

# **JAPAN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

Speech by Ambassador Yasuhisa Kawamura

University of British Columbia, Vancouver  
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It is my great pleasure to address this important workshop with a stimulating title. Allow me to express my wholehearted appreciation to Professor Yves Tiberghien for his leadership and efforts to make this event possible. My thanks also go to the UBC executive and staff for their excellent arrangement and warm hospitality, and to the renowned and promising scholars and practitioners who have gathered for this conference, some all the way from Japan and the United States.

It is a very fortunate and gratifying thing for a Japanese Ambassador to see an event titled “Japan’s Leadership in the Liberal International Order” convened by one of the top universities in Canada. In Japan, modesty is of the utmost virtue, but I won’t challenge the title, but rather straightforwardly say that I am proud of the achievement of Japan’s diplomacy in recent years. Certainly, it has limitations and not everything is a success, but we have tried, and in some areas, I believe we could lead the international community for greater common good.

Prime Minister ABE Shinzo talked about “new Japanese” in his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2014. He said the “new Japanese” are those “who have lost none of the good qualities of the Japanese of days gone by,” “who are determined ultimately to take on the peace, order, and stability of this region as their own responsibility,” and “who possess the drive to shoulder the responsibilities of peace and order in the Asia-Pacific region, working together with our regional partners with whom we share the values of human rights and freedom.”

I think what we are trying to do is to conduct the diplomacy of the “new Japanese.” It might be premature to say that we have achieved something, but we are laying a foundation and we will continue this endeavour.

So, why has Japan’s endeavour attracted attention? First and foremost, it should be attributed to the stable government and steady economy. In this age of rapid changes and great uncertainty, particularly in liberal democracies, the consistent and proactive policies of ABE’s government have gained traction.

Prime Minister ABE has established strong personal relationships with both President Obama and President Trump. The robust Japan-U.S. Alliance underpins ABE’s Proactive Contribution to Peace. At the same time, ABE is a trusted friend of Prime Minister Modi and many other long-serving leaders in the Indo-Pacific, and on close speaking terms with President Putin and President Xi Jinping.

Secondly, I think that Japan’s geographical, historical, and strategic positioning has enabled us to offer some lessons and suggestions to the international community. Some people argue that we all are in the middle of major power competitions, and Japan is on the front line. Many countries are watching closely how Japan copes with the new reality.

Thirdly, I think Japan in recent years has succeeded in launching timely initiatives and delivering opportune messages. When major countries don’t talk much about ideas and values in their

foreign policies, Japan has been consistent in emphasizing the importance of ideas and values in our foreign policy conduct. The title of ABE's keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue I mentioned earlier was "Japan for the rule of law. Asia for the rule of law. And the rule of law for all of us."

The FOIP, Free and Open Indo-Pacific, was also timely, although we don't claim that Japan has exclusive copyright. The TPP-11, or CPTPP, is another example. Japan was the last one to join the negotiation, but when the TPP was about to be set adrift, we could show leadership, in light of the significant strategic value of this high-standard trade agreement.

Now I would also like to talk about Canada, and the value of the Japan-Canada Strategic Partnership. As you all are aware, Canada is also one of the stabilizing forces among liberal democracies. The Economist calls you the last "liberal beacon." However you feel or the Globe and Mail writes, other countries envy Canada's political and social stability, solid economy, and safe streets.

Canadians tend to call themselves a middle power, but this is a huge country with abundant resources and advanced technology. Diversity in Canadian society as a source of energy and dynamism will be a role model for the international community in the decades to come.

I believe Canada and Japan have a lot in common. Not only do we share liberal democratic values and a liking for "Anne of Green Gables" and sushi, but we are on the same boat in this unpredictable world, aligning with the United States, managing complicated relationships with China, and fighting shoulder-to-shoulder against North Korea's nuclear ambition. President Obama said, "the world needs more Canada." I said, "the Indo-Pacific needs more Canada" at the FOIP Conference earlier. Together we, Japan and Canada, can do more good for the world.

Now I conclude my speech by submitting a thesis for this workshop: "the Japan-Canada Strategic Partnership is certainty in the age of uncertainty." I know this workshop is primarily about Japan, but I hope you will also discuss extensively how Japan and Canada, or in some cases Japan-Canada-U.S. trilaterally, can work together on global governance or regional rules-based order.

For my part, I will take advantage of the current positive momentum and do my utmost to deepen our partnership with Canada, because I am convinced this relationship is something we can trust and rely on in this rapidly changing world.

Thank you for your attention.