

The 9th U.S.-Japan Youth Forum

Post Forum Report

12.12.2013



Comments by the Moderator and the MC



Moderator: Nobuhiro Morita

Junior Student at Keio University in Japan, majoring in Law

Japanese Executive Committee Member for the 65th Japan-America Student Conference

It was a great honor for me to take part in the Youth Forum in two consecutive years. Last year as a panelist from Japan I learned the difficulty of representing one country knowing that different values and opinions exist within the nation. This year as a moderator the challenge was even larger. I had to pull six different opinions together and lead them to a constructive discussion. However as is often said, larger the challenge, larger the joy of success. It was a pleasure working with the wonderful panelists with various backgrounds. The panelists did a fabulous job indeed, however the forum would not have been as successful as it was without the energy coming from the audience. One of the main goal of this forum is to create a platform for the students, for the professionals and for everyone to share their ideas and to raise questions on different social issues and above was well performed by the floor of this year's forum. I thank you for your participation and hope that you were able to bring something back to your own community and keep on tackling the issues that were raised during the forum.

I thank all the members of the executive committee for all the efforts they have put to create this forum. I sincerely hope to see you again at the next year's forum marking its tenth anniversary.

Comments by the Panelists



He Tingshan , *Singapore*

Masters Student at the National University of Singapore, majoring in Japanese Studies

Presentation Summary

Looking at various economic indicators, Singapore seems like an affluent nation on the surface. It is also seen as a wealthy nation in a region of developing countries. However, a closer look suggests that things are not as rosy as they seem - there is a growing income gap amid rising cost of living. A lack of an official measurement of poverty hampers efforts to judge the actual severity of the issue, but a range of indicators seem to suggest that a worrying proportion of residents are not earning enough to cover the cost of basic needs. The situation faced by other Southeast Asian countries is different in that their economies are experiencing a shift from agriculture and natural resources to industry and commerce, and these economic benefits are unevenly distributed in favour of the higher-income groups due to problems such as low levels of education and a reliance on foreign capital. There is also intra-regional disparity in the form of low-wage migrant flows between countries. Inequality and disparity can also be examined in ways other than economic figures, such as social capital, social integration, and personal well-being. The first step towards tackling wealth disparity is raising awareness of the problem among the general population. A rethinking of the education system is also integral to eradicating elitism, and Singaporeans need to reflect on the nature of our society and realise the importance of not only pursuing economic growth at the expense of the well-being of fellow residents.

Post-forum Comment

I feel most honoured to have been given the opportunity to attend the Youth Forum as a panelist. I learned a lot from my fellow panelists, who were from a diverse range of countries and were able to contribute a host of perspectives that were new and fresh to me on the topic. The issue of wealth disparity is one that Singapore is grappling with, and I believe, one of grave importance as it has real and painful consequences for individuals. Hence, the opportunity presented by the Youth Forum to discuss and reflect on the problem has been timely and pertinent. While the situations faced by different countries may vary, we can all learn from and help each other to improve the well-being of our fellow human beings. The discussions and debates between the panelists, as well as with members of the audience were stimulating and provided me with new insights to the issues at hand. The environment of a live discussion panel provided by the Forum pushed and prompted me to think of fresh angles to consider the issue from, and triggered new ideas and insights. For this rewarding experience, I am very grateful. I was also greatly inspired by the speeches by H.I.H. Princess Takamado and Professor Horvat. I would like to thank all the organisers who worked hard to make the Youth Forum a success, as well as the moderator, fellow panelists, and all guests who made the Forum such an enjoyable and fruitful experience. Thank you very much!



Yugo Kimura, *Japan*

Sophomore at Waseda University in Japan majoring in global political economy

Vice Chair for the 66th Japan-America Student Conference

Presentation Summary

Japan, once a country that believed the whole population had reached the middle class (“The One Hundred Million Middleclass” or 一億総中流) has now become a country riddled with inequality. Looking at the income gap, government statistics support the inconvenient truth that there is a widening wealth gap. Comparing with the world, Japan ranks 6th in relative income poverty- there is now no denying that wealth disparity is significant in Japan.

The crucial point then becomes whether this situation is something we should try and alleviate, or something that is merely the course of the nature of markets. Is a widening wealth gap just a problem of self-responsibility?

Looking into individual cases, it soon becomes clear that it is highly arrogant to cast blame unto those poor people who have been marginalized by the widening wealth gap. The truth is there is a lack of social mobility so if one is born into a poor family, you end up poor yourself. Usually these people are caught in a viscous cycle where overwork in order to maintain a living, leads them to depression and other illnesses so they become unable to work. So even though one is eager to work, they are unable to because they have worked too much. Rather than pointing the finger at the individual, is it not the fault of the government to not be able to free these people from this death trap.

If we look around us, poverty and the consequences of a widening wealth gap lurks everywhere. This problem not only affects the poor, but it affects everyone. One trip up and you may be the one caught in the trap.

Post-forum Comment

Although I had studied areas of this topic, thanks to this forum, I was motivated to study even further. I also appreciated that the forum gave us students a chance to voice out towards society. However childish our ideas and opinions may be, I believe it important for students to join debates and discussions to think about how to make a better society.

Taking back the comments that I received, I plan to study in order to actualize my thoughts and also research in the field rather than discussing based on general and vague knowledge.

I thank all that contributed to making this wonderful event and fellow panelists that enriched the discussion. I also show my gratitude to all that came that night, and I promise you that the 10th Youth Forum will be as amazing, so I urge you to keep your eyes out for information to come.



Salim Jakir Hossain , *Bangladesh*

Graduate school of Economics at Aoyama Gakuin University

Presentation summary

The discussion about “Wealth disparity and the future we foresee” is very controversial issue in south Asia. From the prospective of Bangladesh there are a lot of reasons. For example, natural disaster, fast growing population rate, poor infrastructure, political instability, corruption and insufficient power supplies are main reasons for this poverty. Although, it has very glorious past. Historically Bangladesh was a part of Bengal, the eastern province of an undivided India which was ruled by the British and Mughal Empires. And, it was very attractive place for all kinds of business in that time. However, microfinance and Grameen bank can be good solution to solve this problem. Beside this, proper infrastructure, political stability, women empowerment, stability of law and order system also basic requirements to solve this problem.

Post Forum Comment

When I received mail from Aoyama international exchange centre about U.S Japan youth forum, I was very surprise. As I have no idea about this event, so I was very confused to participate or not to this event. But, my confusion did not continue for long time when I participate the forum. Rather, I was very happy, everything was perfectly organized and everyone was so cordial that I was really surprised. This year there were six members in panelists from six different countries around the world. Although, we stay together for short time but work like family members in one indifferent topic. “Wealth disparity and the future we foresee “was the topic of this year. From this forum I gather a lot of new experience and idea about this topic from different perspectives of different world. I think this is one of the great achievements and successes of this forum.

In the end, I must say it was really a wonderful journey in my life. Thank you very much from my bottom of heart who organize this amazing event.



Zhang Chenrong, *China*

*Double Degree Master Candidate at Fudan University in China,
majoring in International Relations*

Currently studying at Keio University in Japan majoring in Media and Governance,

Presentation Summary

China is in the East Asia and Pacific Region and it is the biggest developing country in the world. According to the data from the WB, China's population is 1.351 billion. Its GDP is \$8.358 trillion and GNI per capita is \$5,680. As a result, according to the standard line of WB, China belong to the upper middle income state.

Despite being the largest exporter for world's demands, China is still far from being a developed country. The country is plagued by many problems and one of the most pressing issues is the increasing income disparity between different groups of citizens.

There are approximately 150 million people in China who are living below the United Nations poverty line of 1 US dollar per day. A Gini coefficient of 0.474 as recorded in 2012 also suggests that China has a relatively high inequality population. The average urban to rural household per capita income ratio is 3.1 times in year 2011.

There are several reasons of China's wealth disparity, such as increasing rural-urban migration, monopolized industries and illegal income, like corruption.

In order to deal with the wealth disparity, Chinese government has taken lots of measures to solve it. These measures including payroll tax, consumption tax, raise the minimum wage, raise the level of national health insurance and other social welfare system. And the most important is to raise the farmers' income.

Because China has huge farmer population, and if Chinese government can deal with it, it can narrow the income gap between the urban and rural area.

Post-forum Comment

It was an honor to be the panelist for the 9th U.S.-Japan Youth Forum. The U.S.-Japan Youth Forum is a great opportunity for young students from all around the world to know each other and share their opinions. We discussed the issue of “Wealth Disparity” from various perspectives, and I believe everyone in the audience as well as on the rostrum left the evening with a broader understanding of the discussed subject matter. We have recognized wealth disparity exist in many nations. Because the panelist from six different countries with various cultural backgrounds, we have different idea of how to define the poverty line and how to deal with the wealth disparity. But we all agree that we should make the society become more equally.

Through the Youth Forum I was able to broaden my network as I met many internationally-minded people at the dinner party. And I am sure that this unique experience has created a somewhat special bond between the panelists and the organizing team.

I would like to show my greatest gratitude for all those that made this year’s youth forum possible, especially for H.I.H Princess Takamado for joining us and enlightening us with a very inspiring speech after the discussion. I sincerely hope that, with young students from different countries, the Youth Forum will continue to serve as a platform for the youths to convey their opinions to the world and increase the communication between the young generations.



Nicholas Hall *The United Kingdom*

University of Cambridge B.A. (Law), M.Phil. (Criminology);

University of Santa Clara, Cuba, Masters (Psychology) scholar

Currently studying Japanese and working in Tokyo as a Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation Scholar

Presentation Summary

In Britain we take pride from living in a fair country. We believe that everyone should be given a chance in life to prosper through skill and hard work whether as a care worker shop assistant or civil servant or company boss. However, is Britain as fair as it seems to be? How is wealth distributed in Britain today?

Imagine the total wealth of the UK is 100 pounds; now imagine a group of people represent the population. A new ICM pole asked 2000 British people how this wealth should be distributed. The result tells us that we think it is right that some people have more wealth than others. In a really fair Britain we say the richest group have 25% of all the wealth while the poorest group would have about 15. In our ideal world some people will always have more than others but we know we don't live in an ideal world.

The next pole asked how we really think the wealth is distributed and we saw that the richest 20% have 60% of all the wealth. We can now see that Britain is now such a really fair country after all.

Post Forum Comment

My participation in the Youth Forum conference was a rewarding and interesting experience. I felt that through my involvement as a panellist I was able to sharpen many of the skills which are necessary for both my personal and professional development. It also provided me with the opportunity to gain

knowledge on an important issue of UK and international society: wealthy disparity and the future we foresee.

Since I desire to become a barrister at the Bar of England and Wales, the experience of giving a presentation to a large audience, thinking on my feet, and responding to questions eloquently was extremely worthwhile. It also gave me the opportunity to practice my legal and sociological research skills on a complex and provocative issue.

Furthermore, the conference itself was extremely enjoyable and provided a great opportunity to meet a variety of young and old(er) people from different backgrounds. On a more personal note, I wish to thank everyone involved in the organisation of this year's conference. It was extremely professional and ran very smoothly. It also gave me the welcome opportunity to challenge the perception of British fairness. Well done!



Madison Mears *The United States of America*

Junior student majoring in Japanese with a minor in teaching English as a second language at the University of Wisconsin - Madison,

Currently studying in Japan at Keio University

Presentation Summary

As demonstrated in all the presentations during the Youth Forum, wealth disparity is a big problem in many countries around the world; however, the severity of wealth disparity in a nation may not be known by its citizens—this is what my presentation focused on. A study done by a professor at Harvard compared the true disparity of wealth with a group of Americans' ideal wealth disparity and what they thought wealth disparity looked like. What they found was that these Americans underestimated how uneven wealth was distributed in the United States. It is because of this survey that I focused on statistics within the United States and how wealth disparity effects the population. It is necessary that the people of a nation educate themselves on the facts of wealth disparity in order to contact representatives and hopefully see change.

Post-forum Comment

I am very thankful for the opportunity to participate in the Youth Forum. When presented with the topic of wealth disparity, I was unsure about what I would present about, as my studies do not focus on economics or politics. However, because of this, I was able to expand my knowledge about what wealth disparity was like in not only my own country, but also other countries around the world. I was very happy to learn more about a topic I had previously only briefly covered. Through this process I was able to interact with some old friends and meet a lot of great people. I am very glad I was able to present in this year's youth forum.

The Executive Committee Members

Chair: Kaoruko Kobayashi

Mina Yoshiya

Makoto Kawaguchi

Nobuhiro Morita

Marie Kanke

Azusa Shiohara



Youth Forum JAPAN