

Survey of American Opinion Leaders On Japan-U.S. Relations

By Yasunori Sone

Although Japan and the United States are very closely tied to one another, it is not easy for the peoples of the two countries to get accurate information about each other's land.

In Japan, some people talk about the United States based on personal experience. For others, the image of the United States is that of their American friends. Meanwhile, the mass media tend to report on the most outspoken elements in America, rather than on the country's reality. Yet at the same time we cannot say that Capitol Hill does not represent the United States. Nor should we assume that Washington's policy is divorced from American public opinion.

It is simply not realistic, considering the time and human resources required, to interview each and every American who directly influences the nation's poli-

cy-making, nor to explore the whole country. While perhaps not ideal, we find public opinion polls to be one of the best tools at our disposal.

Focus on trade

In 1988 and 1989, we conducted sample surveys in Japan and the United States. In 1990 we commissioned Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., which has long experience of surveying top social groups in America, to conduct a poll of American opinion leaders, and had the company run a follow-up survey in July of this year. These surveys characteristically focused heavily on economic and trade issues.

The past year has witnessed kaleidoscopic change around the world. The Gulf war broke out at the height of the search for a new, post-Cold War international

order. The Soviet Union sank into economic distress and ethnic strife, while follow-up structural impediments talks set the tone for fractious Japan-U.S. relations.

The 1990 survey had shown a calmer attitude toward Japan-U.S. relations than previous, more general studies. This was encouraging, given the importance of long-term friendly relations for both countries. However, this year's survey found a slight but noticeable worsening in the view taken by opinion leaders of Japan-U.S. relations.

Asked what Japan should do to im-

Outline of Survey

Sponsored by the Japan Economic Foundation.

Managed by Central Research Service Inc.

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Survey conducted in the U.S. by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. by personal interviews between April 1 and May 3, 1991.

Number of valid respondents: 531 (90% male, 10% female).

Respondents comprised 219 business leaders (senior vice presidents or above from among top 1,400 U.S. companies); 49 federal government leaders (aides to senators or representatives on foreign trade issues); 28 state government leaders (governors or aides to governors); 31 local government leaders (mayors or aides to mayors); 52 academic leaders (professors of economics and international relations from among the top 100 U.S. universities); 47 labor union leaders (executives from among the top 100 U.S. unions); 64 religious leaders (leaders of major religious groups); 51 media people (editors, writers and correspondents concerned with international affairs).



A fair supported by a major Japanese corporation to promote imports of foreign semiconductors, aimed at demonstrating the openness of the Japanese market.



The Rockefeller Center in New York. Its purchase by a Japanese real estate company came amid a flurry of real estate acquisitions by Japanese companies in the U.S.

Photo: Kyodo News Service

prove the situation, many said it needs to open its market, underscoring the deep-rooted American perception that the Japanese market is unfair and closed. There was also increased support for U.S. "retaliation" and "managed trade" against Japan.

A closer look at their replies, however, reveals that many of the American opinion leaders are remaining true to the principle of economic liberalism. Many of them support universal free trade systems like GATT, and do not necessarily endorse the establishment of a trade bloc or managed trade.

Comparisons between the economic threat from Japan and the military threat from the Soviet Union must be made in

this context and against the backdrop of global political and economic change. Japan's perceived economic threat has increased. Yet there has been little change in the American sense of Japan's reliability. In contrast, this year's survey found growing doubts about whether the Soviet Union is a trustworthy partner.

Another noteworthy shift was growing support for direct investment from Japan, with more than half the respondents considering Japanese investment in U.S. real estate to be desirable.

Some of the respondents felt that Japan's contribution to the Gulf war was less adequate than Germany's. It should be understood that this perception resulted from the gap between their expecta-

tions about the role Japan should play in terms of Japan's international contributions and their disappointment at what Japan actually did in the Gulf. What they do expect Japan to do in similar situations in the future is to provide financial assistance and make visible human contributions. Not many of the respondents wanted a military contribution from Japan.

The Gulf war has had a tremendous impact on world politics and economics, but a majority of the respondents suggested that any new international order should be maintained not by American hegemony but by United Nations initiatives. Many considered the Japan-U.S. relationship to be an equal global partner-

Summary of the Survey

(Figures show percentage of respondents choosing the answer indicated.)

Q. 1: Actions the U.S. should take to help ease trade frictions with Japan (top 4)

	1991	1990
Make U.S. companies more competitive internationally	29.2	33.9
Pressure Japan to open its market, including retaliation	24.5	18.3
Reduce the U.S. budget deficit	22.2	25.6
Practice managed trade	7.7	7.0

Q. 2: Actions Japan should take (top 3)

	1991	1990
Open Japanese markets wider	65.7	61.5
Increase imports by boosting domestic demand	26.6	28.8
Exercise voluntary export restraints	4.1	4.2

Q. 3: Desirable trade system

	1991	1990
Free trade zone in the American continent	13.9	—
Free trade zone in the Asia-Pacific region	3.8	—
Free trade zone between the U.S. and Japan	4.3	—
Free trade zone between the U.S. and the EC	6.2	—
Global and multilateral trade system	66.5	—
Other	1.5	—

Q. 4: Japan-U.S. trade system

	1991	1990
Adhere to free trade and cope with trade issues under the framework of multilateral arrangements such as GATT	55.2	64.3
Adhere to free trade in principle, but have Japan adopt limited managed trade practices, such as voluntary export restraints or import expansion programs	17.3	27.7
As the free trade system no longer works, the U.S. should adopt full-scale managed trade systems against Japan, including quantitative targets for the value of exports and imports	3.2	3.8
New, more cooperative Japan-U.S. trade agreement	22.4	—

Q. 5: When comparing the Soviet military threat and the economic threat from Japan, which has increased the most?

	1991	1990
Soviet military power	23.5	35.0
Japanese economic power	71.0	56.6

Q. 6: Reliability of Japan and the Soviet Union

	1991	1990
The Soviet Union is a reliable partner		
Reliable	30.3	35.7
Unreliable	62.7	49.1
Not sure	7.0	15.2
Japan is a reliable partner		
Reliable	71.0	73.6
Unreliable	25.8	20.9
Not sure	3.0	5.5

ship, and advocated shifting the thrust of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty from defense to the political and economic arena.

It is important to weigh the implications of these survey results. The first and most important lesson is that something must be done about the image of a closed Japanese market held by most American opinion leaders. Trade and economic problems dominate the conflicts between Japan and the United States, and this "closed market" is seen as causing many of them, in the opinion of the respondents.

While Japan ought to make changes where necessary, Americans also ought to try to correct their image of Japan, which is often far from the reality. Chang-

ing this image requires Japan to assert itself and improve its publicity efforts.

Need for solutions

The survey also shows that the Japanese and U.S. governments are equally obligated to solve the trade problem. America's macroeconomic problems have been discussed so frequently that there is no need to mention them again here, but it should be noted that there is a gap between Washington's stated intentions and its actions. The Japanese government's behavior, too, has left something to be desired in this regard.

The American opinion leaders' response to Japanese investment in the

U.S. is level-headed but their views are not necessarily unanimous. Their strong demand for greater opening of Japan's domestic market arises partly from a belief in economic principles, and partly from psychological responses. This balance must be further clarified if relations are to be improved.

Friction between Japan and the United States may in a sense be unavoidable, as underlined by the prediction of a full 96% of respondents that there will be conflicts in high-tech trade. Yet ways to live with such frictions must be found. Friction can grow into real conflict if both parties respond, not to reality, but to misperceptions and misinformation about the other side.

Q. 7: Plants established by Japanese companies in the U.S.	1991	1990	(1989 survey)	Q. 11: Desirable world political structure following the Gulf war		
Desirable	80.8	75.5	(32.7)	Stability under U.S. hegemony	3.4	
Undesirable	14.9	18.3	(52.9)	Cooperation among the U.S. and other major Western bloc nations	10.5	
Not sure	4.3	6.2	(14.4)	Cooperation between the Eastern bloc, including the Soviet Union, and major Western bloc countries	22.6	
Q. 8: Japanese real estate investment in the U.S.	1991	1990	(1989 survey)	Stability under a stronger United Nations	60.3	
Favor	58.4	56.6	(15.4)	Q. 12: Desirable form of Japan-U.S. relations		
Oppose	30.3	29.1	(74.6)	Equal, global partnership	49.1	
Not sure	11.3	14.3	(10.0)	U.S. leadership with Japanese support	30.5	
Q. 9: Comparison of Japanese and German contributions in the Gulf war	Japanese contribution	German contribution		Japanese independent initiatives	18.8	
Sufficient	30.9	41.4		Q. 13: Future Japan-U.S. security relationship	1991 1990	
Not sufficient	65.2	54.8		Maintain the status quo	14.1	10.6
Not sure	4.0	3.8		Abolish the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty	3.0	1.1
Q. 10: Japan's future contribution in similar situations (multiple answers)				Give priority to political and economic relations under the Security Treaty	49.9	49.0
Military participation			19.4	Increased Japanese share of defense spending	28.8	36.8
Non-military, visible human contribution			36.9			
Financial support			36.7			
Other			1.7			
Not sure			5.3			