

Another Aspect Of Polish Contribution to Japan

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel ill at ease addressing such a distinguished group of scholars, myself not belonging to the academic community. Therefore, I have to apologize and I will speak on a subject little known to you and little known to the world at large, except for a small group of people who were directly involved with it.

At this point we have to go back about 40 years, when Japan was still a rather poor country, devastated after the Second World War, barely freed from US occupation and not quite sure of its position and acceptance in the world. Yet they decided that life must go on and they would have to lift themselves to match their conquerors.

During the 1950's thousands of Japanese engineers and executives invaded the United States. Each of them carrying, in accordance with their custom, papers, notebooks and invariably small gifts, wrapped up in a silk scarf. They studied and learned. And this is where my story begins.

At that time I was working for a man, who in the field of metallurgy, was already world famous. This man was Mr. Tadeusz Sendzimir, inventor of the continuous hot dip galvanizing of strip process bearing his name, as well as of a rolling mill capable of rapid cold strip reduction and of a planetary hot reduction mill.

Mr. Sendzimir was born in Poland in 1894 and studied at the Lwow Polytechnic. In 1915 he was deported by the Russians to Kiev where he remained until 1918. During the chaos of the Russian revolution he escaped across Siberia to Vladivostock, which was in the hands of European troops. From there he went to Shanghai where he got people living there interested in the founding of a wire and nail works, which was the first of its kind in China. It was there, in that plant, faced everyday with the corrosion problem, that he began to develop his new galvanizing process.

In 1929 he went to the United States, then to France where he tried to get steel companies interested in his new process. He failed. Steel companies were too

conservative to radically change their methods. So, finally in 1930 he returned to Poland where, at last, he found interested sponsors who helped him to build the first industrial continuous galvanizing line and his first cold reduction mill in Silesia. That was in 1933.

Outside of Poland, however, there was a good deal of skepticism. In 1934 Mr. Sendzimir moved his office to Paris. Slowly the interest began to dawn and experts from many countries, including France, England and the United States went to Poland to see for themselves. Orders began to arrive. Two from France, one from England and finally from the USA. In the Spring of 1939 Mr. Sendzimir moved to America, it becoming his adopted country since the War, and in 1947 he became a US citizen.

I will not try to explain to you technical details of Mr. Sendzimir's inventions. The secret of the cold mill was that it was capable of rolling very hard metals into a very thin strip.

Here I would like to quote from Mr. Sendzimir's excellent biography written by his daughter, Vanda:

"One of the points of Japan's First Modernization Program (1951-1955) was to grant preferential treatment in bringing in foreign machines and technology. Japanese engineers combed the globe to find, study and ship home the newest devices the West had to offer. By 1955, they were already able to increase rolling mill capacity 600%. Then they found Tad. And Tad had what they wanted: the most modern and efficient mill for rolling thin sheet metals..."

Simultaneous to the development of the new rolling technique was the advent of new metals practically unknown in the industrial production until the last War. These were the nickel and chrome nickel alloys, popularly known as stainless steel or inox. Now, it took a Sendzimir mill to roll down to thin gauges a strip of stainless steel! In the years right after the war few people saw this possibility and nobody could predict the fantastic expansion of the stainless steel market.

In the early 1950's there were only a few Sendzimir mills in Europe and in the United States, and only one of them, in Pennsylvania, started to roll stainless. Just as you read today about the world wide problems of steel industry in general, of plants being closed down, of unemployment caused by it in the

formerly thriving steel producing areas – the only segment of this industry which is still expanding every year is stainless strip.

When you look around today you will see its application everywhere – in the household kitchen sinks, cutlery, drums in washing machines, architectural trim in buildings, parts of your car like decorative trim but also now in the new catalyser mufflers. Then major installations in food processing plants, in chemical plants, in shipbuilding industry, trucks and railway carriages carrying milk or various acids, everything connected with the atomic industry, reinforcing honeycomb and wing skin of supersonic jet planes, as well as in various space programs.

There are several million tons of flat stainless strip used every year and at least 90% of it has been rolled on Sendzimir mills.

The Japanese industrialists, encouraged by their government were one of the first ones to see and grasp the opportunity. The first Sendzimir mill was sold in Japan in 1953. By the 1960's they were selling like hot cakes. Mr. Sendzimir had in his organization a number of Polish engineers who had spent years in Japan commissioning the newly installed equipment. Here I would like to mention people like Emil Skulski, or Ted Bijasiewicz, who have stayed there for several years.

Mr. Sendzimir made his first trip to Japan after the war in 1956. When US Secretary of State John Foster Dullas arrived to Japan a little earlier, he was met at the Tokyo airport by some 40 important government officials. When Mr. Sendzimir landed at Haneda airport he was met by some 80 chief executives as well as directors of all major Japanese steel companies and trading companies.

Today, thanks to Mr. Sendzimir's revolutionary process as well as the foresight and energy of Japan's steel industry executives and engineers, Japan, with its over 50 Sendzimir mills has become the number 1 producer of stainless steel strip. It has an annual capacity is some 1.6 million tons. For a comparison the next largest world stainless strip producer has a capacity of approximately half a million tons per year.

Mr. Sendzimir liked and respected the Japanese and they reciprocated. To quote his daughter again, when Mr. Sendzimir died in 1989 “of all the companies in all the countries around the world Tad did business with, it was only the Japanese who showed up – five of them – at the tiny church in Bethlehem, Connecticut, to pay their respects at his funeral.”

A few months later in Poland, at the request of trade unions, one of the two largest steel works has been renamed after Mr. Sendzimir, Huta Imienia T. Sendzimira.

After handling Japan’s desk and greeting hundreds of Japanese visitors in the United States and guiding them through many US steel works, I finally visited Japan for the first time in 1960. In those days Japan was a different country. No bullet trains, all the domestic flights were in un-pressurized DC-4, with seats arranged for the Japanese build which meant that after a four and a half hour flight from Tokyo to Fukuoka I could hardly get out of the plane... The only heating outside of the international hotels in Tokyo and Osaka were charcoal pots. There were, however, also the good sides: the exchange rate was some 360 yen to a \$1 which let me stay for \$30 a day at Frank Lloyd Wright’s Imperial Hotel.

To me one cannot be indifferent about Japan... One either likes it, or not. Since I had to occupy myself with the Japanese affairs I have decided, a *priori*, that I better like it!

In spite of my positive attitude, my first stay in Japan was not an easy one. Not knowing the language, not knowing a single so called “occidental”, I was left for weeks and weeks at the mercy of my Japanese interpreters.

One has to remember that in those days even the so called interpreters hardly spoke English and their interpretation was always subjective. They simply considered that a Japanese could not possibly understand western psychology and approach and vice versa. Therefore they always had their own interpretation of what you said.

My mission was to negotiate formation of one of the first “joint companies”. Mr. Sendzimir chose as his partners Iwai and Company and Hitachi. All I remember

today is that we started invariably at about 8:30 in the morning and continued until 7 in the evening. On one side of the table I sat alone, while on the other sat some 8 or 10 representatives of Japanese partners. The little chairs were very low and very uncomfortable. Usually, after each sentence read in English from the proposed agreement, there was a discussion of half an hour or so in Japanese which I did not understand at all. Then followed a question: Mr. Romer, what do you mean by the word “subsequent”, or something similar, and again half an hour of discussion would begin which was incomprehensible to me.

Finally we initiated a tentative agreement and just as I saw myself already flying to Hong Kong or Bangkok for a well deserved rest, I was told that 2 or 3 days later I would have to go to Osaka to meet Mr. Yujiro Iwai, Chairman of the board and a grandson of a certain Mr. Iwai, who was the founder of this particular Zaibatsu by importing the first bicycle to Japan.

I had never met Mr. Iwai before but was told that he was a sort of “intellectual” and I was curious to meet him. Mr. Okamura, my guardian angel, collected me from my hotel room and guided me through a maze of little narrow streets and bamboo houses. Later I was told that this was the area of the most exclusive restaurants and geisha houses in Osaka.

The dinner was a private one. Just Mr. Iwai, Mr. Okamura and an elderly lady who did not sit with us but occasionally added a little sake to our glasses. I learned later that she was Mr. Iwai’s geisha, a custom today practically unknown because of its cost.

Mr. Iwai must have been about 70 years old. His English was impeccable (he was educated in a boarding school in the United States and then attended Cambridge University). He also spoke equally well in Italian, German and French. Our conversation started with a general discussion but Mr. Iwai soon began to subject me to a sort of examination.

At first he tested my reactions to his very sharp criticism of French and English politics and their colonialism – this was just after the Suez crisis. Later, after learning that I was born in Lithuania, he started to rave about its language “- surrounded by a sea of Slavic and Germanic tribes, this little island, the only one

in Europe, directly descending from Sanskrit!" He went on to say that when he was traveling by train from Berlin to Moscow in 1935, it was in Kaunas that he first heard spoken Lithuanian, he was so impressed, that he got off the train and spent two weeks there.

You may be surprised that I am spending so much time describing to you that dinner in Osaka, Well, it is very simple: in life when you look back very often you can identify key moments, or turning points and it was that dinner some 35 years ago that indirectly brought me here today.

Mr. Iwai knowing that I was of Polish culture (he must have been briefed by Mr. Okamura), suggested that we discuss Polish literature. "I would like very much to share my observation" he said. "Of course we shall not waste our time talking about authors universally known – Nobel prize winners like Sienkiewicz and Raymont – but could you tell me what do you think about the novels by Hlasko?" It is needless to say, that at that time, living in the United States, even though I have heard the name Hlasko I had not read any of his novels! Mr. Iwai admitted that he has recently read three of his novels in German translation.

Somehow I got through this literary test. And then Mr. Iwai told me something that has occupied my mind to this date. He said that I may find a number of his contemporaries in Japan that speak fluently in Polish, especially among those who were in high government posts and military service. "You see Japan and Poland are like two poles separated by a Russian sea 11,000km long. We are the natural allies, if not militarily, at least we must erect a cultural bulwark to contain this colossus from both East and West sides."

It was that meeting and conversation which first developed my interest in the subject and the study of past contacts of which I did not know anything. I was still lucky enough to meet and hold long talks with people who contributed so much to the mutual co-operation of the two countries, like General Yamawaki, first Japanese representative in Poland after World War 1, General Matsumura, who graduated from Polish Military Academy, not to mention Poles, like Dr. Fryling, Prof. Jedrzejewicz, Ambassador Romer, Major Rybikowski and other, who forged mutual understanding between Poland in Japan.

This was going to be the subject of my PhD dissertation, and today it has become a theme of a book which we are jointly preparing with Prof Ewa Palasz

Rutkowska, which will cover Polish Japanese relations from 1895 until 1945 and which should be published next year.

Thank you.