日本経済が安定成長に入り、代わって中国が台頭しだしたところからだ。日本国際交流センターの07年調査報告書には、次のようなデータが並ぶ。

▽民間主催で来日した米議会関係者(議員とスタッフ)の数は90年代半ばをピークに減り続け、スタッフでは過去5年で8割も激減。06年に来日した米国議員は9人で、訪中した議員数(21人)の半分以下▽在ワシントンのシンクタンクで、日本専門家の数は中国専門家の3分の1程度。

エリート層の交流が細まっているとの懸念が高まっている。ただ、21世紀は環境対策など地球規模の課題が台頭した。2国間、政府間にとどまらない民間の幅広い協力が求められている。

「日米もエリート層の知的交流だけでは関係は深まらない。草の根、市民社会の交流も大切」(沼田貞昭国際交流基金日米センター所長)という時代になった。JETで滞日経験を持つ米国人は、全米に2万人以上。日本の国際化に貢献したり、日米外交に携わる人も生まれた。米国大使館のマーク・ディラードさん(39)は「JETを通じて日本人と米国人の価値観は同じだと知り、懸け橋の役割を果たせると思った」のが外交官を志した動機だ。同館の外交官のうち、約20人がJET経験者。課長も3人いる。

JETの人材活用の動きも始まっている。滞米15年の多田幸雄・双日ワシントン支店長は05年、NPOをつくり、日本企業などへの就職を支援している。日米文化教育交流会議も、JET経験者に注目し、民間分野での日米協力に活用する方法を検討する。

かつて「世界で最も重要な2国間関係」(故マンスフィールド駐日大使・在任77～89年)とも言われた日米。グローバル時代の新たな同盟を担う人材は、草の根でもはぐくまれていく。【吉永康朗】＝おわり

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