

Fierce Pride Called 'Giri'

By PETER DESBARATS

(Fourth of Six Parts)

The American businessman was supervising installation of a new machine in his Osaka factory. One of his Japanese business associates suggested arranging the mechanism in a certain way. He drew a rough diagram to illustrate his idea. The American drew another diagram for a more efficient arrangement.

When the machine went into production, the Japanese businessman watched it closely for two days. The American was right. It was more efficient that way.

He walked out of the factory and refused to talk to the American for 12 months.

Students of Japanese character say that the Japanese have a word for this — giri. "Giri to one's name" means the duty to maintain one's professional reputation, at all costs.

Ruth Benedict, an American cultural anthropologist, illustrated it this way:

"The teacher says, 'I cannot in giri to my name as a teacher admit ignorance of it,' and he means that if he does not know to what species a frog belongs nevertheless he has to pretend that he does."

"The businessman, too, cannot let anyone know that his assets are seriously depleted or that plans he made for his organization have failed. And the diplomat cannot admit the failure of his policy."

"In all such giri usages there is extreme identification of a man with his work and any criticism of one's acts or one's competence becomes automatically a criticism of one's self."

After the first interviews with Japanese government officials and businessmen, I felt as if I were stumbling blindfolded through a china shop. In Canada, criticism is one of a reporter's best tools. If an interview is going badly — criticize. Try to strike a spark from the other person. North Americans and Europeans react aggressively to criticism. The Japanese accept it coldly.

This is the sort of difference that makes communication difficult in Japan. It also indicates that the so-called "Americanization" of Japan doesn't penetrate deeply. Coca-Cola in the stomach doesn't mean America on the brain. American westerners on the television sets in the living room don't obscure the Buddhist shrine in the corner with its tiny image and photographs of dead relatives.

It isn't merely a matter of language. Even with Japanese who spoke fluent English, I often felt as if we were trying to shout at each other across the Pacific. On the other hand, the mute American-born Japanese businessman from San Francisco, his speech-box removed in a cancer operation, could establish immediate contact with me by shoving a note across the bar: "How's it going?" He couldn't say a word but he talked my language.

The Canadian exporter lit another cigarette nervously.

"I spent three hours with those guys this morning," he said, "and all they did was agree with me."

"Every time I suggested something, they said hi-hi. Yes-yes. And I knew that I wasn't getting to first base. I don't think they understood a thing I was saying."

"Sure they did," said the American public relations man who had lived in Tokyo since the end of the war.

"Talk to a Japanese businessman in his office and he'll just nod at you and say hi-hi. He agrees with everything. You think you've got a deal. But weeks go by and — no deal."

"Then he takes you out to a party some evening. Geishas, food and sake. He starts to relax. By the end of the evening you've discovered that he's got some terrific objections to the deal."

"It isn't the way we do business at home — although



Road to Kyoto shrine — commercial religion is no Western invention.

SKETCHES BY McNALLY

"The double martini taken isn't much different — but that's the way it's done here."

"When you see a Japanese laughing, look out," said another American businessman. "It means that something bad has happened, something so bad that he doesn't know how to tell you about it, so he laughs."

"One day last week, I heard a group of them laughing in the factory. Oh-oh, I said to myself. Sure enough, one of the girls on the machines had sliced off two fingers."

Of course the Japanese can talk just as easily about the "inscrutable West."

Minor example: One night in Tokyo, in dire need and knowing that public lavatories are few and far between, I paid 10 yen for a platform ticket at a railway station, had the ticket punched by the guard, used the station facilities and gave the guard the ticket on the way out. He looked at me as if I were crazy.

A Japanese would have used a convenient wall and no one would have given him a second glance.

The two-page advertisement in the Tokyo newspaper contained a photograph of a subway-platform crowd of several hundred Japanese. The caption: "Mitsui will affect the lives of all these people today." The rest of the advertisement listed various Mitsui companies active in shipping, transport, banking, manufacturing, real estate, insurance and other fields.

Before 1945, the economy of Japan was dominated by "zaibatsu," large financial interests originally controlled by one family. The tentacles of each empire spread throughout the country, often around the world, into dozens of business activities.

After the war the Americans broke up the zaibatsu in an effort to foster more competitive and "democratic" commerce. Now the combines are re-grouping to a certain extent for the simple reason that this type of business organization is in the Japan-

ese tradition and seems to suit the Japanese character. Tradition also explains the close relationship between business and government in Japan. Initial steps toward Western-style industrialization in the 19th Century were sponsored by government and it is still difficult to discover where government influence ends and free-enterprise initiative begins.

A Japanese manufacturer, for example, may be technically free to import as much aluminum from Canada as he needs. But the government, for various good reasons, may think it desirable for him to purchase a certain proportion of his requirements from a Japanese firm. The manufacturer may follow the government's "advice" because he needs official co-operation in opening up a new branch plant.

The whole system is filled with hidden checks and balances and family and political connections that baffle the outsider. Most foreign companies doing business in Japan find it essential to work through or with a Japanese company.

There is a great deal of what a North American would call paternalism in Japanese business. When a young man starts work with a large company, he often expects to stay with it for the rest of his life. The word "loyalty" — used less and less to describe management-worker relationships in Western industry — crops up often in Japan. Management's loyalty is reflected in the fact that it is extremely difficult to fire a worker even if he is lazy or inefficient or no longer required by the company.

More than any other country, Japan must trade to live. It is relatively poor in almost all natural resources — agricultural land, forests, minerals and oil. Its main resource is 96,000,000 skilled, literate and disciplined Japanese. It also benefits from a comparatively low wage structure although this factor is becoming less and less important. Japan is now in the midst of a 10-year income-doubling plan and some companies increased wages by as much as 15 per cent last year. A German businessman in Osaka estimated that the cost of labor in Japan today, all of the many fringe benefits included, is only about 20 per cent less than it is in Germany.

The "floating factory" has shown the world in the past 19 years that it can produce high-quality goods, but it requires expanding markets if it is to prosper.

Canada has a two-to-one favorable trade balance with Japan, largely because of a system of "voluntary" quotas

on Japanese imports. But the Japanese are becoming more and more restless under this arrangement.

Canada now is in the

middle of trade negotiations with Japan. Government officials in Tokyo told me flatly that the latest Canadian proposals "shocked" them — and that's strong language for the polite Japanese. Already they have rejected proposals to limit Japanese exports to Canada of rayon, spun rayon and woollen goods.

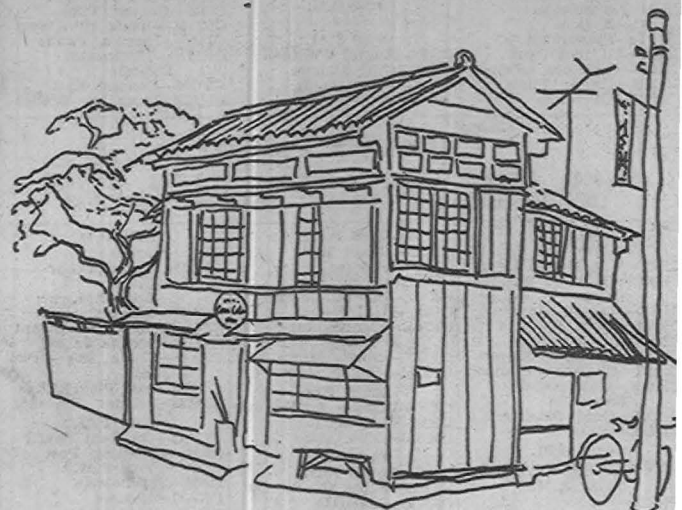
There are valid arguments on the Canadian side. Only a growing manufacturing industry in Canada will reduce unemployment. Small-scale Canadian manufacturers require some protection against products of large-scale low-cost Japanese industry.

But Canada also has a long-range stake in the prosperity of Japan as an expanding market for Canadian wheat, coal, iron ore and other raw materials — not to mention the incalculable political advantage of having a prosperous and peaceful Japan on the other side of the Pacific.

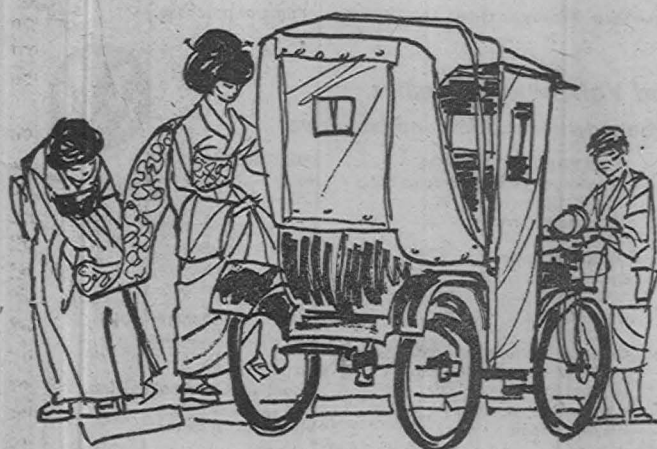
The Japanese are not content to moan about import quotas. They are making strenuous efforts to capture Canadian markets that are open to them. The Nissan Motor Company, for instance, last year established dealers in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal although it exported only 200 cars to Canada in 1963 and fully realizes the difficulty of convincing Canadians that Japanese cars are as good as Japanese cameras.

Japan's trade with Communist China increased by more than 60 per cent last year. The question of future relations between the two countries is one of the main topics of political discussion in Japan today. If China can afford to buy it, there is no doubt that Japan will be eager to supply the machinery for China's industrialization. Increased trade cannot but have an effect on the political relations between the two countries.

In an effort to soothe the United States, still its best customer, Japan is using the same vocabulary that Canada employed to explain its Cuban trade to Washington. The Japanese say that it is necessary to maintain contact with the mainland and to introduce "new thinking" there. But cultural and political "bridges," like trade, are two-way streets. This cannot be overlooked in a country where leftist movements are reportedly strong among university students and where people in the past have switched loyalties rapidly.



Typical small shop-dwelling in central Tokyo.



Geisha boards rickshaw taxi in southern Beppu.