Finance, Trade and Development

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What name do you use—"Dokdo" or "Takeshima"? This is a question I am frequently asked by friends and colleagues who know I have spent a considerable amount of time living and working in both Japan and Korea.

To respond to such questions, I have to call on all of the "insider" knowledge I have of the two countries—not only their unique histories, but also how issues of this kind are viewed within their governments and their societies more broadly. As always, when a thorny issue of this sort arises, I immediately think back to my experience as a Mansfield Fellow navigating the sometimes difficult waters of cultural and other differences. I was in the very first class of the Mansfield Fellowship Program, but as this example illustrates, I continue to rely heavily on my Fellowship experience in my professional life even today.

When I was a Fellow, I was working at the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration. During my year in Japan, I spent most of my time at two agencies then known as the National Space Development Agency (NASDA) and the Science and Technology Agency (STA). There are many, many things that I learned and experienced during the Fellowship that made a strong and lasting impression on me. One of these involved the in-orbit malfunction of a Japanese scientific spacecraft that carried several U.S. instruments onboard. The United States has learned over the long span of its space program that space exploration is difficult and risky. Japan, however, had not yet experienced significant failures in its space program. It was rewarding for me to be able to work together with U.S. and Japanese space agency officials when a joint investigation was launched to ascertain the cause of the incident and make recommendations to ward off similar problems in the future. Further, this incident provided me with one of the many unique opportunities I had as a Fellow to witness firsthand the decision-making process within the Japanese government—to observe how different ministries and agencies interacted and to see how decisions were made and implemented. While many of these processes were similar to those of the U.S. and other governments around the world, I also observed several noteworthy differences. Understanding these has aided me in my interactions with government officials from Japan, Korea and elsewhere throughout my career.

Soon after I returned to the United States, I joined the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) and became a U.S. trade negotiator focused on Japan. When I made this move, I was well aware that USTR was not the most popular U.S. government agency in Japan, and it was not too many years earlier that I had heard Japanese trade negotiators liken their U.S. counterparts to Admiral Perry coming in on the "black ships." But one of the key reasons I decided to leave the friendlier field of U.S.-Japan space cooperation for the more problem-fraught area of trade negotiations was that I felt that my firsthand experience working within the Japanese bureaucracy as a Fellow gave me some unique insights that could help forge mutually acceptable solutions to difficult trade issues. I truly hope I succeeded in doing so! While I worked on Japanese issues at USTR, I led negotiations related to government procurement, insurance and autos. The latter subject was a particularly difficult one. I recall protracted discussions not only of the substance of the issues at hand, but even on where the two sides would meet, who would provide interpretation and what the scope of the discussions could and could not include. I did my best to ensure that, while the United States actively pursued its objectives, we took into account the concerns of our Japanese counterparts as well as the overriding importance of the U.S.-Japan relationship. And, at the end of the day, I believe were able to deal with these difficult issues in a productive way.

I am currently the President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Korea (AMCHAM Korea). AMCHAM Korea has about 2,000 individual members from over 800 companies, most of which are based in the United States. As the head of the American Chamber of Commerce in Korea, I am often asked to talk about my career path and in particular, what jobs I did that helped me to get to where I am today and what special skills/knowledge I have been able to cultivate over the years that have best enabled me to succeed at my job. I never fail to mention my time as a Mansfield Fellow.

One of my key functions in Korea is to work closely with our Korean counterparts in the public and private sectors to resolve issues that are inhibiting trade between our two countries—and to try to keep trade friction between the United States and Korea at a minimum. I believe that my Mansfield Fellowship experience has helped me bridge the gap of cultural and other differences between the United States and Korea in some of the same ways it helped me do so between the United States and Japan. Of course, Japan and Korea are very different. However, there are also some similarities. Having seen firsthand how the decision-making process works in Japan (and how it is different from that of the United States) has provided me with invaluable insight on how the U.S government and business community might more effectively forge partnerships and address difficult political and economic issues in Korea.

As someone who has dedicated her career to strengthening the United States' relationship with two of our most important Asian allies, I firmly believe that the United States has an even greater need than ever to cultivate leaders who have a deep and detailed understanding of Asia, especially Japan. There is no better way to do so than through the kind of hands-on experience that the Mansfield Fellowship provides.

Amy Jackson participated in the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program as a representative of NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) from 1995–1997. During her Fellowship year in Japan, she served in full-time placements in the National Space Development Agency of Japan, the Science and Technology Agency, and in the office of the Honorable Hidenao Nakagawa, LDP Member, House of Representatives. She currently is President of the American Chamber of Commerce, Korea.