

Bob Considine

A Painful 'No' From Hirohito

Japan's Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ohira seemed to be saying "Yes, but what have you done for us lately?" when he announced that Emperor Hirohito would not be allowed to accept President Nixon's invitation to visit the U.S. this year.

It was not too many years ago that an invitation from the President of the United States to the Emperor of Japan to come see us would have been accepted with hysterical joy in Nippon, and the Emperor would have made it to Washington even if he had to paddle a canoe all the way.

TEMPUS FUGIT: There was a time during and after World War II when a large sector of the American people would have enthusiastically supported any motion to de-horse the Emperor and even with Tojo and Homma. If anything, Japan seemed to be a more sinister foe than even the Germans. Not many voices were raised here against the indiscriminate and probably unnecessary atomic obliteration of defenseless residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Made up for Pearl Harbor, lots of people muttered.

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BUT WITH A COMPASSION that only a great victor can summon, we forgave Japan. We built back what we had destroyed and, in the case of certain bomb-battered industrial complexes, provided financial backing that enabled the owners to purchase more sophisticated equipment than our own dated machinery.

We permitted Hirohito to remain on his throne. Douglas MacArthur wrote the Japanese a constitution based on our own, restored their self-respect, elevated Japanese women from ancient serfdom, invigorated the Japanese economy.

Ever since then, we have bent over backwards to help Japan, including assuming the cost of providing a military umbrella over them. The Japanese have rebounded spectacularly. There will be readers of this piece who picked up this newspaper after driving to a newsstand in Japanese-built cars. Or, if the sense of these remarks is distributed by the electronic medium, it will be received mainly through Japanese-built radios and, to a large degree, via Japanese-built television sets. The fuel for the Japanese-built car may have been shipped to this country in Japanese-built supertankers.

Now our smiling and increasingly affluent friends have chosen a particularly painful moment in President Nixon's tenure to tell him that the Emperor whom his predecessor Harry Truman spared has been ordered to refuse Nixon's twice-extended invitation. High on the list of the President's priorities is establishing more realistic trade relations with Japan—whose embargo and tariff barriers against a lot of our exports has been forgiven or soft-pedaled in the interests of improving diplomatic and cultural relations.

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THERE WAS ALSO his personal reason for wanting to be the host of the Emperor. The President would then have been able to repay the visit. That would have been another "first" for him, first U.S. President ever to visit Japan, as he was the first ever to visit mainland China. (U.S. Grant made it to Japan in 1879, after leaving office. Eisenhower scheduled a visit in 1960 but that was canceled when the Japanese government was under dangerously intense domestic pressure by young students protesting an extension of the U.S.-Japan military pact.) Nixon had also hoped that a visit to Japan, in the mood and manner of his trips to China and Russia, would bring about the same results.

Ohira's choice of words was typically vague. Seems that "circumstances, including the Imperial Household schedule" would not permit the visit "this year." He didn't embellish on the "circumstances." Perhaps the Emperor will be tied up all year with his next poem. Perhaps the visit can be arranged for some other year, say, 1977, by which time the president will be writing his next book, "My 12 Crises."

Yes, indeed, tempus fugit.