

Dean's Lecture Series

Japan and the World



Kenichiro Sasae

Ambassador of Japan to the United States

February 18, 2014

Merit E. Janow, dean of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), welcomed Kenichiro Sasae, Japan's ambassador to the United States, for a stimulating lecture and conversation on "Japan and the World." The February 18 event, part of the Dean's Lecture Series, was cosponsored by SIPA, the APEC Study Center, and Columbia Business School's Center on Japanese Economy and Business.

Introducing the ambassador, Dean Janow noted his illustrious career in government service, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and various Japanese embassies abroad to his appointment as ambassador to the United States in November 2012, and recalled their work together in the 1990s while she was deputy assistant U.S. trade representative for Japan and China.



Merit E. Janow

Ambassador Sasae began his talk by describing the difficulties regarding trade and investment issues between the United States and Japan during the 1990s. The United States was at the tail end of the Cold War, and its economy was not doing well. Meanwhile, the Japanese economy was very strong—

though in retrospect Ambassador Sasae believed this perception was misleading, as evidenced by the subsequent two decades of stagnation.

Ambassador Sasae recalled that President Clinton wanted Japan to open up its markets, which created tensions between Tokyo and Washington, primarily on the issues of trade and automobiles. Both issues remain sticking points in U.S.-Japan trade today and are currently being debated in the context of the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Ambassador Sasae stated that, on the whole, trade and economic relations between the United States and Japan have matured and stabilized.



Kenichiro Sasae, Merit E. Janow

Relatedly, Ambassador Sasae addressed “Abenomics,” the economic policies of current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Japan has had positive economic growth for consecutive quarters, a rare event. Ambassador Sasae sees the future of Abenomics as a move toward a more flexible market, which is what the economy needs.

Commenting further on the TPP, he stated that the prime minister is heralding the pact as an important strategic tool to galvanize growth and a more robust foreign policy. Once reluctant to join the TPP, Japan is now actively engaged. The TPP will be the leading exercise to show the world that there are new rules that govern trade, Sasae said. He added that public support in the United States and member countries is key to maintaining momentum for the TPP’s passage. The TPP is strategically important as a means to ensure an American presence in the Asia-Pacific.

Ambassador Sasae asserted that including China within the context of TPP would encourage its leadership to be more transparent. With this kind of economic partnership, mutual trust would follow and aid in security and political partnerships.

