

Remembering Tadashi Yamamoto



Aboard the *Astoria*, heading to America to study



Interpreting for Lyndon B. Johnson and Sony founder Masaru Ibuka

The past year marked a sad milestone in the history of the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) as we bid farewell to the institution's founder and leader, Tadashi Yamamoto, who succumbed to cancer at the age of 76. One of Japan's leading internationalists, Yamamoto pioneered a style of highly personal, face-to-face diplomacy that built a network of ties among leaders inside and outside of Japan and advanced international cooperation in a surprisingly broad range of areas.

In his youth, Yamamoto trained to become a Jesuit priest, but when he began to have doubts about that vocation, he transferred overseas to St. Norbert's College in Wisconsin. As a foreign student there in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he was deeply moved by the ideals of the American civil rights movement, the optimism and emphasis on public service that pervaded the public debate of the day, and the focus on "love and community" that he found in his faith. He often recounted how these experiences inspired his later work.

After returning to Japan in 1962, Yamamoto was hired as a special assistant for international affairs to Tokusaburo Kosaka, the president of Shinetsu Chemical Company and later a prominent politician. Here, he began to hone his style of behind-the-scenes diplomacy by making arrangements for a groundbreaking trip to Japan in 1962 by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to promote stronger US-Japan ties.

At the time, Japan's domestic debate on foreign policy was characterized by violent clashes between leftists who rejected Japan's alliance with the United States and right-wingers who wished to stem the influence of communism. Yamamoto, though, was part of an emerging group of liberal realists who sought a third way in Japan's foreign policy dealings, and he helped to advance this cause by arranging the Shimoda Conference series. The inaugural Shimoda Conference in 1967 was the first postwar meeting to convene political leaders and public intellectuals from the United States and Japan on equal footing for a foreign policy dialogue, and it came to be seen as a milestone in Japan's reemergence on the world stage. Swarms of leftist demonstrators tried to shut down the conference and block the motorcade of its keynote speaker, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. Yamamoto was responsible for successfully negotiating a *détente* with protest leaders, walking back and forth down the steep hill from the conference site through a gauntlet of hundreds of protestors chanting, "Tadashi Yamamoto is the running dog of the American Imperialists."

Inspired by Mansfield's words at the Shimoda Conference, Yamamoto launched the first US-Japan parliamentary exchange in 1968 to bring members of the Congress and the Japanese Diet together for frank and



US Rep. Tom Foley and Tadashi Yamamoto during a 1981 plant tour



Ambassador David Wright confers the Honourable Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire on Tadashi

substantive policy dialogues on challenges in US-Japan relations. These exchanges, which JCIE continues to hold today, are credited by such early participants as Thomas Foley, Donald Rumsfeld, and Howard Baker with introducing a generation of American leaders to Japan and creating the personal ties that later were important in defusing trade tensions and strengthening bilateral cooperation in a range of areas. This led former House Speaker Foley to remark that he knew “of no more important individual so effective in strengthening our bilateral ties.”

In 1970, at the age of 34, Yamamoto left his promising corporate career to launch JCIE as one of the first independent international affairs institutes in his country. At that time in Japan, the concept of a non-governmental institution that was completely free from government or business control playing a role in foreign affairs was considered revolutionary; moreover, it was nearly unthinkable for such a young person to undertake so bold of an initiative. But despite steep odds, his combination of idealism and hardnosed pragmatism allowed his improbable new organization to quickly grow and contribute profoundly to international relations.

In JCIE’s early years, Yamamoto’s efforts centered on its US-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program, but Yamamoto’s focus soon extended beyond US-Japan relations to ties with Europe, Asia, and other regions through his work on high-level forums including the Trilateral Commission, the “Hakone Conference” series with Europe, and bilateral dialogues with the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, and India. He also was responsible for initiating historic dialogues with Korea and Southeast Asian countries that advanced postwar reconciliation and laid the foundations for deeper regional cooperation in Asia. In the 1990s, he expanded JCIE’s research program as a way of underpinning these dialogues with more substantive input, and in doing so he developed and expanded an extensive network of scholars and experts around the world.

From the inception of JCIE, Yamamoto realized that Japan’s nongovernmental sector faced a number of serious hurdles in terms of the tax and philanthropic systems in Japan. Although Japan was experiencing rapid economic growth, there were few incentives for individuals or corporations to support not-for-profit initiatives such as JCIE. In 1973, he launched the International Philanthropy Project, which marked the beginning of more than three decades of research and dialogue by JCIE staff and colleagues around the world on the evolving role of civil society, nongovernmental organizations, and the philanthropic sector. It also led to JCIE’s involvement in the creation of the Asian Community Trust in 1979, Japan’s first charitable trust modeled on American community foundations, and later to JCIE’s work with corporate donors in administering donor-advised funds and to the creation of a JCIE-led fund to support recovery efforts following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. JCIE has also been



FGFJ Diet Task Force Visit to South Africa:
Visit to a community in Kwazulu-Natal

actively engaged in the discussions surrounding government reforms of the nonprofit laws in Japan.

Yamamoto was an astute observer of the shifting world around him, and under his leadership the focus of JCIE's work evolved from the more traditional security and trade issues that once dominated bilateral and international relations dialogues to an array of broader global challenges where he believed Japan's contribution could be pivotal. Over the past two decades, he led the way in mobilizing political leaders, policy experts, and NGOs in order to advance cooperation on governance, global health, the fight against HIV/AIDS, development issues in Africa, and the notion of human security.

A warm, inspirational, and indefatigable leader, Tadashi Yamamoto will be dearly missed by his colleagues and friends around the world. They have set up a memorial fund (see page 65), and have launched a number of initiatives to carry on his important legacy.



1936–2012