

TOKYO LETTER

have been used for deeper background analyses.

Moreover, this bureaucratic system of decision-making sets in motion such heavy and complex machinery that it is obviously inoperable when a crisis occurs. In fact in such a situation, one must either continue striving for consensus, with no decision possible in time, or sacrifice consensus and revert to a more solitary decision, from the top of the hierarchy.

It seems to me that the final possible danger of decision by consensus is irresponsibility. Since the group must decide, no individual is prepared to take the necessary decision, resulting in interminable meetings where to listen is wiser than to speak, and people merely give opinions rather than cut through to a solution. Since in the end it is the group which has decided, nobody wants to take the consequences for a possibly bad decision.

In short, the *ringisho* decision-making system is like a snake biting its own tail, drawing its strength from its weakness and turning the long and difficult path to a decision into the best guarantee of its appropriateness and workability.

The Men of MITI

Undeniably, the strong point of MITI, and its secret (if indeed it has one), lies in my opinion in its personnel, and what is sometimes called rather pejoratively its "bureaucracy."

In fact it is precisely the manner of recruitment, the guarantee of promotion according to seniority, and the respect for hierarchy that obviates sterile rivalries and creates a sense of common interests. The requirement that officers complete part of their career overseas is what gives MITI its amazing capacity to make use of international situations to better defend its national positions. And surely one can see in the policy of systematically rotating personnel from one division to another or from one office to another the reasons for the youth and suppleness of MITI, which adapts itself immediately to the requirements of the moment and can generate industrial change with such formidable efficiency.

Paradoxically, for a technical ministry with the lowest number of employees and the weakest budget, MITI is everywhere:

in embassies, delegations, representation at international organizations, in JETRO, in the Economic Planning Agency, and in the private sector, thanks to the tradition of "putting the slippers on" (*pantouflage* as we say in France) or more poetically *amakudari* (the Japanese term for post-retirement re-employment, meaning "descent from heaven"). And finally MITI's links extend to the Keidanren (Federation of Economic Organizations) and the Liberal Democratic Party, through the interplay of personal relations and the basic connivance existing in Japan between the economic, political and financial spheres. It is not by chance that MITI is currently seeking to multiply the number of its former officials holding seats in parliament.

This closely-knit network of relations and representation explains why MITI men seem like lords of the economic world and why at the mere mention of the great name of MITI people plunge into pure mythology: falling into the major trap of relegating MITI to the realm of foreignness, uniqueness and inexplicability.

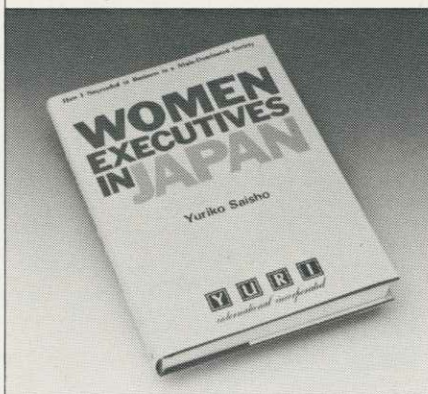
It is certainly impossible to discern

BOOK REVIEW

By Yoriko Kawaguchi
Cabinet Councilor
(Comprehensive National Security),
Cabinet Secretariat

"Women Executives in Japan"

By Yuriko Saisho
YURI International Inc.
214 pages; \$11.95 (¥2,500)



This is a biography of a woman endowed with talent and originality who established and managed an advertising agency herself and is now extending her

business activities to the international arena. This book is for professional Japanese women of the younger generation. A professional woman myself, I found the book very interesting and enlightening.

Upon reading it, I was made to ponder how much Japanese society has changed in the past 30 or 40 years since the end of World War II, when Ms. Saisho established her advertising firm, in its attitude towards career women and especially women being promoted to managerial posts.

Japanese women today certainly enjoy far more opportunities than women of earlier days. Ms. Saisho says that her parents did not allow her to go to university because she would lose the opportunity to get married. The annual rate of women who advanced to higher educational institutions (universities and junior colleges) was only 5% in 1955, whereas since 1975 it has been around 32.2%. However, only about 5% of all supervisory posts in the country are filled by women. There has been no change in this percentage for the past seven or eight years.

Behind this discouraging set of figures is the backward thinking of employers, the lack of social facilities (such as nurseries) and systems necessary to enable women to continue working throughout their life.

At the same time, women themselves need to have enthusiasm and make efforts to overcome the many hurdles and accumulate a record of outstanding performance. In this sense, Ms. Saisho's book teaches us many valuable lessons. She relates that she had to reduce her sleep to a little more than three hours during the hectic years that followed the establishment of her business and until its foundation was solidly laid. She had to visit one prospective client every day in order to land a contract. Despite her packed schedule, she found time to take driving lessons to get a license to drive the company car. These and many other episodes showing the extraordinary efforts and energy she put into her work make this book highly convincing.

The promotion of women to managerial posts has frequently attracted public attention in the past two or three years. The publication of Ms. Saisho's book itself may be one sign that the barriers are being overcome by women. Still many more cases of successful career women are needed to break down the barriers against women in Japanese society today.

I hope this book will stimulate many men and women, both young and old, and that more and more young Japanese women will develop executive careers.

TOKYO LETTER

exactly what was—and is today—MITI's role in the success of the Japanese economy, or to know what the real power of the administration is vis-à-vis the private sector. No answers have been accorded me, more than any other foreigner, and at the risk of disappointing readers, I will content myself with three final remarks.

Firstly: A ministry which groups together, at the same time, the commercial, industrial and scientific and technological research sectors, which considers, at the same time, both national and international problems, can only by its very nature be extremely powerful. This is what gives rise to the occasionally difficult relations between MITI and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, which has little concern for anything but agricultural interests; between MITI and *Gaimusho* (the Foreign Ministry), which fears seeing politics supplanted by economics; and between MITI and the Ministry of Finance, which is all the more influential the less money it has to distribute.

Power is not without a certain banality, and in this regard, MITI is organized and functions like virtually any other Japanese

ministry (even though it is certainly the most prestigious and claims to be the most democratic in the management of its personnel).

Secondly: After having long extolled the ministry as a fascinating power, people today are tending to go the other way, reducing it at all costs to something commonplace, the most ordinary of ordinary ministries. While the magic of myth smothers the issues, excessive demystification, on the other hand, only gives rise to schematic and biased images which are equally wrong.

Westerners are undeniably incapable of seeing Japan in any other way than through psychological states: either MITI has to be an irreducible marvel or a miracle of banality. Couldn't we just make it an item of objective knowledge?

Thirdly: In approaching Japan, we never pay enough attention to the role of time, and we forget that Japan recommenced its history in 1945, scarcely 40 years ago.

Whatever analysis we make of MITI, we need to conclude not that it is on the fringes of human history, like some kind of

super-phenomenon of nature, but that the only thing original about it is its accelerated history and its recent past. The miracle of Japan (and of MITI) is that of mastery over time.

The MITI casebook, therefore, remains open. And I for one have no pretensions to want to close it. I simply hope my period of study at MITI will not remain the only one, and that other students of Ecole Nationale de l'Administration (the National School of Administration) will also have the benefit of spending time there and enjoying the same warm and friendly welcome as I did. It is a modest but important way of building relations of friendship and mutual understanding between Japan and France.

Apology

The writer of the article "A Lawyer by Any Other Name..." in the November 1982 issue (pages 58-59) was Mr. Robert Brown, a 33-year-old American attorney at law who worked at the legal division of Mitsui & Co.'s Tokyo head office from January 1981 to December 1982. We regret that Mr. Brown's name was inadvertently omitted.

L'écrin

In previous columns, I introduced to readers restaurants in Tokyo whose food is excellent but whose prices are moderate. This being the New Year issue, I shall ask the forbearance of readers and write about a restaurant whose food is gorgeous and whose prices are on the high level among the expensive establishments in Tokyo.

If I were asked to name a restaurant in Paris which corresponds to this one in Tokyo, I would immediately answer, "Taillevent" at Rue Lamennais 15 near the Japanese Embassy. The name of this restaurant is taken from the oldest book on cooking in Europe, *La Viandier de Taillevent*, which is today classed as a rare book.

Taillevent is the pen name of the author of this historic book. His real name was Guillaume Tell and he was the chef de maître of King Charles V in the 14th century. The Taillevent in Paris, of course, basks under three stars in the Michelin guidebook. It is interesting to note that a restaurant named Guillaume Tell existed in Saigon, which used to be known as the Paris of the Orient. Located near the harbor, it was known until 1965 as Saigon's finest restaurant.

The restaurant in Tokyo which I would



recommend as the equal of Taillevent in Paris and the old Guillaume Tell in Saigon is L'écrin, located in the basement of the Mikimoto Pearl Bldg. on the Ginza.

Some people claim that L'écrin serves the best French cuisine in Tokyo. L'écrin offerings which I would especially recommend are: Escargots à l'ancienne ¥2,000, Champignons de Paris aux Huîtres ¥2,400, Aiguillettes de Col-au-Vert à la Rouennaise ou à la Vinaigre de Framboise ¥5,200, Sole Soufflé Cléopâtre ¥4,200, and Fricassée de Pêcheur aux Petits Légumes ¥5,200. Sommelier T. Shimoya

is very thoughtful and gives the guest the most cordial service even for a single glass of wine. The after-dinner Benedictine from Normandy is out of this world.

If a guest should be dissatisfied, even about the smallest thing, manager T. Akimoto will attend to the matter at once.

Unfortunately there is no French restaurant in Tokyo today aside from L'écrin which keeps on the table a *cuillère* for sauce which is the essence of French cuisine.

As for the cost of dining here, budget for about ¥30,000 for two.

If this introduction to L'écrin becomes a New Year present to readers who visit Tokyo at the outset of 1983, this writer cannot be happier. (Yoshimichi Hori)

