

# What Anti-Japanese Protests Tell Us

## Pathology of East Asia & America's Thinly Veiled Designs

By HAN Dongyu

### Historical Context of Protests

IN 2005, the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II, massive anti-Japanese protests raged through China and elsewhere in East Asia on a scale that had rarely been seen in six decades of post-war years. To the Japanese media in general, including the opinions of some respectable Japanese scholars, the protests in China were not really directed against Japan. These Chinese protesters, the Japanese believe, used the demonstrations as a “cover” to rail against their own government to protest a growing divide between rich and poor in China. The media in China, of course, played a completely opposite tune, and I agree with neither.

I believe the eruption of contradictions usually reflects piled-up tensions. In this part of the world, a region sad-

dled with a profound history of benignity and animosity, each event carries complex historical undertones. It may not be adequate to explain and address a particular regional issue by arbitrarily picking on some incidental factors.

### Blind Spot & Background of Flaming East Asia

Recently some Japanese scholars have advocated the idea of an “East Asian Community.” Those involved in the concept romantically picture the relations of countries in East Asia in terms of a family and their ideals are undoubtedly appealing to many people. However, the response from Chinese scholars sounds more pragmatic. They point out family relations are often more difficult to handle than social relations. Also, they say, if East Asia were a family, who would be

the head of family? While the issues raised by Chinese scholars were phrased in a light-hearted, almost joking manner, the matter is nothing but serious. They go to the heart of the complex East Asian history – the grave memory of the “tributary state system” in the feudal ages and “Great Asia-ism” in more recent times.

### Similarity of “Sino-centric” & “Great East Asia” Spheres of Order

The evolution and transformation of interstate relations in East Asia is not merely the consequence of politics and economics. To a considerable extent, they have been constrained by some “inherent laws” of history and culture of this region, i.e., the constraints of a belief system particular to East Asia. Simply put, this “East Asian modality of thinking” is a concept of hierarchy and order shaped by the civilization and moral paradigm of a “superior” state after its values have spread throughout the East Asian region; the premise of this belief system, therefore, is based on a pattern of “center-periphery” interactions in the region. The existence of such a “modality of thinking” can be seen by the fact that the two “spheres” that existed in this region – the “Sino-centric Sphere of Order” advocated by China and the “Great East Asia Sphere of Order” advocated by Japan – showed overlapping characteristics both in terms of doctrine and geography.

### Takeover by Japan-US Security System

After these two “spheres” drew their curtains, the Japan-US security system – created by the United States for the purpose of using Japan to control East and Southeast Asia – unquestionably formed a new “sphere.” One characteristic of this

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Japanese astronaut Mukai Chiaki shakes hands with Wu Bangguo (right), chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in 2003 during her visit for the first meeting of the New Japan-China Friendship Committee for the 21st Century.

Japan-US security system is that its sphere of control obviously overlaps with the area of control under its two predecessors, and its effective modus operandi seemingly resemble a combination of “Confucian teachings,” which form the core of the “Sino-centric sphere,” and “military intimidation,” the core of the “Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.” In other words, the United States exercises its control in the sphere through a liberal democratic ideology (the modern equivalent of Confucianism) coupled with a powerful military (military intimidation) deployed in East and Southeast Asia.

### ■ US “Divide & Rule” Strategy

However, the fact that the two previous systems that had East Asia under their control went bankrupt one after another is posing a new problem to the United States. In other words, if the United States is thinking of keeping the “Japan-US security system sphere” under permanent control, it must study the contradictions that had existed between the various countries in the region and exploit these contradictions. If there is no contradiction among them, it must then create contradictions for them by taking hints from history. The Americans seem to be convinced that this is the only way to weaken lateral contacts within East Asia and that only such a weakened East Asia would obey its commands.

The “painful” memory of Japan’s raid on the American homeland in World War II has also bred a sense of wariness among Americans toward Japan.

In order to keep East Asia under control while keeping the outward form of the US-Japan alliance unblemished, the United States appears ready at any moment to mobilize outside forces to block Japan from extending its regional influence and keep any excessive Japanese ambitions in check. According to the now-defunct 1952 Japan-US security treaty, the area where the United States can use military bases provided by Japan to “maintain international peace in the Far East” suitably included the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan, territories that Japan had invaded and occupied.

### ■ Brilliant US Diplomacy

To people in China and on the Korean Peninsula, memories of the “pains” caused by the “Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” are far sharper than what the Japanese people nowadays feel in their preconceived “disgusting China” syndrome. Because of this, any sign of reemergence of Japanese nationalism would trigger a sharp, prompt response in China and on the Korean Peninsula.

The brilliance of US diplomacy can clearly be seen in the actions the United States took around the time Japan sought permanent membership in the UN Security Council. On April 28, 2005, Howard Stoffer, the US ambassador to the United Nations, expressed support for Japanese permanent membership in the Security Council during informal talks at the UN General Assembly on reform of the world body. Japan took Stoffer’s remarks at face value and spent much money to rally international support. Around Japan’s Golden Week in May that year, nearly 40% of Japanese Cabinet ministers made a “pilgrimage” to the United States.

And then a most dramatic scene of diplomatic drama unfolded. On July 12, in an address to the UN General Assembly, Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli, senior adviser to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for UN reform, declared that if Japan and the three other countries seeking permanent Security Council membership force a vote on their draft resolution to expand the Security Council membership, the United States will urge other countries to vote against the measure. And yet, when Japan took a counterpunch from China and other East Asian countries over its Security Council permanent membership bid, the United States promptly offered “encouragement” to Japan through a conservative US think tank, which publicly supported the production of nuclear weapons in Japan, arguing that Japan could face a military threat from China in the next 5 to 10 years. A fury sprang up in East Asia,

and international relations in the region descended to the freezing point, dragging Japan and other East Asian countries to the abyss.

Nevertheless, in a region shaped by the “tributary state system” and the “Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere,” the relationship of benignity and animosity is deep-rooted; it is a relationship too intertwined to be sorted straight, and any attempt to straighten it would surely aggravate the situation. This situation has been fully exploited by the United States in its control of East Asia.

### ■ Will There Be Genuine Partnership in Asia?

While the “Japan-US security system” has effectively restrained regional nationalism and radical statism in East Asia, the various countries (territories) in this region have unconsciously turned themselves into a “plaything” in the hands of the “hegemonic power.” They behave like a collection of crickets, each tied to the cricket keeper. These crickets are so much manipulated by their keeper that once they are placed together in one spot, they start to fight each other.

However, just as the two previous “spheres” in East Asia had collapsed in their time, the “Japan-US security system sphere” will inevitably face the same historical fate. Both history and today’s reality cry for the birth of a “new East Asia concept,” which hopefully can provide a playbook to lead East Asia out of the current “cul-de-sac.”

This playbook should be something like this: if state-to-state relations in East Asia are to overcome the region’s historical and present difficulties and if the various countries in the region really want to form a genuine “East Asia Community,” the rules of the game must be genuine “equality” and “mutual benefit.” It cannot be a rehash of the region’s history of domination and subservience. **JS**

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