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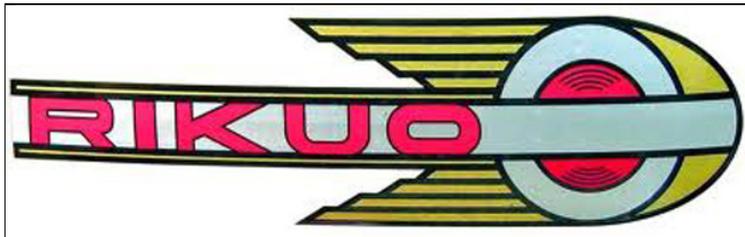
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Harley Goes to the Far East: Part 1



The story of how Harley-Davidson motorcycles first came to Japan and the events that transpired over the next 40+ years is an interesting chapter in the history of the Motor Company. It all started in 1912 when the Japanese Imperial Army ordered on Harley-Davidson motorcycle for evaluation purposes. More orders followed and by 1916 there was an official distributor set up for Japan under the Nippon Jidosha company. Nippon continued importing small numbers of motorcycles into the early 1920's, but surprisingly never purchased any spare parts. Harley insisted that spare parts were necessary (seems pretty obvious to me) but Nippon refused to purchase them.

During this same time the Charles Cable Company, approached Harley-Davidson about becoming the distributor for Inner and Outer Mongolia. Harley agreed and soon the Charles Cable Company was putting in orders for motorcycles which they shipped out of San Francisco. Like Nippon, Charles Cable Company only ordered motorcycles and did not order any spare parts. Their excuse was that the Mongolians preferred to make their own parts. This was absurd since the Mongolian economy was based on the raising and trading of goats and camels and did not have any manufacturing to speak of.

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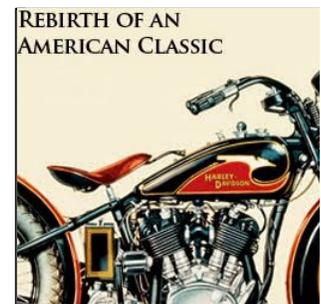
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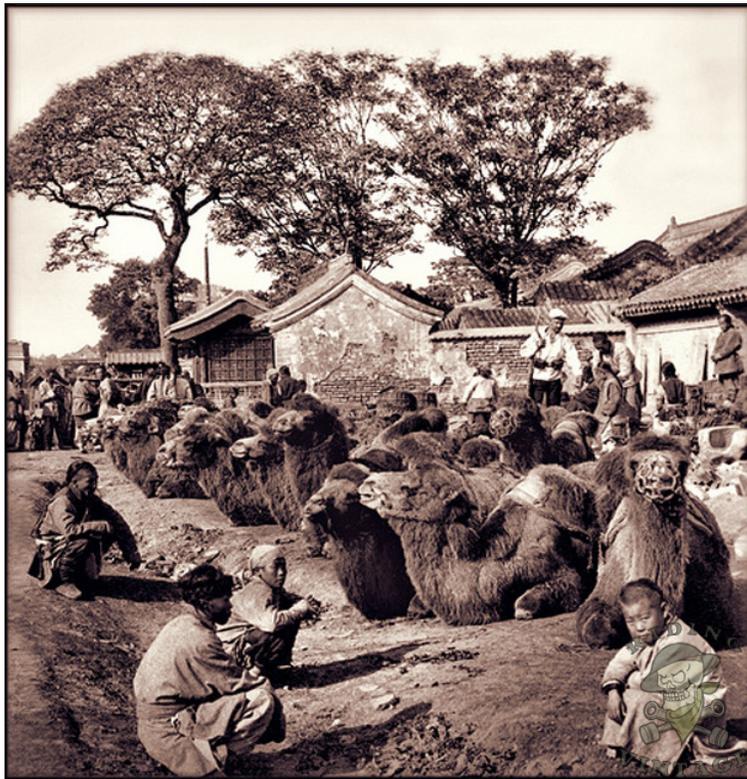
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1933 HARLEY-DAVIDSON VL RESTORATION



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As this new export business to the Far East began to move forward, two unrelated but important events occurred. First there was a massive earthquake that hit Japan in 1923, destroying roads and rail lines across the country. This was a windfall for Harley, whose motorcycles were well suited for traveling over rough terrain. Then in 1924 the US Congress passed a new law limiting immigration by Asiatics. This resulted in waves of anti-US protests across Japan. In the midst of this turmoil, Harley sent their export sales representative, Alfred Child to Tokyo.



Child soon learned that things were not as they seemed in Japan. It turned out that the Charles Cable Company was actually importing Harley-Davidson motorcycles into Japan through the Koto Trading Company and selling very few if any in Mongolia. Harley's official distributor in Japan, Nippon Jidosha was completely unaware that hundreds of HD motorcycles were being imported right under their nose. Child started negotiations with both companies, but in the end, Koto Trading Company became the new distributor for the Motor Company. Upper management at Harley wanted to keep an eye on things in Japan, so they asked Child to stay in Japan as the Managing Director of Sales for Harley-Davidson Sales Company of Japan.

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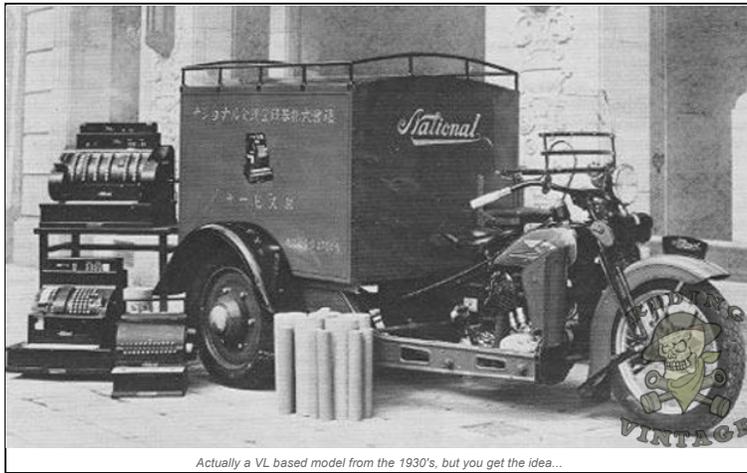
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Harley enjoyed great success in Japan throughout the 1920's. The destruction of the roads from the earthquake meant that delivery trucks could not be used to bring good to market. Harley filled that gap by converting some of their imported motorcycles into rear cars which was a three wheeled trike.



Koto Trading Company was owned by they Sankyo Company which was the largest pharmaceuticals manufacturer in Japan. Sankyo used their existing relationship with the Imperial Japanese Army to make Harley-Davidson the standard vehicle for the military. Soon other government agencies followed and before long the Imperial Navy, Police, Post Office and even some Manchurian War Lords all began using Harleys. Harley became so prominent that the Imperial Guard ordered 30 motorcycles equipped with sidecars to surround the Emperor's motorcade when traveling. Fifteen of the motorcycles had the sidecars fitted on the left and the other fifteen had them fitted on the right. The sidecars were also modified with lower sides, to allow the guards to exit quickly in case of emergency.



This was all about to change as the Great Depression spread across the world in 1929... The story will continue in [Part 2](#).

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