

# The Truth About Japan

Donald Kirk

**R**on McLean is a hangover from another era, an aging hippie who still does his hair in a graying pony-tail nearly a decade after he first carried placards and shouted slogans denouncing Japan's support for U.S. policy in Vietnam. For the past eight years of his existence in Japan, though, McLean waged a different kind of crusade—this one against an official ruling that finally forced him to leave the country and return to Hawaii to pursue his academic interest in classical Japanese music.

"The government of most countries is intended to protect the rights of the individual," he said with the didactic air of one who has just discovered a basic truth. "In Japan it's to protect the government." He was talking in the half light of one of those glittering little coffee shops that purvey a small cup for the equivalent of nearly two dollars and a piece of cake for twice as much. He looked hurt, wronged, stung by the vindictive power of a ruthless regime. Here he was, a liberal and humanitarian, well liked by the students to whom he had been teaching English since arriving here from a tour with the Peace Corps in Korea ten years before. Now he was forty-three, engaged to a Japanese girl, surrounded by Japanese friends and associates, and for some reason the people who run the country didn't appreciate him.

Like Ron McLean, almost anyone who has spent much time here discovers the truth about Japan. It's a tough place. Typically, foreign businessmen sit down for endless cups of tea, dinners overflowing with sake, toasts, and speeches, make a few deals but then encounter strangely niggling difficulties with customs officials, distributors, their partners. Tourists, those who can afford to pay eighty to a hundred dollars a day at top-class hotels, mirate over bills as high as a thousand dollars for three or four people at posh restaurants and cabarets. Long-time students stare with tight-pursed lips at supermarket shelves laden with cans of fruit from the U.S. at one or two dollars each, slabs of steak at thirty dollars a pound, hamburger meat at twelve dollars a pound, and large red apples for as much as two dollars.

McLean's case, though, was different—not so much a figment of the acquisitive thrust of the postwar "economic animal," "Japan, Inc.," as a rich illustration of the underlying centrifugal stress of Japanese society. In the end, Japan's highest court acknowledged that he had not violated Japanese law by participating in demonstrations, but it still upheld the right of the Ministry of Justice to deny him a visa—or

deport him. The classic ruling gave immigration authorities sweeping power to consider "all facts concerning all the activities of aliens during their stay in Japan" ranging from "domestic, political, economic and social circumstances" to "foreign relations, international comity and other pertinent matters...." On the basis of those facts, rather than on simply stated laws, authorities could then decide "what is most appropriate to the circumstances of the time, and which best upholds the national interest, including the maintenance of internal security, moral standards and public health and hygiene and the stability of the labor market."

To McLean and the Japanese lawyers who argued the case through the courts, the ruling epitomized historic Japanese ethnocentric nationalism in its rawest form. They claimed the decision gave the government the power, if it wished to exercise it in some unforeseen crisis, to order a nationwide purge of the country's 600,000 Koreans and 50,000 Chinese, almost none of whom can obtain Japanese citizenship, and forcibly deport them. "I'm leaving a lot of people worse off than before," said McLean, who carries a special sympathy for Koreans from his Peace Corps days. "They're the niggers of Japan." He cited the case of a man who was fired from Mitsubishi after the organization's personnel spies made the shocking discovery that he was a Korean masquerading under a Japanese name. "It's partly racism, partly nationalism," he said, equating his own plight with that of the Koreans. "It's a feeling, 'We have to keep things under control.'"

**W**hatever it is, the ordeal of Ron McLean, largely unreported in the foreign press, struck a responsive chord among many of the 21,000 Americans living in Japan. In an era of rising Japanese exports, a burgeoning American trade deficit, disquieting if vague talk about an increase in military expenditures as America "withdraws" from Asia, the McLean decision stood for the type of "consensus" that propels the Japanese machine more surely than the actions of any individual. In myriad isolated ways the country's small leadership elite—anonymous bureaucrats and politicians, drab bankers and businessmen—are telling each other Japan must stand on its own. More and more they are saying they cannot trust the Americans, they must look to new markets and new alliances—and regurgitate the troublemakers in their midst. Japan still pays endless lip service to the American alliance and friendship with Americans, partly out of a deep-rooted fear of America's some-

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time ability to turn initial defeat into final triumph, but the rhetoric seems increasingly disingenuous. As Murata Hisashi, president of the Japan External Trade Organization, said in a typically effulgent speech to the American Chamber of Commerce: "When Americans wholeheartedly put their minds behind an effort, your industry has shown you are nearly always successful. I wonder if we won't have to refer to the United States as 'America, Incorporated.'" Flattered, the Americans laughed politely, but the real point of Murata's words was quite different. Reflecting the apprehension of the ruling establishment, he hoped to counter the threat of protectionism against Japanese exports by buying time. "Some members of Congress will take a hard line against Japan no matter what we do," he said, "but protectionism is something we must avoid." He ran through the usual litany of the "time it takes to develop an export program, to make the contacts" and then evoked the baseball image common to both societies, predicting "American exports can be a grand slam in the Japanese market."

The truth, though, is that Japanese society, in its need to survive by importing raw materials and exporting finished products, its top-to-bottom rigidity, its internal structural cohesiveness, cannot yield to the inroads of the foreigners except under extreme duress. The pattern of Japan's evolution over the past decade has been a reality of tightening regulations and restrictions beneath an appearance of "liberalization"—and the generalization applies to Japanese as well as to foreigners, to internal politics as well as to economics. Japanese were so accustomed to authoritarian central power exercised by the Liberal-Democratic party, often described as neither liberal nor democratic, that the sudden switch in prime ministers at the beginning of December impressed most of them as another round of musical chairs with little impact on their own lives. "Nothing will change no matter who runs the government," one young secretary remarked. "So what difference does it make to me?"

What difference indeed does it make that a man named Masayoshi Ohira surprised all the forecasters by polling far more votes in the LDP primary in November than did Takeo Fukuda, previously regarded as almost certain to win a new term as LDP president and prime minister? If Ohira seems more "liberal" and "soft" than the rigid, arch-conservative Fukuda, the fact remains they both spring from the same bureaucratic tradition. Each of them apprenticed for prime minister by serving as finance and foreign minister, and each shows the same loyalty to party that a typical Japanese "salary-man" displays toward his company. Ohira's final vote as LDP president by the party's Diet members turned into a love-in, with Fukuda smiling and shaking hands with his victorious rival and pledging to maintain "our mutual trust." Ironically, the real kingmaker was Fukuda's arch-enemy, Kakuei Tanaka, forced to resign as prime minister under a cloud in 1974 and desperate for revenge.

In fact, Tanaka's role in the squabbling of the LDP exposes the party primary election for what it really was—a behind-the-scenes buy-off that typified the

way power flows in Japan but had little if anything to do with real issues. Fukuda's great error was one of hubris. He assumed the LDP's million-and-a-half dues-paying members and "associates" would by and large support him on the basis of his record, including signing a treaty of peace and friendship with China and opening the country's major airport gateway at Narita over violent radical protest. In effect he told the voters to come to him, while Ohira and Tanaka went to the voters—or, rather, to the prefectural bosses who control blocs of votes—with promises of influence and special considerations. In a week-long write-in ballot, local politicians checked Ohira's name on thousands of pieces of paper without bothering to inform the "voters" themselves.

The process of selecting a leader in Japan turned into a charade that masked the real power plays—the movement of money among huge conglomerates, descendants of the old *zaibatsu* supposedly broken up during the American occupation, and special interest groups, notably farmers panicked at the prospect of foreign competition. If Fukuda appeared beholden, for instance, to companies with interests in Taiwan, he managed nonetheless to encourage the deepest Japanese economic penetration into mainland China since the Thirties. If Ohira seemed to side with "consumers" crying for tax cuts and deflation, he still made clear to growers of outrageously high-priced beef and citrus products that he would defend them against American efforts to increase imports substantially and force them to slash prices. Ohira counted among his more ardent backers, moreover, the leaders of Japan's hard-pressed steel industry, reeling under protests and restrictions by Western nations that were protecting their own interests against the competition. The question among Japanese moneymen was one of tactics, not strategy—and the choice of prime minister was a technicality in the struggle for consensus.

**I**n the Japanese "culture of shame," the individual consumer, like the foreign businessman, becomes a statistic whose bargaining power depends upon his skill in pressure politics. So far Japan's consumer organizations, claiming some 20 million members, have had almost no success in combatting the distribution system that jacks up retail prices for foreign goods even though their cost to wholesalers has dropped markedly in the past year of the dollar's decline. "We have a general tradition of politeness," said Shoji Ohno, secretary-general of the national liaison committee of consumers' organizations. "We are weak in raising the confidence of consumers. As a whole we do not have such dominant influence."

The problem with the consumers' movement goes deeper than mere "tradition," at least in the sense of "politeness" or "weakness." What Japanese is not personally proud of Japan's renaissance? The statistics of Japan's trade surplus, more than \$11.5 billion with the United States alone for 1978, may upset Americans, but to the Japanese they reflect a success in which all of them share. Socialists and Communists

may purport to oppose big business. They berate the government for paying little heed to social welfare, health, education, and the like, but faithful bureaucrats and Liberal-Democratic party liners find their criticism easy to ignore. "You start with the long-suffering attitude of the consumers and combine it with the political indifference of the leadership," said a foreign diplomat. The bottom line is that socialists and Communists, on gaining power in urban centers, get along beautifully with local business and industrial leaders.

It is as if, over the past decade, Japanese of all political backgrounds have been welding a new national consensus—one that will inevitably aspire to more than simple economic might. In forming the consensus, the ruling establishment does not rely solely upon buying and selling, subtle flattery, and limited freedom in the form of the safety valve of pro forma denunciations in the Diet. It also is quite capable, in the crunch, of sheer, well-coordinated force, the main instrument for driving the radical Left and the radical Right out of meaningful existence. The leftist struggle to shut down Narita was almost a last line of resistance before ultimate defeat. Radical leftists now are battling each other in guerrilla skirmishes on university campuses, while the rightists content themselves with driving sound trucks through Tokyo calling for "patriotism" and denouncing the new relationship with China. The furthest-out radicals—the Red Army—still exist and no doubt are happily plotting the takeover of the country but are almost forgotten as items of daily news.

The key to the suppression of real opposition of the sort that might topple the power structure is the national police force, a quasi-military organization with some of the best-trained riot policemen in the world. At the demonstration at Narita in September riot cops garbed in medieval-looking helmets and shields outnumbered demonstrators by a count of twelve thousand to eight thousand. Rows of slate-gray trucks equipped with high-powered hoses waited to soak anyone disposed to challenge the state by deviating from the assigned line of march. The demonstrators in their red, white, and black helmets—each color representing a different organization—cheered loudly while their leaders promised to "shoot down the planes." On the outer fringes of the crowd, plainclothes policemen, easily identified by their two-way radios, took down names and snapped pictures. The demonstrators snake-danced through villages and farmland but broke up peacefully at dusk amid vague promises of "one year of struggle" against construction of a second main landing strip.

There is, to be sure, an excuse for the waning of the spirit of protest that during the Sixties intermittently threatened the postwar pro-American leadership. The left wing has not had a burning national cause since the reversion of Okinawa from American to Japanese control in 1972 and the end of the Indochinese conflict in 1975. Yet those causes themselves were essentially "antiforeign"—conservative Japanese businessmen might frown on the far Left but were not totally hostile

to a protest against the military power of a nation that had conquered and occupied Japan thirty years before. The degree of permissible freedom as well as the militant zeal of Japanese students has fallen precipitously since the defeat of the American clients in Indochina, for which Okinawa served as a vital rear base. Japanese students seem far less exercised over the prospect of Japan's reemergence as a military power in its own right—or at least as a manufacturer of war matériel.

**T**he occasion of the annual Self-Defense Forces parade at the Asaka training ground outside Tokyo in late October dramatized both the country's new military potential and the ineffectiveness of serious opponents. There were, actually, two parades that day. First, a few thousand leftists marched through the town in tightly disciplined formation. They followed precisely behind a row of police vans, and police reinforcements stood on either side of the designated parade route. Close after the leftists, like another display in the same parade, came an assortment of patriotic rightists shouting slogans denouncing them and calling for preparedness for a new war. The main significance of the left/right parade, though, was that it was not only smaller than the year before but totally circumscribed by police.

The real parade—the one inside the Asaka training ground before some twenty thousand spectators—was far more impressive. Approximately five thousand troops from all branches of the SDF marched by, followed by heavy military hardware ranging from 155 millimeter and 203 millimeter howitzers to anti-aircraft guns and Hawk missiles to M-74 tanks—M for Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and 74 for the year in which they were first produced. Almost all the items were manufactured in Japan, evidence of Japan's capacity to shift to full-time war production in a few months. More revealing still was a speech by Fukuda exhorting the SDF to prepare for attack and encouraging the build-up of the defense establishment, now numbering only 233,000 men and women in uniform. Fukuda claimed sympathy for the SDF was increasing, a conclusion backed up by newspaper polls showing that most Japanese support its existence even if they hardly look upon war as an imminent danger.

It was the first time a prime minister had made a real speech at the SDF parade, and it happened in the midst of a lengthy national debate on defense priorities. The debate was touched off by one of those rare acts of drama that periodically punctuate the movement toward consensus. General Hiroomi Kurisu, chairman of the Joint Staff Council of the SDF, was forced to resign in late July for criticizing civilian control of the armed forces—an absolute tenet of the military philosophy of a nation that still pays more than lip service to Article 9 of the postwar constitution proscribing militarism of any kind. The defense forces, established at General MacArthur's urging during the Korean War, clearly represented a departure, but they still are tiny, underequipped, and poorly trained for a country of Japan's economic power. The government

carefully limits the annual defense budget to just under 1 per cent of the gross national product—\$10 billion this year. That figure is the seventh largest of any nation, but three-quarters of it goes for the payroll of troops who can resign at three weeks' notice.

"The Self-Defense Forces are like a sculpted Buddha," said General Kurisu in a typical speech, this one before foreign journalists. "They look beautiful, but they have no power. The capability of the Russians in the Far East is increasing. We should be able to act in an emergency. We must develop quick retaliatory methods." General Kurisu contended that Japanese planes did not even have the authority to counter Soviet attack without orders from the prime minister. "The Russians could destroy half our cities while our leaders are still playing golf," he said, displaying the usual contempt of a military man for civilians. "The constitution only ties our hands. If there's any danger in the future, it will be because people refuse to give a proper role to the Self-Defense Forces and recognize their importance." At the crux of the debate in the Diet were two issues—first, whether to grant the Defense Agency special "emergency" powers and, second, whether to increase spending beyond 1 per cent of the GNP.

As it happened, the debate was less significant than it appeared in newspaper headlines. Kurisu was left twisting in the wind, lecturing and writing but criticized for having dared to speak openly against the system. The proposal for emergency powers never came to a vote, and Fukuda had to reiterate his faith in civilian control. Ohira wisely chose a dovish stance. Rather than give an impression of tolerating the discussion, as did Fukuda, he let it be known that he opposed any change. "The existing legislation is adequate," he said in a ponderous statement of policy before the election. "Should the need arise, we will study it"—the typical bureaucrat's device for covering his flank in case he had to alter policy in a hurry.

The debate was of only symbolic value. The Japanese, in their daily lives, are not afraid the Russians are coming. Their leaders, faceless diplomats and defense officials, talk about the Soviet presence on the four northern islands overrun by Soviet troops at the end of World War II and still claimed by Japan as a precondition for a "peace treaty." But the dialogue is theoretical, abstruse, geographically and emotionally remote. In another sense, though, the debate may have shifted public opinion—if not noticeably in the immediate future, then in five, ten, or twenty years hence. For one thing, Japanese deeply questioned the American "commitment," especially in view of the planned phased withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from South Korea over the next few years. For another, a legion of military "experts"—professors, intellectuals, theoreticians with backgrounds in and out of government—publicized shortcomings and failures in the SDF and recommended increases in specific areas of training and equipment.

"We hope we can build our defense capabilities to the extent that they will build public and psychological confidence," said Makoto Momoi, professor at the

National Defense College. "We want other Asian nations, including China, to believe we can take care of ourselves—that means a 25 per cent increase in naval and air forces, including a special task force for sea control." Beyond that, Momoi urged "systematization" of what he called "the three C's—communications, command and control"—plus an airborne early-warning system. In terms of education alone, he said, it would take fifteen years to develop enough fully experienced naval officers and between five and eight years to train enough air force and army officers. Other experts agreed. "To keep our defense budget at less than 1 per cent of the GNP is not reasonable," said Keiichi Saeki, president of the prestigious Nomura Research Institute, "but we need not increase it beyond 1.5 per cent or 2 per cent of the GNP." He suggested the SDF expand "not in quantity but in quality," particularly in air-defense and antisubmarine capabilities.

Even that kind of seemingly tough talk was rather esoteric. One of Japan's most knowledgeable opinion analysts, Takayoshi Miyagawa, president of the Center for Political Public Relations, dismissed new guidelines, much less a constitutional revision, as politically impossible. But he foresaw "real danger" in the efforts of Japanese industry to export war-related products. "We have some signs of a larger defense build-up from these industrial centers," said Miyagawa. Manufacturers of computers and other sophisticated matériel pressured the government to get COCOM, the Coordinating Committee for Export Control, dominated by the U.S., to ease up on restrictions banning the export by America's allies of military goods to China. More important for the long run, Miyagawa and others predict that Japanese industry will turn to production of warships, weapons, and the like to compensate for recession. The shipbuilding industry in particular needs an outlet in the midst of a severe slump in orders.

"No single company in this country depends on Defense Agency orders," Miyagawa noted. "They're more interested in relaxation of export restrictions." Military production is so small that Mitsubishi has made only a few hundred of the M-74 tanks, deemed much too costly to keep turning out only for the SDF's limited needs. In the search for consensus, however, the influence of the *zaibatsu* may count for more than that of the noisy politicians in their employ.

In any case, the way to consensus lies on the familiar course of economic imperialism. Money alone is not the sole motive for Japan's resurgence, as the dilemma of Ron McLean indicated, but it is certainly a means. The spectacle of thousands of Japanese waving paper flags at the annual SDF parade told the story more effectively than did the dying chants of the demonstrators. The crude phrase, "Japanese only," barked by doormen outside cabarets in tough nightclub districts, remains the code of this land, and McLean's departure symbolized the mounting drive to enforce that code in a renewed, undeclared campaign for world power. **WV**