

Remarks upon Receiving the Sun & Star Legacy Award

Delivered to the Japan-America Society of Dallas/Fort Worth



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The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Federal Reserve System.

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リチャード・フィシャーと申します。銀行に勤めています。¹

I hope I said that better than when our family arrived in Tokyo in 1990 and my son James promptly spoke his first Japanese words: 私の犬は鼻がとても長いです, which turned out to mean: “My dog has a very long snout.”

Domo. Thank you, Sylvia. Thank you, Curtis. Thank you all. Thank you for honoring me with the Sun & Star Legacy Award. I am most grateful to the Japan-America Society for this honor. I am especially honored to receive this award in the presence of Kamo-san, a fine representative of the government of Japan. And I am delighted to have witnessed the presentation of the Bridges to Friendship Award to my buddy, Ron Kirk.

Ron and I share two things in common. We both took leave of our better senses—or did not listen to our better *sensei*—and ran for the U.S. Senate. We joined a long line of others, Democrats and Republicans, who learned the meaning of the Latin phrase, *Veni, Vidi, Defici*: I came, I saw, I lost.

And much more important than all that, we both married smart, beautiful women. I am happy to see Ron here tonight. I am even happier to see Matrice, one of the best and brightest and most beautiful women on God’s green Earth. (Nancy is at a meeting in Boston tonight, so I can get away with that one.)

I love Japan.

In 1990, Nancy and I packed our bags and our four kids and, with the assistance of the Japan Society and the Nomura Research Institute, went off to live in Tokyo to learn more about the Land of the Rising Sun. We tackled it with full-bore enthusiasm, doing our best to be as Japanese—and as non-*gaijin*—as possible. We traveled everywhere, ate things most Americans wouldn’t want to know about, and drank a lot of sake and good Japanese beer.

We even worked on a rice farm and a pear farm. The Japanese farmer I worked for felt that bees “were too random,” so he had scores of women—and me—climbing ladders carrying bags of pollen, which we carefully brushed onto each blossom of every pear tree on his farm. It was quintessentially Japanese.

In preparation for that adventure, I read all the requisite literature then in vogue: Professor Reischauer’s works; books by Robert Whiting, particularly *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*; Murasaki Shikibu’s *The Tale of Genji*—the translated version, of course. I read Karel van

¹ “My name is Richard Fisher. I work for a bank.”

Wolferen's *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, Robert Christopher's *The Japanese Mind* and several Japanese novels, like *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* and Tanizaki's *Naomi*. My favorite was Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro*. Loosely translated, the word *kokoro* means "the heart of things."

Let me get to the heart of things; to why I love Japan.

The story of Japan reaffirms faith in the power of man- and womankind to regenerate, to overcome bad decisions or bad luck or outright defeat. If you know the history of Japan, you can't help but believe in resurrection. Robert Christopher, whom I just mentioned, arrived in Tokyo just a few days after General MacArthur accepted Japan's surrender on the decks of the *Missouri*. Here is what he wrote:

To speak of a sea of rubble is a cliché, but this is precisely how I recall...Tokyo. In those days, you could drive through Tokyo without seeing anything but undulating heaps of debris, a foot deep here, three feet deep there. In all this vast empty expanse, once home to hundreds of thousands of people, the only thing raising its head above the wreckage, the only thing vaguely reminiscent of human habitation, was an occasional burnt out safe—a forlorn reminder of the illusory prudence of some businessman or householder now as likely as not dead. It was the most melancholy and horrifying landscape imaginable.

Japan serves as a reminder that cynics and even the most highly regarded pundits and thoughtful prognosticators can be dead wrong when it comes to evaluating the spirit and resilience of mankind. After the war, the Western press assigned Japan to the dustbin of history.

My friends here know that I am a devotee of *The New York Times*. I read it every morning without fail—after reading *The Dallas Morning News*, of course—even though its motto "All the News That's Fit to Print" occasionally comes closer to "All the News That's Fit to Tint." Here is what a Sunday *New York Times* had to say about the Japanese economy in 1945: "It is not likely to expand sharply....The prospect [is for] a return to Japan's status as a small, self-contained nation."

How myopic they were. Despite the *Times*' prognostication, Japan became the second largest and most prosperous economy in the world, eventually impacting every consumer on the planet. Among its many accomplishments that affect our daily lives, Japan makes the finest automobiles the world has ever known (the guys here tonight from Toyota paid me to say that). Its culinary tradition is a favorite of the elites of all American and European capitals. Japan has given mind-boggling technologies to consumers around the world—although those ubiquitous household toilets that only a NASA scientist can operate have yet to make much of a splash on this side of the Pacific.

From the rubble, from the "melancholy and horrifying landscape" described by Robert Christopher, a great and important economic machine arose and a great and important culture was resurrected.

For these and many other reasons, Japan has been a source of constant fascination to me. After that first experience in 1990, I spent a great deal of time there. In 1998, I was assigned by the

president of the United States to cochair the U.S.–Japan Enhanced Initiative on Deregulation and Competition Policy, which he and Prime Minister Hashimoto had cooked up and which met countless times and allowed me to deepen my understanding of Japan and the Japanese.

The one thing that is so engrossing about Japan is that the more you experience it, the less you know about it. Every time I began to think I had it figured out, I'd realize that I was only just beginning to understand it.

Let me share with you a metaphorical incident that puts it all in perspective.

As Curtis mentioned, in the spring of 1990, our son Anders, then 13, became the second non-Japanese boy in history to play in the Tokyo Senior Boys Baseball League, on a team named the Minato Moose, so that he could learn the meaning of *wa*, or team spirit.

In Texas, he was considered a fine ballplayer. But in Tokyo, where junior high and high school boys throw 90-mile-per-hour fastballs like clockwork and the pro teams begin recruiting 13-year-olds, he had to work himself almost to death to make the team.

He came home one night from tryouts at around 10 o'clock. Having passed what was known as the “thousand grounder test”—an infield drill where you field grounders until either you have caught what seems a thousand of them or your hands bleed or swell up so as to be useless—he had made the team. He had his league patch, his number and two Japanese characters that were to be sewn on his uniform before he went off to play a game at 8 o'clock the next morning in Yokohama. He proudly handed them to us and fell onto his *tatami* mat, asleep within seconds.

Well, at 10 at night, Nancy and I had no choice but to sew the patches on ourselves. We borrowed a needle from a kindly neighbor, but she didn't have any thread that matched Anders' uniform. So I spent the entire night painstakingly pulling thread out of a dress of Nancy's that was the same color, while she sewed the patch, the numeral and, most importantly, the two characters that stood for Minato Moose on the front of his uniform.

When Anders awoke, we proudly presented him with his uniform, gave him his *obento* box—full, incidentally, of peanut butter sandwiches that Nancy had exquisitely sculpted to resemble the sushi pieces his teammates had in their *obento* boxes, it being hard for an American boy to eat squid during a baseball game—and sent him off to the team bus headed for his first ballgame as a member of the Minato Moose.

That night, at the appointed hour, the door to our apartment flung open, Anders walked in, threw his glove down and burst into tears. Before we could say “How did it go, son?” he looked at us in horror and said, “Mom, Dad: You sewed the characters on upside down.”

Over the past 17 years, my family and I have tried hard to develop an understanding of Japan. I admire the country. I love Japanese culture. I have the greatest respect for the Japanese people. Tonight you have made me very proud to be recognized for trying to do so, even if I occasionally get things upside down.

Domo arigato gozaimasu. Thank you so much.