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ACCJ 2009 PERSON OF THE YEAR

TADASHI YAMAMOTO:
40 YEARS OF FORGING
U.S.-JAPAN PARTNERSHIPS

OBAMA IN ASIA
President Obama strengthens
U.S. economic ties in Japan

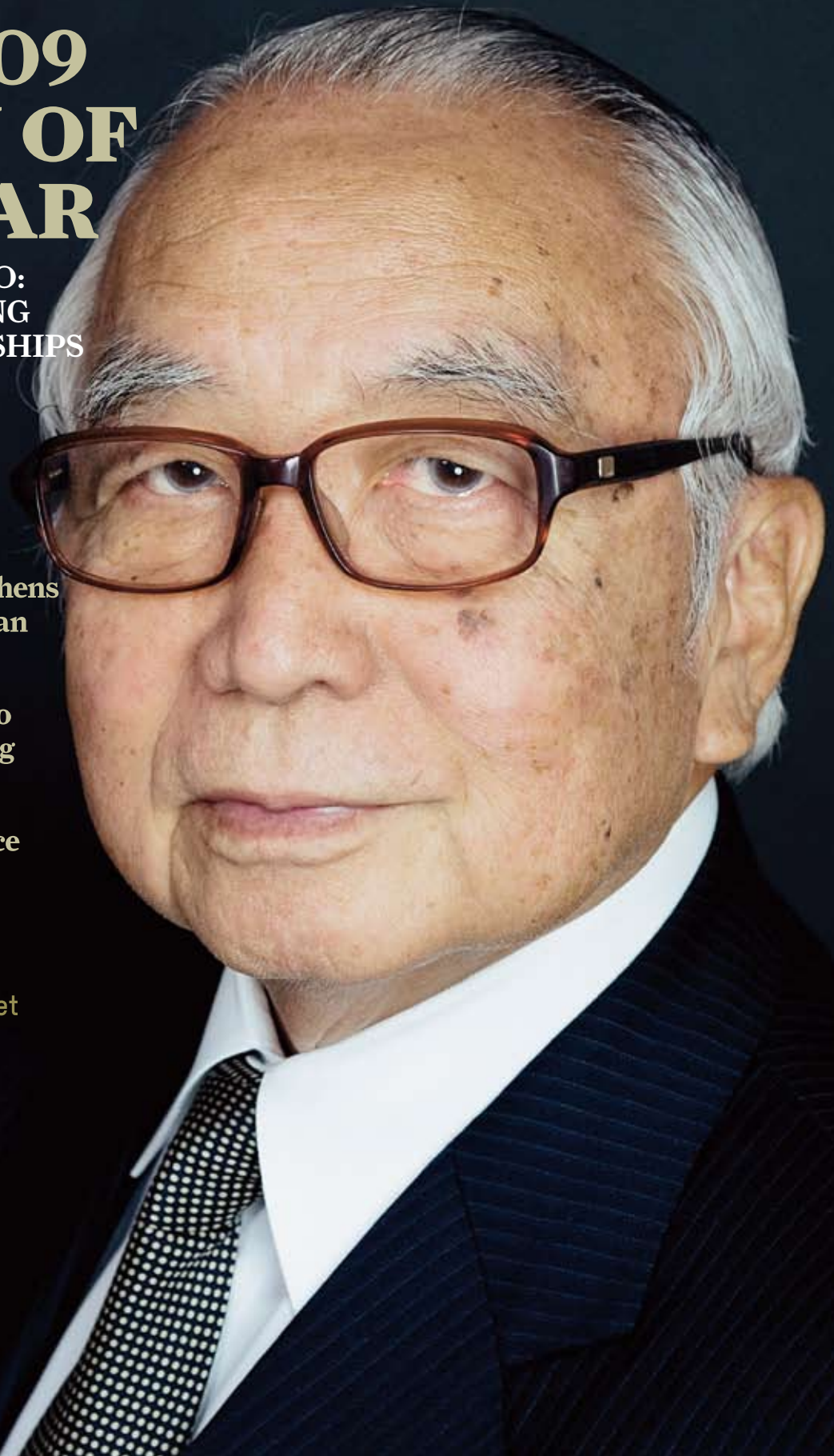
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THE CONNECTOR

As the founder of the Japan Center for International Exchange, Tadashi Yamamoto has dedicated his life's work to strengthening the U.S.-Japan relationship. The American Chamber of Commerce now names Yamamoto as its 2009 Person of the Year.

MICHAEL CONDON

Tadashi Yamamoto sits relaxed after a week helping to coordinate the influx of politicians that comes with a presidential visit. It is late November, the week following the first Japan trip since Barack Obama took office. The president is now in China following the two-day Japan

leg of his Asia tour. Likewise, Yamamoto is now looking ahead. 2010 marks the 40th anniversary of Yamamoto's organization, the not-for-profit Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) and the 73 year-old is once again drawing together the funds and the people needed to make international exchanges between not only the U.S. and

Japan but also between leaders from Japan's Asian neighbors, Australia and Europe.

Obama's choice to put Japan first was symbolic. As China heads further along its path to economic dominance and the calls of "Japan passing" echo through halls of the Diet and White House, the American president's message could not have been stronger. Okinawa and its bases are once again on the agenda and the U.S. and Japan's roles within the region are being put under the microscope once more.

As the two nations' relationship continues to evolve, Yamamoto sees a need for greater nongovernmental contributions to the region's affairs as the demands of maintaining international relations become more complex and diverse.

"Before it was a simple relationship - one based on security and economic interests. But now we have to build a much broader base involving diverse sectors. Before it was focused primarily on bilateral issues but now there are a lot more global challenges that we should work together on, from issues like the environment to things such as HIV/AIDS."

The Shimoda Conferences, the U.S.-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program and the Trilateral Commission, three integral foreign exchange programs that helped shape Japan's post-war internationalization all had deep involvement from Tadashi Yamamoto and JCIE.

After more than four decades creating exchanges between the two nations, Yamamoto now occupies a rare position. As one of the few independent "civilian" connectors the two nations have, he sits in the center, promoting not only political exchanges but also intellectual, business and cultural exchanges, in order to foster and strengthen relations between the world's two biggest economic powers.



Tadashi Yamamoto speaks to a colleague as a young Al Gore looks on at one of the U.S.-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program events organized by Yamamoto's JCIE.



Yamamoto acts as interpreter for Sony president Masaru Ibuka and then president Lyndon B. Johnson during a U.S. study tour conducted by the Keizai Doyu Kai (Japan Association of Corporate Executives) in 1970.

Tom Foley, former Speaker of the House of Representatives and Ambassador to Japan, counts Yamamoto as a crucial part of the equation.

"I know of no more important individual in Japan or the United States who is so effective in strengthening our bilateral ties. He is one of those rare individuals who knows both countries exceedingly well, not only the languages of both countries but the customs, institutions and culture of both."

Foley, as part of the U.S.-Parliamentary Exchange

Program, took part in the second Shimoda Conference exchange, all organized by Yamamoto's JCIE in 1969. The Democrat would go on to partake in another 12 exchange programs before eventually coming back to Japan in 1997 as ambassador.

"The involvement with Tadashi and the JCIE gave me a much wider understanding of Japan and contributed, I believe, to my selection by President Clinton to be the U.S. Ambassador to Japan. My association with Tadashi

gave me a much broader acquaintance with leading Japanese political and business leaders that were very valuable to me as a new ambassador."

Yamamoto first became involved in creating exchanges between Japan and the U.S. in the early 1960s as an assistant to Tokusaburo Kosaka, president of Shin-Etsu Chemical Company. Before Japan rose to take its place as the second most powerful nation economically, second only to the U.S., Yamamoto was helping to forge relationships. He has seen the nation mature not only as an economic power but also as a political power and has dedicated his life's work to improving dialogue on all levels.

"I have come to believe more and more that many things depend on the leadership and if you select several leaders and get them intensely involved and that can make a huge difference," he says.

A LIFE BETWEEN WORLDS

Born in Tokyo in March 1936, the son of a trader, Yamamoto spent just three months in Japan before he and his family moved to Hong Kong. Shortly after, he moved to Mumbai (then Bombay) where he lived until the age of three. As war approached, he, his mother and four siblings returned to Japan.

Following World War II, he graduated from the Jesuit-founded Rokko Junior and Senior High Schools. Yamamoto says that he was deeply influenced by Christianity and, aspiring to become a priest, chose to go on to study philosophy in the faculty of humanities at Jochi (Sophia) University, another Jesuit institution (Yamamoto's older brother, who had already entered the priesthood, went on to become president of the university). After his third year, Yamamoto transferred to St. Norbert College, a Catholic College in Wisconsin. It was here that the young student had a brief encounter with

I KNOW OF NO MORE IMPORTANT INDIVIDUAL IN JAPAN OR THE UNITED STATES WHO IS SO EFFECTIVE IN STRENGTHENING OUR BILATERAL TIES. " - Tom Foley, former Speaker of the House of Representatives and Ambassador to Japan counts Yamamoto as a crucial part of the equation



John F. Kennedy, who was then running for president. Yamamoto, who was working as a student waiter in the campus dining hall, served the presidential candidate a glass of milk (it happened that, at the time, the future of dairy farming was a key part of the presidential campaign).

After completing his undergraduate degree, Yamamoto decided to stay in the U.S. until 1962, completing an MBA at Marquette University. Being in the U.S. at this time, seeing JFK in person, and witnessing the civil rights movement all had a profound impact on the young liberal arts student. Upon returning to Japan, the university graduate began to work as the foreign relations secretary for the president of Shin-Etsu Chemical Company, Tokusaburo Kosaka, who was involved in inviting Attorney General Bobby Kennedy to Japan.

Kosaka, the younger brother of foreign minister Zentaro Kosaka, would go on to become a member of the House of Representatives. At the time, as president of Shin-Etsu, he was attempting to create a kind of internationalization rarely seen in Japan.

In 1967, Kosaka successfully created the Shimoda conference, considered to be one of the first major high-level dialogues between leaders of the two countries. Yamamoto's role was to be Kosaka's point person in organizing the conference. The event was

THE LIFE OF TADASHI YAMAMOTO

<p>↑</p> <p>1936</p> <p>BORN Tadashi Yamamoto in Tokyo. Three months later moved to Hong Kong with family. Seven months later moved to Mumbai (then Bombay) with family.</p>	<p>↖</p> <p>1940</p> <p>Moved back to Japan as World War II approached.</p>	<p>↗</p> <p>1953</p> <p>Graduated from Komaba High School after transferring from Rokko Senior High School.</p>	<p>→</p> <p>1954</p> <p>Entered Sophia (Jochi) University to study philosophy.</p>	<p>→</p> <p>1958</p> <p>Transferred to St Norbert College in Wisconsin, USA.</p>	<p>↘</p> <p>1962</p> <p>Returned to Japan after completing an MBA at Marquette University and began work at Shin-Etsu Chemical Company as president Tokusaburo Kosaka's foreign relations secretary.</p>	<p>↘</p> <p>1967</p> <p>First Shimoda Conference .</p>	<p>↓</p> <p>1968</p> <p>First Parliamentary Exchange Program between the U.S. and Japan.</p>
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attended by senate majority leader and future Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield, who gave a keynote speech that made the front pages of most of the nation's major newspapers. Also in attendance were a half dozen U.S. congressional members including Edmund Muskie and Donald Rumsfeld.

GOING IT ALONE

But it was 1970 that was arguably the most important turning point for Yamamoto. Kosaka made the move to politics and after working on his mentor's campaign Yamamoto made the decision to go out alone to continue his work

The Shimoda Conference series, begun in 1967, had been a success but Kosaka believed it was now time for him to make the move to the public sector in order to achieve his aims.

Yamamoto's stubborn belief that for true dialogue to exist between nations, the active participation of a diverse range of sectors was necessary spurred him to take action.

"In order for these to be effective, they needed to be independent from the governments and independent from the corporations and so I founded my own."

"(Kosaka) warned me that it was impossible for a young man to build an independent organization within Japan. But I set up my organization in a rented apartment in Aoyama Itchome, and got to work."

With support from business leaders such as Sony's Akio

Morita and with the support of organizations such as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation, Yamamoto was able to continue the Shimoda conferences as well as branching out to create a diverse range of programs. In 1973, Yamamoto and JCIE helped launch the Trilateral Commission, David Rockefeller's brainchild – the non-governmental organization that would play a key role in developing relationships between Europe, the U.S. and Japan throughout the 70s and 80s as Japan's economic dominance grew and then on, through to the present.

JCIE continued to branch out from its traditional bilateral role, helping to create exchange programs and networks of think tanks involving representatives from Asia, the U.S. and Europe.

"If I regard my association with the U.S. as my first phase, the second phase would have to be to add a close working relationship with our Asian friends, mainly from the ASEAN nations, and then Korea. And Korea was not easy due to what we did during the war... it was challenging and I think that we have made some progress. And now it comes to China."

Yamamoto says that intellectual dialogue is the first important step towards identifying common challenges and then working together on those issues.

"Of course we're dealing with a nation that is not

democratic (China) and there is a limit to what we can do... Maybe in 10 years we'll see some great progress. Look back at the last 10 years at what we have achieved, given another 10 years (I think we'll see progress). We see so many common challenges, the environment, communicable diseases, and they are really willing to talk to us on this."

LOOKING AHEAD

Presently, JCIE's activities are divided into three main groups: Global ThinkNet, a program of policy studies and dialogue; JCIE's Political Exchange Program which includes the U.S.-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program; and CivilNet, which is designed to encourage the development of a civil society and corporate philanthropy.

"There has been a need to broaden the base of international understanding and cooperation so, over the years, our programs have become much more diverse and multi-faceted, involving politicians, NGOs, business leaders and others from different walks of life. Really, there is a key role to be played by independent, autonomous institutions such as JCIE because they can reach out to all sectors of society."

But Yamamoto says that continuing trends have made it increasingly difficult for independent organizations such as JCIE to continue their work.

"I really have a sense of crisis that on the one hand we

have lots of opportunities to develop these relationships but we don't have enough institutional support, financial support and professional involvement. Also, the Japanese government has been steadily cutting funding for non-governmental dialogue and exchange at the very time that non-governmental contributions are more necessary for our nations and our world because the demands of international affairs have become more complex and the challenges facing us more diverse."

Yamamoto continues to look to the future. He has seen the two countries mature as he has seen young leaders turn into senior members of parliament or presidents of companies. The work of JCIE continues to work to expand the networks of all sectors and help to cement relationships between the nations.

"It takes an investment over a long period of time to build those relationships and unlike some other things you can't just throw money at it and get the result overnight. It takes time, but once you build that, then you are almost assured that you'll get a continued impact." ❶

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