

# Reflections from Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations Study Tour of Japan

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THE UEHIRO FOUNDATION ON ETHICS AND EDUCATION

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## Foreword

by Joel Rosenthal, President, Carnegie Council



# Tall oaks *from* little acorns grow.



*Andrew Carnegie*

In early November 2025, I was privileged to lead the first study tour sponsored by the newly established [Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations](#). With the help of Carnegie Council staff, a delegation of eight participants was assembled for this historic event.

The itinerary was designed and managed by the excellent staff of the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education in Tokyo. Meetings were arranged with members of the Uehiro network in Japan, including scholars, university leaders, think tank partners, and civil society leaders. Stops included Tokyo, Sendai, Kyoto, and Hiroshima.

The Uehiro Foundation and Carnegie Council share the same mission. Dr. Noboru Maruyama, director-general of the Uehiro Foundation, opened the program emphasizing this point, noting the shared commitment of both organizations to the principles of pluralism and peace.

The founders of the Uehiro Foundation and Carnegie Council believed deeply in the same idea: the power of ethics and education to build a better world. Tetsuhiko Uehiro and Andrew Carnegie saw war. And they imagined peace. They had seen ignorance and hatred. And they resolved to answer with reason and virtue.

Eighty years after World War II, we see the world retreating from international peace and cooperation. We see the weakening of once strong commitments to democracy and human rights.

This program was created as our response. It reaffirmed our founders' principles. And it expressed a vote of faith in the next generation to keep working for a more peaceful and just world just as the founders would have wanted.

Themes for discussion ranged widely, including Ethics in Public Policy; Disaster Response and Recovery; Bioethics; Humanity and the Environment; Ethics in Artificial Intelligence; Memory-Keeping; and Leadership Lessons in International Cooperation, Peace, and Democracy.

The venues also ranged widely including seminar rooms, laboratories, temples, museums, and monuments. We also experienced the bullet trains and exquisite Japanese cuisine. Of course, nothing was more vital than meeting dynamic policy leaders, academic leaders, researchers, professors, students, and members of civic groups.

Before leaving New York, two delegates asked me the same question: What would success look like from the week-long visit?



Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations Study Tour Delegation in Shibuya Scramble Crossing.

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I offered three ideas, suggesting that after this visit:

- There will be important relationships to build upon.
- This group will help the Uehiro Foundation and Carnegie Council select the most promising and impactful themes for development.
- Our delegates will be well-positioned to advise on how to structure the program, and which tools might work best (study tours, fellowships, exchanges, virtual meetings, etc.) as we think creatively and boldly about how to build a program that will have generational and transformative impact.

This study tour succeeded in all three areas, and we are now poised to build a robust network and curriculum promoting ethics and leadership on a global scale.

In reading the following essays from our participants, I noticed several common themes emerging.

- **Renewal:** This is not a time for complacency or exhaustion. It is time for renewal. From the new International Research Institute of Disaster Science in Sendai to the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Kyoto, to the newly established GRIPS program in Tokyo, scholarly innovation and global cooperative ventures are on the rise.
- **History:** Memory-keeping is critical as the post-World War II generation has left the scene, but the scars of war remain relevant and present in contemporary society. It is up to the next generation to determine the meaning of past experience such as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and how it should guide the future.
- **Culture as Virtue:** Encountering traditional Japanese culture opens an entirely new perspective on contemporary issues. On this tour, we received new insights on the natural world, Eastern philosophy, and bioethics, in particular.
- **Interdependence:** The issues we face today—from climate to economics to security—are global in scale. International cooperation is not only pragmatic, but also a moral imperative.

It is my hope that this report gives the reader a sense of the wonder and excitement of our time in Japan. I trust it also conveys the possibilities of a truly transformative program for next-generation leadership. We are just getting started.

# A New Zen

by Samantha Brahms, Trustee, Carnegie Council



My introduction to Japan through Carnegie Council and the Uehiro Foundation in November of 2025 had many challenging and enlightening moments.

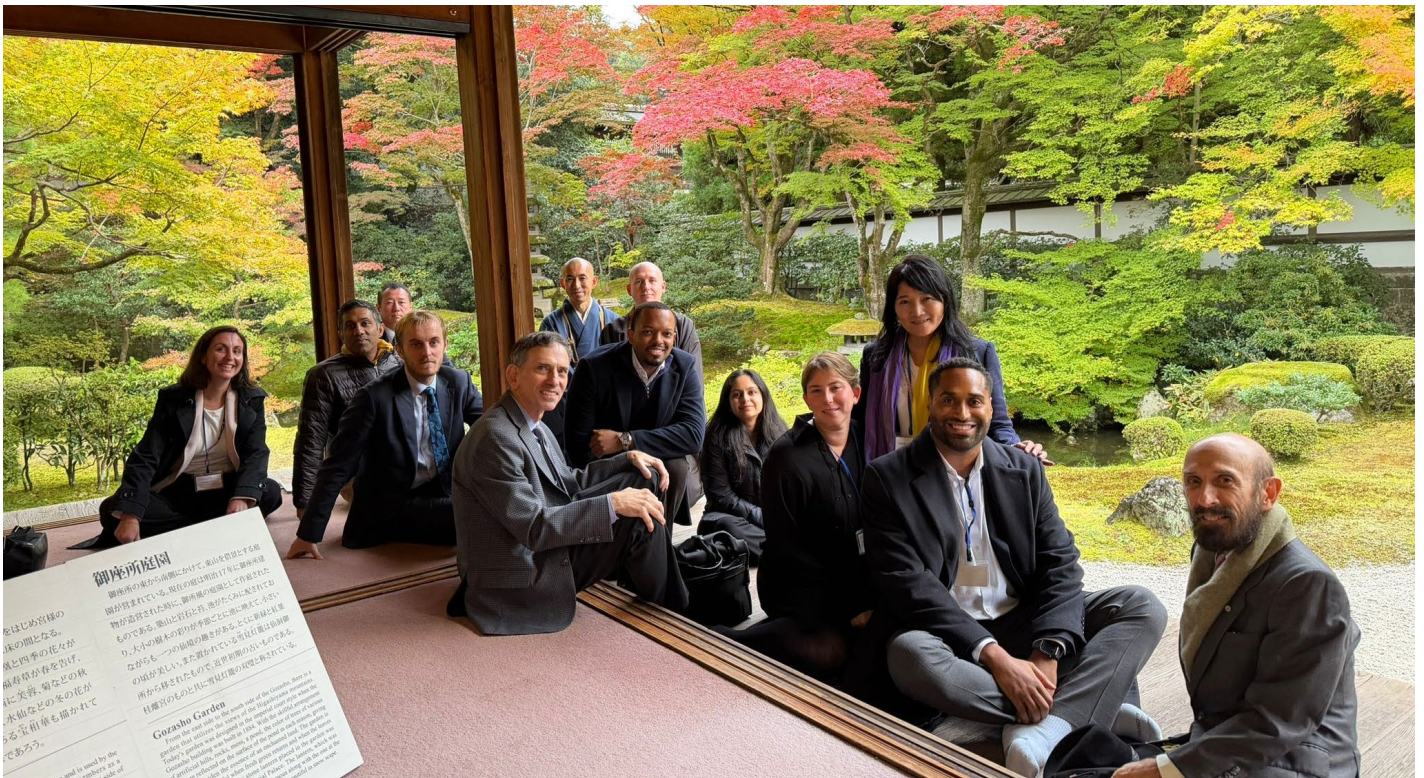
I grew up in a household where service for others was a part of daily life. It was tied to the concepts of the American Dream, values, legacy, and the hot topic words of “morals and ethics.”

With gratitude for what one has in life comes the responsibility to give back to the world around you—this was part of the household thinking.

Similar to the thought that one has to experience a world of pain, loss, and sorrow to appreciate the smallest measure of joy and happiness—the two halves of the coin are intertwined and provide context for the other. A Zen of sorts.

The Uehiro Foundation and Japan changed my context and therefore changed my Zen. Japan asked me to challenge the multi-facets around: values, ethics, and partnership in its distinctly meditative and respectful way. I had not imagined a legacy that lived beyond my grandparents’, parents’, mine, and my children’s generations before Japan. Not because I did not hope or realize that there were those who came before us and those who would come long after. I just felt that touching one person’s life during my own was enough. Japan questioned that thinking.

Tokyu Corporation and its work at Shibuya Scramble Crossing proposes a plan spanning 100 years before completion. Asking us to imagine what it is like to touch the lives of those not yet even a thought in existence, but who will experience a space, a transport



Visit to imperial garden in Kyoto.



Visit to Center for iPS Cell Research and Application, Kyoto University.

system, an ecosystem, a “crossing,” that is being built with them in mind; a legacy that will come to existence post a chairman of the board being alive to see it—his children being alive to see it—and perhaps even their children. Is that what it means to dream in Japan? Is that what it means to have a legacy? To create and work on something that no one will remember you for because it is so many years in the future . . . something that requires partnerships spanning lifetimes while working to provide solutions to problems that have not yet been experienced?

In Sendai, the Uehiro Foundation introduced us to scientists and researchers who use the experiences of the past to “try” and make the world better for the future. We met with several partners on the trip who aim to do such work (GRIPS, iPS Cell Research Center, the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature). What does it mean to try? How do we each define “better” and what does success look like?

Ambassador Ryoza Kato further complicated those questions by asking us to think about what “partnership” means within this work.

Each organization provided a different answer: Partnership is sometimes about doing the work even when the others are NOT at the table with you. For example: Newton’s law will not become less true regarding equal and opposite reactions of an earthquake or tsunami impact on Sendai’s shores and California’s or Hawaii’s just because the U.S. might not research with you or the funding might not be there yet.

The value of cell research does not diminish just because one partner does not understand it. And the legacy of work within nature to combat the climate crisis does not become diminished just because one nation defines it differently than another.

Japan asked me to sit in an imperial temple, looking out at a perfectly pristine imperial garden and question how I want to redefine these terms, the work we do, and the world in which we want to live. I do not think my definitions before Japan were wrong. I guess one might argue that even though I did not think they set boundaries on my work, my legacy, my values, or my partnerships . . . my pre-Japan definitions did.

Japan helped me realize that for as long as I can remember, I shied away from what was a dirty word in my mind: “leader.” I saw leaders in America and across the globe as being egocentric, manipulative, having an agenda. I felt they provided negative connotations to words that I grew up valuing: service, give-back, values, morals, and especially . . . ethics.

Andrew Carnegie once said: “As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do.” Japan showed me how one nation is trying to do quite a bit. It showed me with its actions that we are far from perfect when it comes to “trying to make the world a better place,” but we have to try. It showed me that we have to embrace the inner “leaders” in each of us . . . because we all have an opportunity to go out into the world and be one. Dare I be so bold in saying it—perhaps an obligation to give back to society by doing so in our own ways. And, it is only through action that there can be change. As Hiroshima reminded me: “Be the change you want to see in the world.” It is on each of us to create and maintain the partnerships we hope to have in this world; to do the work we hope to achieve in this world; and maybe, just maybe—leave a legacy that we never dreamed about and we will never live to see.

So, I left Japan with a new Zen, informed by new challenges, perfect moments, and a deeper appreciation for ethics in my life and beyond.

# The Kyoto Experience: Reflections on Humanity and Nature

by Priya Chokshi, Associate Editor, Carnegie Council's journal, *Ethics & International Affairs*



There exists a complex, deeply interwoven relationship between nature and humanity that is often overlooked in our everyday, but is fundamental to how we live life. In many ways, this relationship should be intuitive: Humans rely on nature for survival—for clean air and water; energy; food resources; medicine; and general well-being. On the flip side, human activities have a significant impact on nature, disrupting ecosystems and natural habitats and altering the Earth's atmosphere. The human impact has, in many ways, been

driven by a sense of perceived power over nature, as a resource to control. This lack of regard has long-term consequences: Extreme weather events have become more commonplace, survival rates have lowered for many species of plants and animals, and an increasing number of people have become displaced from their homes. Addressing the climate crisis requires, in my mind, a fundamental rethinking of humanity's relationship with nature and working toward a more balanced relationship between the two.



Visit to Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Kyoto.

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At the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN) in Kyoto, we learned about the organization's transdisciplinary approach (integrating the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences) to solving global environmental problems, working with local communities in several countries on environmental projects, including water conservation, sustainable food consumption, innovative agricultural land use, and restoration of clean air. At the time of our visit, 45 research projects had been completed and seven were ongoing. The Institute's research is based on the idea that "human culture—beliefs, values, and actions—are at the root of contemporary global environmental problems." The conversation at RIHN centered around the interaction between humans and nature, and the importance of creating an integrated ecosystem that does not divide the two. We discussed the philosophy underpinning this approach: the Japanese traditions and philosophies that view nature and humans as co-existing and in harmony rather than as separate beings. Embedded in this thinking is a deep respect for nature and a recognition of its intrinsic value, rather than simply its utility.

Our visit to the Sokujo-in Buddhist Temple in Kyoto allowed for further reflection on this relationship. As we walked through the Temple and learned about the history and teachings of Buddhism, I found myself thinking about my own understanding of my relationship with nature, and the interconnection between myself and my surroundings. Buddhist teachings emphasize the interdependence of all sentient and non-sentient beings—harming other beings is seen as also harming oneself. We do not exist in isolation. This underscores for me the responsibility I have, and that

humanity as a whole has, toward nature. The group also had a 15-minute meditation session by the Temple's garden, where we focused inwards, surrounded by the sounds of nature. There is a lot that religion can teach us about our interactions with nature, and faith-based environmental ethics is something that I would like to continue exploring in my personal and professional life.

Overall, I had many takeaways from my experience in Kyoto (as well as in Tokyo, Sendai, and Hiroshima). Each of the panels and experiences at the study tour involved a dialogue that was incredibly transparent and thought-provoking. Climate was one of the focal points of the study tour, and points of discussion included international cooperation, collective responsibility, and future generations. Climate change is a crisis that knows no borders, and if governments do not take action to protect the environment, it becomes crucial that citizens do. There is no humanity without nature, and leaving the world inhabitable for future generations requires that we re-think our relationship with nature and shift away from the large-scale neglect that has for so long characterized this relationship. One of the questions posed at RIHN was: "What does the environment mean to humans?" And I think that making sense of our connection to our environment, and ensuring that we make choices that respect nature as a partner, rather than as separate from ourselves, is of the utmost importance for any climate ethics framework.

# Hiroshima: Reflections on a city that preserves the past, speaks to the present, and reflects the future



by Kathleen Egan, Senior Program Associate, Carnegie Council

As part of the Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations Study Tour, I had the extraordinary opportunity to travel to Japan. Thanks to the generosity of our hosts, the intentionality of the itinerary, and the caliber of conversations, my first-ever visit to Japan was profoundly impactful, both personally and professionally.

Of the six-day journey, our time in Hiroshima left an indelible mark. Seeing the destruction, reconstruction, and intentional preservation of memory was striking and powerful. The very character of the city both preserves the past while moving intentionally into the future. This nature was exemplified by the markers of the past with the plaques for the [A-bombed trees](#) or *hibakujumoku*, by features of the present with the intentional urban planning of the parks and memorials, and by the signifiers of the future with the skyscrapers and bullet trains. As the director of the [Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum](#), Mr. Yoshifumi Ishida, stated to our delegation: “Instead of becoming a military base, Hiroshima became a city for peace.” That ethos was unmistakable in everyone we met and in the essence of the city itself.

Our delegation had the distinct privilege to meet two atomic bomb survivors or *hibakusha*. [Keiko Ogura](#) and [Koko Kondo](#) shared their experiences, detailing the moment of impact and their decades-long journeys from victims to international peace advocates. The two women told their stories with poise, clarity, and self-assuredness. Keiko and Koko personified a balanced, values-driven approach to leadership which has enabled them to affect incredible change.

The opportunity to learn from Keiko and Koko surfaced memories from my own childhood. As part of my high school education, my school arranged a guest lecture from Holocaust survivor, Marion Blumenthal Lazan. As a 16-year-old, hearing [Marion's story](#) was a foundational educational experience. Importantly, though, my classmates and I learned in detail how American troops liberated concentration camps in Europe in 1945 but not in depth about how that same military decimated a civilian population in Japan that same year. Keiko and Koko



Kathleen Egan in front of Atomic Bomb Dome, Hiroshima.

embodied and articulated a different perspective; understanding both experiences provided a fuller and more balanced account.

The stories we heard from Keiko and Koko were not only remarkable demonstrations of reliance, forgiveness, and advocacy but also a critical reminder that the current volatility of the strategic nuclear environment is not an abstract threat; the consequences are real and horrific. As someone who works on nuclear ethics, I think and write on the subject frequently but from the comfort and safety of my home in the United States. Standing on the site of impact and hearing from survivors who have dealt with the aftermath and lasting physical, social, and emotional consequences of the bomb, underlined and made tangible the horrific consequences of nuclear weapons.

Moreover, the visit to Hiroshima was a stark reminder of the cruelty and depravity of the Second World War which directly informed the formation of the current liberal international world order. The associated [1949 Geneva Conventions](#), [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), and international organizations and agreements, like the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](#), sprung out of these tragedies. Today, 80 years later, there is a sense that the international order is changing and that the lessons learned from the Second World War are no longer relevant or pertinent.

Even within Japan itself, the shared lessons from Hiroshima and the *hibakusha* appear to be fraying, as evidenced by [statements by senior officials](#) about the need to acquire nuclear weapons. With [recent increased spending](#), the current government may be signaling that militarization is a safer path than peace.

The domestic and global trends only further underscored for me the importance of ensuring that the stories and the lessons learned from the city of Hiroshima are not forgotten by the next generation. Over dinner at the Foreign Correspondents' Club in Tokyo, one of our hosts reminded us that Japan and



Visit to the Peace Memorial Museum guided by Director Yoshifumi Ishida, Hiroshima.

the United States were enemies 80 years ago. The contrast between the geopolitical history of animosity between our countries and our delegation's warm reception by our Japanese hosts is perhaps the most important lesson I will take with me; the world today, especially for young people, can feel entrenched by political difference and marked by intractable conflicts. Our visit to Japan contradicted this narrative demonstrating that bridges can be built, differences can be reconciled, and conflicts can end. It was a privilege to hear Keiko and Koko's stories and to visit Hiroshima. I will endeavor to take their messages with me as my generation thinks about how to reenvision, remake, or reinforce the international structures for peace, non-proliferation, and cooperation that their generation conceived.

# Reflections on Engaging the Next Generation of Leaders

by Brian Mateo, Director of Education and Special Projects,  
Carnegie Council



While on the Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations Study Tour in Japan, a theme that resonated with me was the importance of empowering the next generation of young leaders. One of the institutions we visited was Tohoku University in Sendai. There, I had the opportunity to listen to a variety of presentations at the International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS). In one of the presentations, I learned about the [2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami](#), where a 9.1 magnitude earthquake struck the Northeast coast of Japan and a tsunami followed 30 minutes afterwards. The tsunami was so powerful that it reached Hawaii and Chile. There were over 18,000 fatalities in Japan, according to the presentation. Because they were able to communicate with other countries through the [Pacific Tsunami Warning and](#)

[Mitigation System](#), there were just two fatalities outside of Japan. After this catastrophe, faculty and researchers at IRIDeS are working to ensure that younger generations understand how to prepare for tsunamis and what to do if their region is affected. One of the ways that they do this is by helping to change behaviors with regards to early warning signals, because changes in behaviors save lives.

The IRIDeS researchers also emphasized the importance of international cooperation and knowledge sharing. In 2013, IRIDeS partnered with the [Association of Pacific Rim Universities \(APRU\)](#), a network of 61 leading universities, to create the [APRU-IRIDeS Multi-Hazards Program](#). This program supports research, an annual symposium, and an annual summer school. In



Delegation greets Japanese school children on field trips to Hiroshima, part of their curriculum called *Kokoro-no-kyoiku*.

2024, the [ninth annual summer school](#), hosted at Tohoku University, convened 53 participants from 28 universities in 11 regions.

Another experience that resonated with me on the theme of empowering the next generation of young leaders was while visiting the city of Hiroshima, where one of the atomic bombs was dropped during World War II on August 6, 1945. Soon after, the city advocated to the national government for it to become a [peace memorial city](#). Three years later, on August 6, 1949, the [Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law](#) was enacted. Article 1 of the law states: “It shall be the object of the present law to provide for the construction of the city of Hiroshima as a peace memorial city to symbolize the human ideal of sincere pursuit of genuine and lasting peace.” Article 6 of the law states: “The mayor of Hiroshima shall, with the cooperation of residents and support from relevant organizations, establish a program of continuous activity toward completion of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial City.” As we met with different individuals and visited offices, it was clear that everyone wanted to make sure they were contributing to the goal of providing continuous activity to ensure that city of Hiroshima meets its objective.

While in Hiroshima, we visited the [Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum](#). At the museum, I stopped to reflect on the images of people affected by the atomic bomb and closely listened to our tour guide who was explaining the images and giving us more context. A few moments later, I noticed many young school children walking around the museum, looking like they may be on a field trip. Later that day, I found out that they were indeed on field trips from multiple schools to learn about peace studies, which was part of their curriculum in which they learned about what happened during World War II and the importance of peace. Elementary and junior high schools in Japan have a nationally mandated curriculum called [Kokoro-no-kyoiku](#), which translates to “education of the heart.” This part of the curriculum includes lessons on peaceful resolution and a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.



Delegation lays wreath at Atomic Bomb Memorial, Hiroshima.

That day, we also heard two powerful stories from survivors of the atomic bomb and understood why it was important for them to share their experiences. They both had unique stories but what connected them was wanting to make sure younger generations understood the importance of peace. One of the speakers, Koko Kondo, spoke about the resentment she had growing up. She later realized that her resentment was not toward another individual, but to war itself, as both parties were affected by it. Koko, in an interview with *The Washington Post*, recounted meeting Captain Robert Lewis, co-pilot of the *Enola Gay* (the aircraft that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima), at a national talk show 10 years after the bombing. Hearing Captain Lewis tell his story, she realized that he was also burdened by war. She told *The Washington Post*: “I heard many stories, but I never heard a monster had tears. That means he’s not a monster. That means he’s same as me. We’re human beings.” Revenge on the other was not the solution but eliminating war altogether was. Teaching the next generation of leaders this important lesson is vital.

These two examples helped me understand how educating, providing practical tools, and engaging young people is important to ensure that they reflect on the past to build a more compassionate, ethical, and peaceful future.

# Memory-Keeping as a Policy Tool

By Ronnie Saha, Trustee, Carnegie Council



A consistent theme in our travels across Japan was that of “memory-keeping.” This theme was probably most pronounced in Hiroshima where we met with survivors of the atomic bomb who have dedicated their lives to remembering the tragic event of 1945 in order to prevent it from happening again.

But we also discussed the importance of memory-keeping during other site visits. At Tohoku University’s International Research Institute of Disaster Science, we met with experts whose work was driven in response to the 2011 tsunami. Underlying their research agendas and policy proposals, our hosts

noted the importance of maintaining the memory of the natural disaster as a key driver of their work.

They showed us a short documentary which depicted a large cargo ship washed many miles inland; the stark image of the ship in a field far from the ocean, a physical reminder to the local community of the events that unfolded.

The basic premise underlying nuclear bombing survivor Koko Kondo’s lifework—that of maintaining the memory of Hiroshima to shape the global nuclear non-proliferation agenda—and that of the disaster experts is largely one and the same: [“Respect for history \[is\] the way toward progress and peace.”](#)

During and since returning from the Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations Study Tour, this theme has stayed with me: Memory-keeping is an important policy tool.

## ***Forgetting the Lessons of the Past***

This feels especially important today, a time in which the international community seems to be forgetting the lessons of the 20th century. Indeed, it seems that we have taken for granted the post-war Bretton Woods consensus that has enabled peace and prosperity for the last 75 years. We see this in various realms of international politics.

In the U.S. and Europe, democratic values are under attack and far-right parties are gaining appeal; as members of the Greatest Generation leave us, their great-grandchildren are embracing ideals of [authoritarianism](#). In the realm of economic policy, many are questioning the project of global economic integration, putting our shared prosperity at risk by reverting to tariffs and mercantilism. And in the realm of security policy, we seem headed away from ideals-based alliances towards a spheres-of-influence-based global politics.



Atomic bomb survivor Koko Kondo sharing her story with the delegation and displaying the shirt she was wearing on August 6, 1945.

## Memory-Keeping as a Policy Tool

Recognizing these shifting global trends, we can ask ourselves a few questions to shape the path ahead:

- In this time of accelerating change, what role can memory-keeping play as a policy tool?
- What memories and lessons of the post-war era should we bring forward in this new era of global politics?
- How can we counter institutional memory-loss during a time of generational shifts, changing cultural norms, and shortening attention spans?

The premise of these questions is admittedly abstract, and the answers are not 100 percent clear. However, part of the answer falls directly within the remit and mission of the Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations and should continue shaping future programming.



Presentation by Tohoku University's International Research Institute of Disaster Science, Sendai.

- **Cultural exchanges are critical.** At a time of global Internet interconnectedness, we almost take for granted the value of in-person cultural connections. The Uehiro-Carnegie mission of bringing people together from different cultures and nations is much needed today, and should remain a core part of the program.
- **Intergenerational connections are key.** The Uehiro-Carnegie mission of focusing on next-generation leadership is needed now more than ever. Programming should continue bringing together leaders of all ages, allowing next-generation leaders to learn from their elders and build mentoring relationships.
- **Teaching and understanding history.** The evolution of the U.S.-Japan allied powers relationship—once rivals then partners—is an important historical lesson in international cooperation. This evolution speaks to the founding principles of Carnegie Council—that international cooperation, democracy, ethics, and humanitarianism can shape great power politics. This history should remain central to the pedagogy of the Uehiro-Carnegie mission.

In some ways, it should not be surprising that Japanese society—a society that both values tradition and embraces modernity—prizes memory-keeping. I hope as the Uehiro-Carnegie programming continues to evolve, it will keep memory-keeping as a central theme.

# Pragmatic Policymaking

by Mark J. Wood, Program Officer, Refugees International



Pragmatic policymaking is often misunderstood as technocratic or value neutral. Our study tour of Japan challenged that assumption. What I encountered instead was a model of policymaking that is deeply ethical, resolutely forward-looking, and grounded in realism rather than ideology. Japan's approach across urban planning, disaster preparedness, memory-keeping, and international engagement demonstrates how ethics and pragmatism can reinforce one another, offering important lessons for policymaking in an increasingly fractured world.



Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations Study Tour Delegation reflection session in Shukkeien Garden, Hiroshima.

We face an accumulation of interconnected crises, what is now known as a polycrisis. Policymakers at all levels must be pragmatic and forward-thinking, balancing today's economic growth with the need for long-term sustainability. Successfully managing these interlinked challenges requires adaptability and a renewed sense of ethical responsibility.

Beyond Japan, we see examples of pragmatic policymaking taking root. A simple local policy of regrowing [mangroves](#) in India, which helps protect millions of people and wildlife by buffering storms in addition to sequestering carbon and revitalizing the fishing industry, is one notable model. At the international level, Brazil, Indonesia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which together account for half of the world's tropical forests, formed an [alliance](#) to protect these forests, given their vital role in capturing carbon.

Looking towards the future, there are many instances where pragmatic policymaking will be necessary to ensure that the next generations are not living in a world marked by a polycrisis. For example, Africa's population is set to double to 2.5 billion people by [2050](#). This presents an enormous opportunity to spur economic growth; it also means there is a need to begin planning how urban areas will function, where new homes will be built, and how to design public and transport routes for 2025 and beyond.

Amid these interconnected crises and opportunities, each country faces its own set of policy challenges, shaped by its unique history, geography, and, increasingly, relations with other states. Underlying these are demographic trends and the scarcity of natural resources.

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Pragmatic policymaking requires committed leaders, and Japan forced me to recalibrate how I have viewed ethical leadership. Ethical leadership is not static; it must evolve with each generation's challenges. While moral principles remain constant, the application of those principles requires anticipation, adaptability, and conviction. In Japan, I saw policymakers planning not only for current political cycles, but for future generations. This long-term horizon reframes ethics as an obligation to those not yet born. With the current divisiveness of contemporary politics, policymakers must make a concerted effort to filter out noise, center facts, and actively seek inclusive, pragmatic pathways forward, especially when consensus is difficult.

The founding principles of Carnegie Council—international cooperation, democracy, fidelity, and humanitarianism—provided an essential ethical compass throughout the tour. Yet it was the dialogue with Japanese diplomats, scientists, policymakers, peace seekers, and fellow participants that truly tested and sharpened those principles. I found Japan's policy culture to underscore a critical truth: Ethical frameworks cannot exist in isolation. They must be stress-tested through engagement with differing views. Dialogue is not a courtesy; it is a necessity. Views only change or solidify when confronted by others' lived experiences and concerns. In a world facing shared planetary challenges, cooperation rooted in listening is not idealism; it is survival.

The experience that resonated most deeply with my professional work was the visit to Hiroshima. Listening to the *hibakusha* and walking through the museum was a sobering reminder of the horrors of war. War is unequivocally evil, and there are no true winners. The British academic and philosopher Simon Blackburn puts it [aptly](#): "Events endlessly adjust our sense of responsibility, our guilt and our shame, our sense of our own worth and that of others."

Hiroshima reinforced the urgency of peace mediation, a discipline increasingly sidelined in an era of proxy wars and geopolitical brinkmanship. It also highlighted the moral failure embedded in policy decisions divorced from ethics. The decision to drop a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, after the consequences of the first were already clear, stands as a stark example of calculated policy devoid of moral restraint. With hindsight comes responsibility to ensure such decisions are never repeated.

Japan's commitment to memory-keeping is inseparable from its pragmatic policymaking. Memory is not nostalgia, it is instruction. As distance from war grows, appreciation for the cost of human life diminishes. Japan institutionalizes remembrance to anchor future decisions in past suffering. This ethic of memory-keeping feeds directly into forward-looking planning seen in disaster preparedness, environmental stewardship, and cautious engagement with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Ultimately, this study tour reaffirmed my belief that ethics and global affairs are inseparable. The decisions policymakers make today will echo for generations. Japan offers a compelling example of how to meet that responsibility, by planning ahead, grounding decisions in ethics, and choosing pragmatism over polarization. Forward-looking, ethical policymaking is not merely good governance; it is a moral obligation to the future.

# Reflections

by Alex Urwin, Carnegie Ethics Fellow



Through Carnegie Council’s recent visit to Japan—hosted so warmly by our friends at Uehiro Foundation—we found a country in which past and present exists in an unusual equilibrium.

Nowhere was this clearer than in Hiroshima. Those who’ve walked through the Peace Memorial Museum will know that the immediacy of suffering remains overwhelming. The museum is unflinching in sharing the realities of what happened that cloudless day in August 1945—at “0815,” “the time that it’s

always been,” as OMD’s song “Enola Gay” so powerfully captures.

And yet, stepping outside into a city rebuilt on peace, dialogue, and a strong sense of the future—or “futurability,” as our hosts described it—one finds a place not paralyzed by grief, but powered by civic pride and, most remarkably, hopeful aspiration.

And really this dual consciousness—clear-eyed about the past, ambitious and hopeful about the future—surfaced everywhere we went.



Visit to Tokyu Corporation, Shibuya Sky.

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Take Shibuya City's 100-year plan—a bold civic blueprint with a generational covenant at its core. Or Sendai, where we saw how disaster recovery—borne from the trauma of the 2011 tsunami—had been reimagined as an opportunity to strengthen social infrastructure and community resilience.

This relationship between historical burden and forward momentum—and indeed humility and pride—prompted me to reflect on the current political and cultural moment gripping so many liberal democracies around the world. Many such societies are wrestling with the question of what binds them together in an era defined by the interrelated, corrosive forces of technological acceleration, social fragmentation, and geopolitical anxiety. Many appear caught between a past they cannot fully interpret—or perhaps even regret—and a future they struggle to imagine. Negative, nativist populism is gathering pace.

It seems to me that this brand of populism thrives when national imagination collapses. When a society loses its capacity to articulate a shared and aspirational story of the future, the past becomes the only terrain on which identity can be contested. History becomes a political battleground. Every unresolved grievance, every mythologized moment, every contested symbol accrues greater political weight precisely because the horizon ahead feels blank.

Without any naivety of Japan's own social, political, and economic issues—many of which are deeply structural and in some instances profoundly uncomfortable—there is clearly something to learn from wherever a positive, aspirational national consciousness is achieved, and where that achievement is grounded in the idea of futurability, or the belief that individuals and communities can meaningfully shape what's ahead.

Of course, to do futurability properly requires a willingness for unromantic reckoning with the past—achievements, injustices, and consequences—and the institutional capacity to translate long-term thinking into policy

and civic life. It also requires the cultivation of public spaces, literal and metaphorical, where people can encounter difference without fear. Compassionate exchange is essential to this. During our time in Japan, even discussions of sensitive or painful history were characterized by deep listening and mutual respect. This is not incidental; it is a choice driven by cultural norms, educational systems, and civic leadership. And it's a choice that enables disagreement and reinforces the understanding that national identity is not a zero-sum contest but a shared inheritance—allowing for openness and compassion, while never losing sight of what is distinctively Japanese.

Again, the lesson is not that Japan is without fault or flaw. Many of the issues currently gripping other liberal democracies have not yet affected Japan to the same extent, and may well soon do so. Neither is the lesson that we should replicate Japanese institutions or cultural practices. Rather, it is to recognize that national stories can become stuck where political imagination becomes narrowed. To rebuild a sense of shared futurability, all of us, wherever we're from, must reinvest in the long-term: in local and national institutions capable of thinking beyond electoral cycles; in civic spaces that foster genuine engagement across class, region, and identity; in education systems that prepare young people not merely to navigate the future, but to shape it.

Japan's example shows that it is possible to hold the weight of history without being crushed by it, and to build a future that honors rather than erases the past. The task for others is not to imitate that balance, but to cultivate their own, in their intellectual, cultural, and industrial traditions.

In an era of fracture and anxiety, futurability may be one of the most powerful tools we have to rebuild trust, renew national purpose, and ensure that everyone can see a future they want to be part of, and are equipped to join in.

***The Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations study tour is funded by the generous contribution of the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education.***

**About the Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations Study Tour**

The Uehiro-Carnegie Endowment for Future Generations Study Tour brings together young leaders from Carnegie Council's greater community to deepen their understanding of our founding principles: international cooperation; democracy; fidelity and humanitarianism. Through a week-long cross-cultural exchange, delegates engage with practitioners and visit multiple sites to learn about ethics and leadership. This study tour builds on Carnegie Council's commitment to the next generation of leaders to use the power of ethics and education to build a better world.

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Founded in 1987, the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education is a nonprofit foundation committed to the advancement of moral education in Japan. The Uehiro Foundation is a benefactor of the Uehiro Oxford Institute at the University of Oxford and the Uehiro Center for Advancement of Oceanography at University of Hawaii at Manoa. The Uehiro Foundation has also supported ethical research at higher education institutions in Japan such as University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, Tohoku University, and Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology.