

Interview with Ambassador and Mrs. Walter F. Mondale

With Suetsune Takashi, managing editor of the *Journal of Japanese Trade and Industry*. This interview was conducted for publication in *TRENDS*, U.S.A. magazine.

Suetsune: Mr. Ambassador and Mrs. Mondale, welcome to Japan.

Mr. Ambassador, you have said on many occasions that you became interested in U.S.-Japan relations as a politician, as a senator, as vice president, and later in your private life.

Ambassador: I have been interested in Japan and the U.S.-Japan relationship for many years—literally since the beginning of my public career. As a senator, I dealt with foreign policy and trade all the time. I met with a steady stream of Japanese political leaders and travelled here as a senator several times. When I was vice president, I was also actively involved in the U.S.-Japan relationship, and I visited Japan several times. And then in private life, on business matters, I travelled to Japan a number of times as well.

When I ran for president, I had to formulate my ideas about our nation's position in the world, and I examined our relationship with Japan. Over the years, I have become increasingly convinced that this is our most important relationship. Now I have this opportunity to contribute to it, and I am very glad to be here.

And I might point out Joan has had a very unique relationship with Japan.

Suetsune: Mrs. Mondale, how did you feel about Ambassador Mondale's accepting this post?

Mrs. Mondale: I felt very positive about the possibility of coming to Japan, and I wanted very much to come. So we both were very happy when President Clinton announced my husband's appointment.

Suetsune: You have a long association with Japan, it seems. I heard that you're one of the nieces of the late Ambassador Reischauer.

Mrs. Mondale: Yes. My father was

his cousin. Ambassador Reischauer and my father were of the same generation, and I am the oldest daughter of his oldest cousin. When I was a little girl growing up, he would send gifts to us. We always got little Japanese dolls at Christmas time, so we had a very nice feeling about Japan.

Suetsune: Did you visit Japan while he was ambassador here?

Mrs. Mondale: No, but my husband did.

Ambassador: I did. Through Joan I got to know Ambassador Reischauer and Haru quite well, and I always stayed at the Residence when I came through Japan. He was a wonderful man, and Haru is still a close friend.

Suetsune: Beyond your clear interest in U.S.-Japan relations, in what specific aspect of Japan are you most interested?

Ambassador: I'm interested in practically every conceivable aspect of this assignment. Of course, I want to know more about Japan. I want to meet the Japanese. I want to travel around the country. I want to get a better sense of the richness and the excitement and all those things that are so impressive about Japan and Japanese life. I'm here to be our nation's ambassador to deal with "bilateral" matters, relating to our two nations.

The president has said, and I have said, and believe, that this is America's most important relationship, and I'm here with the assignment to build on that.

If the United States and Japan get along well, as we do, and if we can cooperate, then practically every problem in the world will get better. If we foolishly allow ourselves to go in the other direction, none of us will be pleased with what could happen. Fortunately, I sense that the Japanese feel the same way about it, and I think we're making good progress.

Increasingly, Japan is a powerful force in the international scene, and we encourage that. Part of my job is to work together with Japan on this part-



nership, dealing with regional problems and global issues, such as the environment, human rights and so on.

I've got a big, big platter of joint efforts under way here. I think it's going to be challenging and enjoyable.

Suetsune: Mrs. Mondale, do you have any special projects that you plan to pursue in Japan?

Mrs. Mondale: I hope very much to encourage dialogue and communication between American artists and Japanese artists of all media. I would like to bring our two countries closer together through the arts, since I feel strongly that the arts have a special ability to transcend cultural differences. I really love living in Tokyo because there are so many museums to go, and there are so many art galleries and art exhibits. I would like to help American museums and Japanese museums cooperate with exhibitions.

Suetsune: In what field of art are you especially interested?

Mrs. Mondale: Well, I'm interested in all the fine arts, but particularly in clay because I am a potter. American potters have always admired Hamada Shoji. We've known all about him and about Mashiko, one of the many villages and towns that have their own special distinctive wares. I'm looking forward to not only seeing the works of Mingei potters in museums, but also going to the kilns and seeing the work there. I know that in the United States

we admire the work that Japanese artists and creative people do, and I will try in every way possible to encourage the respect and admiration of the work of Japanese artists.

I also have a very strong interest in public art, that is, art in public places, and in the issue of private and corporate support for the arts.

Suetsune: Mr. Ambassador, have you introduced anything new to the embassy since your arrival?

Ambassador: I'm trying to make certain that this is a very open, accessible embassy. I want us to be available to the press, to journalists, to scholars, to everybody. It has been, but I want to keep opening it up.

We have a wonderful embassy, five consulates and six American Centers in Japan. I think we may have the best American mission in the world, and we've got a lot of talent here. I want to make certain that we're using it all the time, that we draw on the talents and all the experience and knowledge and language skills. There is someone in this embassy somewhere who knows everything about construction. There is somebody who knows everything about telecommunications. There is somebody who knows all about Japanese cultural activities, for example. But, I want this embassy, if I can, to become less structured and more open and fluid. I don't know if that's new, but that's what I'm trying to do.

Mrs. Mondale: The only new thing that I can think of right away is that I've asked that the wives of our Japanese guests be included, and a special phone call made to say, "Please, would you bring your wife because I would like to meet her."

Suetsune: Mr. Ambassador, there have been ups and downs in the U.S.-Japan relationship in the past 45 years, since the end of World War II. How do you assess the situation today, frankly?

Ambassador: I think relations are excellent. On mutual security and political areas, while it is not perfect, it comes about as close to perfection as two independent nations could be. In the areas of international cooperation and regional cooperation, we are going to continue to

build on what we have, and things are very good. On the cultural side, too, I think we're doing very well.

The one problem where it's sticky and calls for a lot of attention is on the trade side. Fortunately, we've got the Framework Agreement between our two governments that lays out the schedule and the process for bringing down the current account imbalance and opening markets here in Japan. It is not going to be easy, but both President Clinton and Prime Minister Hosokawa in New York reaffirmed their commitment to this process. If we're careful, if we respect each other, if we go at this with dignity and with honesty and candor, I believe we're going to make progress.

Suetsune: Under the actual negotiations taking place between officials of both nations, it is said there is a so-called "perception gap" between the United States and Japan.

Ambassador: Oh, yes, and we have to keep working on that. One of the challenging things about our societies is, that though we're both democracies and open societies, we are different. We have different histories, culture, and language to start with. Often, if we are not careful, if we don't keep trying to understand each other better, misunderstandings can come up. That is what diplomacy is about, to try to make certain that doesn't happen.

Suetsune: But do you think differences of culture between countries impede understanding between nations?

Ambassador: I come from a nation which is made up of "foreigners." We are all foreigners. I'm a foreigner; Joan's people are foreigners. We've got everything there in the U.S., and what we found out is there are strengths in differences. If we respect each other and listen to each other, we get a society that's better than the sum of its parts.

I believe the same thing is true of the United States and Japan. I think if we handle ourselves right, our differences can complement and add to each other. We will be stronger than one plus one, and that's what I'm trying to do.

Suetsune: Mrs. Mondale, what are your views on the diversity of culture?

Mrs. Mondale: Well, I am particular-

ly interested in the position of women in Japanese society. I don't think there is any one answer, and I think there are just as many differences in the status of women in Japan as there are in the United States. It depends on which woman, it depends on what her job is, it depends on the situation in life itself.

But I think it's fascinating that, bit by bit, both American and Japanese women are sort of waking up to their potential and looking toward a full expression of themselves in whatever field they choose.

Suetsune: I hesitate to ask you this, but during your campaign period in 1984 you said something like, "If you want to sell an American car in Japan you have to bring the United States Army to Yokohama." I know the situation is quite different today than it was in those days.

Ambassador: I've been asked about that. You have to remember what was going on in the early 1980s. The United States had just pursued a policy that gave us the largest deficits in history. Without going into detail, it resulted in the value of the dollar soaring by about 50 or 60%, and the value of the currencies of our competitors, including Japan, depreciating accordingly.

Within a better part of two years, exports in the United States fell off and imports soared, and it wasn't just Japan. If you read my speeches from that time, I was basically arguing that we had to get a better policy to restore America's capacity to export. Maybe I embellished the rhetoric a little bit there. But if you look at my speeches, if you look at my policies, the thrust of what I was campaigning for in 1984 was an America that would do what we are now doing—starting to get this deficit down and making America more productive. I've never been a protectionist.

Suetsune: Do you think Japanese military power should be strengthened to replace the presence of American military power in the Asian region?

Ambassador: I think our basic relationship is solid. In other words, Japan has a Self-Defense Force dedicated to its own defense. Under the Mutual

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refrains from preferential trading arrangements in the name of regional economic cooperation. The best thing APEC can do to help its members continue their economic growth is to open their economies not just to one another but to all countries.

Besides, given the U.S.-Japan economic tensions, it will be extremely difficult for APEC to strike a transpacific trade deal. While economic, diplomatic and security interdependencies between the U.S. and Japan are simply too strong and too great to permit a total disruption in their trade relations, the idea of "free trade" between them is equally far-fetched, given the widespread view in the U.S. that an agreement with Japan on tangible or transparent trade barriers is largely irrelevant or inconsequential. For, in the U.S., Japan is seen as an impenetrable economic fortress not because of any overt tariff and non-tariff barriers—which are already low by industrial country standards—but because of such covert measures as competition policy, industrial structure, *keiretsu*, and the like, which are hardly amenable to trade negotiations. Under such circumstances, Asia-Pacific free trade would only result in greater one-way flow of Japanese goods to other APEC members including the U.S.

What the future holds

It is neither feasible nor desirable to

(Top Drawer, continued from page 27)

Security Treaty, we are available for serious challenges, and we are available for regional forward deployment. I think that's the right relationship.

I encourage Japan in its peace keeping efforts. I think the Cambodian effort was very, very successful and I encourage Japan to take a stronger role in the United Nations. That's starting to happen, but we are not here urging the Japanese to do anything other than what they think is in their own interest.

Suetsune: Returning to the question of misunderstandings between our two countries, how do you feel about the stereotypes that persist in our perceptions of each other?

transform APEC into an economic bloc of any kind for two compelling reasons. First, such a proposition is just not practical for a configuration of countries of APEC's magnitude. It would be simply too unwieldy, not only because of the large number of countries involved but also in view of the high degree of heterogeneity that exists within the grouping. Second, an economic bloc of APEC's size, with special membership privileges that would discriminate against third countries, would be highly trade-distorting with strong trade diversion effects.

APEC can play a constructive role by adopting modest goals and maintaining a low profile, allowing anonymous market forces to integrate the region quietly. Unmistakably, this integration process is already underway, if the grouping's intra-Pacific trade and investment networks and intra-industry and intra-firm sales across the Pacific Basin are anything to go by. APEC will do much harm to this informal process if it attempts to formalize it at this juncture. This would amount to doing too much too soon, arguably a disservice to the Asia-Pacific region.

East Asia can find both comfort and profit in APEC, if the latter remains a loosely structured consultative forum and a free-trade lobby that reinforces the GATT system. Seen in these terms, the U.S. membership in APEC is critical. For one thing, APEC cannot enjoy

much clout without the U.S.; for another, U.S. membership in APEC can ensure that the U.S. does not stray away from multilateralism, bogged down by the dictates of NAFTA.

East Asia can happily live with an APEC which Ambassador William Bodde, Jr., executive director of the APEC Secretariat in Singapore, seems to envisage: One that will "lead the global economy in the direction of trade and investment liberalization;" "serve as a multilateral problem-solving approach that could take out of the zero sum game mentality so common in the bilateral approach;" and act as "a vehicle for human resource development utilizing modern technology to bring the benefits of economic development to the far corners of the region."

What is in store for APEC in 1994? The APEC pendulum will swing from the Eastern to the Western Pacific, with Indonesia assuming the APEC chairmanship. President Suharto is expected to get the Malaysian prime minister back into the fold and put APEC back on track, focusing on priorities which ASEAN has identified as human resource development, education and technology transfer.

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Ambassador: I don't like to look at Japan in terms of a frozen stereotype or caricature, and I don't want the United States looked at that way. We are human beings; we have institutions; we are living, vital, evolving societies; and that's the way I wish to look at it.

With all my heart, I want the relations between Japan and the United States—and between our two peoples—to be based on trust and respect and admiration. I wouldn't be here if I didn't feel that way about it, and I do.

I don't want harsh, excessive conclusions made in either direction. I think it just undermines everything that is important. Together we make up 40% of

the world's production. We are absolutely crucial to peace in this region and to the world. We must have a relationship based on trust.

In terms of trade, the Framework that was agreed to by Japan and the United States in July 1993 is based on that premise. There is no bitterness in it. It is just an agreement by the two countries to bring down the current account imbalance, open up the markets, and to have a negotiating procedure that will achieve that.

I think that is the proper relationship.
Suetsune: Ambassador Mondale and Mrs. Mondale, thank you very much.