

Investments in China by Japanese companies may have peaked, but they have far from stopped. With more than 20,000 Japanese companies doing business there, China has become a “land of destiny” for Japanese business people. In Suzhou, where many Japanese firms have located their production bases, there is an area looking like an exact copy of the Kabukicho amusement quarters of Tokyo’s Shinjuku, bristling with hundreds of *karaoke* parlors with glittering neon signs. “Mini-Kabukicho” areas are mushrooming in other regions of China. Schools for Japanese children are full of pupils, and in Shanghai, a second school has opened. One-day business trips from Japan are not uncommon. As such, Japanese in China are showing vitality in going after huge business opportunities, but at the same time they are having personal troubles.

Conspicuous in recent years has been the setting up of businesses in China by the Japanese service industry, ranging from lawyers’ offices, infant-education providers and bridal services to wig producers, noodle shop chains, orchid growers and monumental masons – almost any type of business listed in a Japanese telephone directory’s yellow pages.

“We have been selling jackets with flashy embroidery loved by *yakuza* (gangsters) in Japan, but since the anti-gang law was implemented, gangsters have begun to wear normal clothes, slowing



Illustration: Kato Susumu

A man in his 50s who is president of a manpower supply company in Shanghai used to head the Beijing office of a major Japanese securities company, but the company collapsed while he was in Beijing. After assuming the vice presidency of a Shanghai subsidiary of a major Japanese trading house, he set up his own business. The network of connections he has built up while in China is alive. Thinking of his own experience of trouble in changing jobs, he is trying to do business with a human touch.

While the ability to get right back up again after being knocked

Manic-Depression in Japanese Businessmen – Betting Their All on China –

By Matsunaga Tsutomu

down sales of such jackets,” said a Japanese official in China of a Japanese apparel manufacturer. “We are now trying to sell them to Chinese who love colorful clothes.”

Japanese doing business in China are generally energetic. A man who is director of a small Japanese company’s factory in Suzhou used to work for another company and launched its plant in Shanghai. But after he put the plant on track, a son of the company’s president arrived, and he lost the job. He was then employed by the present company, and when he criticized the management of its Chinese factory, he was asked to manage the factory himself. “A *salaryman*-like consciousness is no good. Taking the leadership with one’s own power, not dependent on an organization, is important,” he said.

The director of a factory in China of a Japanese company producing air conditioners, who is in his late 50s, was sidelined while working at its head office in Japan due to an internal factional strife. Just as he was thinking of resigning, a position in China opened up and he took it. “I couldn’t speak any Chinese, but I began studying the language. Now I am making up exam questions for workers by myself, calculating expenses and assessing bonuses. My job here is much more interesting than it was when I was in Japan,” said the director, who will soon reach retirement age.

down is commendable, there are quite a few Japanese businessmen in China having trouble with their jobs.

According to a Jiji Press report, 10 Japanese committed suicide in China in 2004, more than in the United States and setting a record single-country high in the number of Japanese killing themselves overseas. The report quoted one person as saying: “Bright and cheerful company employees who used to belong to sport clubs at universities and have the capacity to adapt to jobs in Japan are no good in China” and “Japanese staying there are wedged between the People’s Republic of China and the ‘People’s Republic of the Head Office’.”

Recently, thorny problems are erupting in China, such as a sudden change in the tax system, requests to withdraw from industrial complexes where investments were made upon being invited, formation of labor unions and wage increases. On the other hand, pressure is mounting from the head offices of companies risking their fate on business in China, thus compounding the stress felt by those in China.

A team of Japanese psychiatrists has begun mental support for Japanese staying overseas, including those in China. To best take advantage of bustling business in China, relief for those suffering from depression is important.

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