

Asian Magma and Japan-U.S. Relations

By Aeba Takanori

Still in the Bakumatsu Period

Japan was the first East Asian nation to achieve Western-style modernization. Prior to this, however, it experienced a short era known as the *Bakumatsu* period. This refers to the final period of the Tokugawa *Bakufu* (shogunate), and is usually taken to cover the period from 1853 when the shogunate power was shaken by the appearance of American ships led by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, until 1868 when the new government was established following the Meiji Restoration.

The traditional system was destroyed by the impact of the arrival of the Western European powers. If this can be acknowledged as a transition period when Japan crossed over into a new era of creating its own modern system, then it may also be said that every country in Asia has its own "Bakumatsu." In China it took 100 years from the Opium War through the 1911 Revolution to the Communist Party to become the established national power, and in Korea it was 80 years from the time of the invasion of the great powers to the end of colonial control. Now, however, China insists the state building will not be completed until Taiwan returns, and in Korea there is a strong perception that the current transition period will continue until north and south are again united into an integrated nation-state. The negative perception of foreign control remains as if explosive magma flows within the hearts of the people in these regions.

Many people think that the Bakumatsu period in Japan ended in 15 years. If we look at it from a different perspective, however, we might find that Japan made mistakes in the process of creating its own system, was defeated by the Western powers, and is still in the Bakumatsu period because of its

continued maintenance of foreign military bases protected by extraterritoriality agreements. Early this year when an American military commander made improper comments about local politicians, Okinawa Governor Inamine Keiichi warned, "Okinawa has the underlying magma that might be expected of a base of resistance. If you touch it, it will erupt." Under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty concluded after World War II, the magma that could originally have been expected to exist throughout Japan was concentrated in Okinawa. Because of this, the pressure to explode is multiplied there.

While the new Bush administration in the United States is putting greater emphasis on Japan, its ally, the people who were clamoring for Japan to get out of its restricted collective self-defense commitments have grown loud. As Japan's diplomatic autonomy, including equality with the United States and the reduction of bases, is respected, the movement in favor of Japan playing a greater international role is going to gain momentum. For Japan, the upcoming phase of diplomacy with the United States will be like having to reemerge from the Bakumatsu period all over again.

Common Sense

A half century ago, the newly defeated Japan did a lot of deep introspection. Japan had struggled to achieve modernization following the impact of the invasion of European and American powers in Asia 100 years before and had tried to quickly catch up with and overtake those powers. Japan engaged in a quick-tempered showdown by trying to break down the existing world order, and ended up failing. From that point, it sincerely hoped it could cooperate with foreign countries to create a peaceful, prosperous nation. In the

Cold War that soon followed, Japan was drawn over to the American side, and ultimately followed the path toward becoming a prosperous, peaceful nation. Now that 50 years have passed since the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, enacted to ensure Japan's continued progress down that peaceful road, the values that the United States has been trying to globalize since its Cold War victory are fortunately not all that different from those that Japan advocates.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld of the Bush administration once said;

The U.S.-East Asian relationship requires two qualities not always in evidence, ... far-sighted American leadership and good common sense.

Hans Morgenthau is said to have remarked that, in general, good foreign policy makes good common sense, and good common sense makes good foreign policy. My 20 plus years in government have persuaded me of that truth.

It would indeed be great if a good relationship between Japan and the United States could be maintained by common sense, but even when we share the same basic values, differences in what we view as "common sense" may emerge as a result of our having different historical backgrounds. Coordinating those differences requires constant diplomatic efforts on both sides.

It is said that the Japan-U.S. relations has long been the best partnership in the Pacific. Until the 1980s, the two countries were partners under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in solidifying the security of the free world in East Asia, as symbolized in the saying that "Japan is the unsinkable aircraft carrier for the free world." Now, however, the Japan-U.S. partnership must

Photo : Tokyo National Museum



The arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853 marked the beginning of the Bakumatsu period

incorporate the construction of a cooperative triangle with China which is moving toward a market economy. As an economic giant, Japan has contributed a great deal to the region's economic development, but it still feels insecure about the fields of politics and security, and therefore it still lacks the confidence to play a new role

in East Asia. The future of Japan-U.S. relations requires that Japan urgently take efforts to improve this situation.

The countries of East Asia waver between resisting the dominance of and seeking protection from the United States, which now has a unilateral controlling effect on the region. For Japan to be trusted by neighboring countries and to obtain their cooperation for making the region a peaceful, prosperous, and free area, it must be vigilant in keeping the freedom, human rights and market economies espoused by the United States from degrading into tools of unilateral control, while also aiming to take advantage of American strengths. In light of domestic political conditions, however, the prospects for Japan being able to fulfill this role are less than optimistic.

Asia Asserts Itself

The countries of East Asia have pursued rapid economic development following Japan's developmental model, and have grown into a "region" by virtue of their common experiences. Following the "Four Tigers" (Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), China and Vietnam have joined this region. The World Bank called it a "miracle" that East Asia's two billion people could achieve modernization through economic development in such a short period of time. That assessment is no mistake, even in light of the economic crisis that has followed. The region is duly expected to be a strong driving force for worldwide economic development focused on the information indus-

tries.

The United States is concerned with the possible disadvantage from this "regionalization" of East Asia. The region's high economic growth has surely been largely beneficial for America, but some feel that Asia has become "too bold" as a result of the increasing confidence it has gained from economic development. The Asian economic crisis has created an opportunity for dialogue among the ASEAN plus Three (Japan, China and South Korea), and some of the ASEAN countries are leaning toward the future creation of an East Asian group. Actually, the relations among Japan, China and South Korea are so complex that an exclusive regional cooperative structure as the United States feared is far from becoming a reality. However, it is important for Japan that the ASEAN plus Three strive to achieve open regional cooperation as a means of promoting globalization without undue opposition from the United States.

Because it was once believed that the region's remarkable economic development was a result of some unique Asian culture, praise was heaped on "Asian values" and "Asian developmentalism." This created friction between the protectionism of the authoritarianism and developmental despotism held by such people as President Suharto of Indonesia, and American-style democracy and market economy. However, strong opposition also arose against these tenets from within the region, and immoderate cultural predestination is now being put to rest. It has become clear that excessive developmentalism may not only hinder political democra-

tization, but may also become a burden to economic development. The fall of several authoritarian regimes after adopting such excessive policies heightened awareness of this truth.

Nonetheless, the Asian nations in the process of forming modern states strongly oppose American and European "intervention

in the rights of sovereign states," even on such grounds as protecting human rights. Japan is largely tolerant of that Asian mentality. To avoid taking a vague attitude toward this issue, Japan must persuade the United States to understand the conditions in the countries of this region, and it must also be willing to raise candid complaints based on its own historical experience when it feels that the Asian countries are overreacting.

But for making it persuasive in both cases, Japan's daily remarks and actions are very important. Japan must be careful not to be suspected of using the "Asian peculiarity" as an excuse to avoid deregulation and abolition of import restrictions, as needs to happen in the advanced countries. It will be fatal for Japan if it appears that this stance is being adopted to justify its past mistakes. Later I will discuss how Japan's handling of its "past problems" will have an effect on future diplomatic affairs with the United States.

The China Element

The post-Cold War world, as is the case after any other wars, is being managed under the system imposed by the victor, but there is a remarkable conflict of interests within this structure which no longer has an enemy. Countries that were all in the losing camp, like Japan a half century ago, are trying hard to find their own place in the world. Many of the tensions arising in East Asia today are related to movements by China, trying to secure its own position in the region. China under Mao Zedong posed a threat to neighboring countries by its attempts to

export the home-made revolution, but it has taken a politics of opening and reforming, and been accepted as a partner in this region over the past 20 years. Now that its expanded economic powers are being accompanied by increasing military preparedness and expansionist behaviors, there is a growing sense of apprehension regarding this traditional giant's intentions, however.

China is trying to become the most important Asian nation in its relations with the United States. China didn't like the former U.S. President Bill Clinton making a stopover in Japan during his June 1998 visit to China. Clinton, who at the time had referred to China as a strategic partner, praised China's development and joined the chorus of voices criticizing Japan. It presumably prompted President Jiang Zemin to take a high-handed approach on his November visit to Japan, causing tensions to rise not only between Japan and China, but also between Japan and the United States.

China, on the other hand, is nervous that the United States is trying to vitiate China's territorial integrity and to weaken its influence in the region. The American government is trying to adapt civil liberties as the global standard in this region, while China's first priority is to protect its national sovereignty from this kind of intervention by foreign countries. The first problem with "the range of state sovereignty" in this case becomes what troubles the international relations in the region.

Communist China in this half century has intervened in the Korean War, has fought massive military conflicts with the former Soviet Union, India and Vietnam, and has used military force to suppress ethnic groups in the autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang Uighur. All the incidents took place in the regions which had tributary ties with historical China. Until the 19th century, the Chinese emperors have customarily granted wide-ranging autonomy to the neighboring peoples who recognized the authority of the emperor or the suzerainty of the central government. After that system was

destroyed by the military advancements of the Western powers, China aimed to build a modern nation state. Now the communist regime claims to be trying to complete that process, but several neighboring races which are demanding their traditional autonomy are strongly opposing the central government's efforts to exert direct control over every corner of its territory as a sovereign state, and are asking for international support.

This poses difficult problems for neighboring countries. India's acceptance of the exiled Dalai Lama not only presents problems in terms of religion and human rights, but is also seen as a kind of opposition to China's "territorial views," and thus has resulted in serious diplomatic friction between India and China. International relations around Taiwan are understood within more modern geopolitical dynamics, starting with the U.S. support for Taiwan. Taiwan has a different historical background than other areas with regard to its "vassal status" to the center, but it can convert to problems that come through other neighboring regions. When this happens, the primary concern for Japan will be its relations with China, but it also increases the difficulty in its relations with the United States, which has the Taiwan Relations Act. The Taiwan problem needs to be approached as a core issue facing the triangular relations among Japan, the United States and China.

However, it would be incorrect to say that China is poised for a conventional regime. Modern China has been striving to achieve a transformation by accepting Western civilization, adopting Sun Wen's Three Principles of the People, Mao Zedong's communism, Deng Xiaoping's market economics and now is considering a real take off by becoming a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This proud country's view of history sees the control of Western Europe as "nothing more than a page in its long history." Thus instead of overturning the system, China strives to have enough power so that it can control the system to lead the world. The response of the

(Han) Chinese to the repeated incursions of conquering dynasties is suggestive. Japan has a role, in this sense, in arousing attention in the United States so that it does not misread the situation and jump hastily to the conclusion that there must be a "clash of civilizations" that assumes a predestined opposition between the east and the west.

Security

While keeping an eye on the acrobatics of China's socialist market economy, North Korea, the world's most isolated and exclusive nation, is looking for a way to escape from its economic impoverishment. It appears that while it makes the United States guarantee the continuation of the current political system, it maneuvers to obtain development funds by normalizing its diplomatic relations with Japan. The Bush administration is strongly demanding "reciprocity," whereby North Korea does not threaten neighboring countries with nuclear weapons development and missile testing, as a condition for continuing agreements made by the previous administration.

Since North Korea has thus far succeeded in using nuclear fears and missile exports by employing its brinkmanship diplomacy, its attitude toward negotiations with the United States is still quite cold. Will the strong tactics of the Bush administration further harden North Korea's stance? Or will the Republican Party's hawkish diplomacy, which has worked in dealing with other communist countries, prove to work here as well? If the former occurs, tensions in the area of regional security will stimulate movements toward fundamental revisions to Japan's defense policies, and will invigorate, or politicize the debate on national missile defense (NMD) and theater missile defense between Japan and the United States.

Japan has made efforts to increase reciprocity in Japan-U.S. security relations by establishing guidelines three years ago and by enacting several laws based on those guidelines, but the

United States is still not satisfied. Voices from within the Bush administration calling for constitutional revisions or a reinterpretation of Article 9 with regard to Japan's right to collective self-defense are growing louder. They are also taking the stance that it is reasonable to request that Japan, as an American ally, participate in several plans for missile self-defense.

Japan is surrounded by nuclear powers including Russia, China and potentially North Korea, and thus needs to be covered by America's nuclear umbrella, but it wants to avoid the danger of further intensifying nuclear competition. Many Western European nations seem to agree, but they are holding back in the face of the Bush administration's strong resolve. Since Russia is not in a position to do much, how will China react to unilateral control by the United States? Japan does not have many choices, but it will primarily try to avoid worsening the nuclear situation in East Asia. For example, Japan must request to China to use its influence to eliminate the nuclear and missile problems in North Korea, a target of American NMD deployment. On the other hand, it must ask the United States to mitigate Chinese fears by promoting nuclear disarmament and by gradually reducing the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. If the NMD is technologically incomplete as it is said to be, the United States would likely want to avoid the negative results of encouraging China to strengthen its nuclear capabilities and weakening the position of the liberalizing factions in Beijing by deploying it.

The Past

One of the ways for Japan to stay on an equal footing with the United States regarding its global policy choices is to exert a centripetal force in the East Asian region and to win the cooperation of the other Asian countries. This requires a closer look at the problem of Japan's post-war responsibility.

To better fight the Cold War in Asia after World War II, the United States offered Japan special treatment to make

the defeated country a "factory for the free camp." This was beneficial for Japan in the short term, but has resulted in some problems over the long term. There is a perception among some Asian people that Japan escaped its wartime responsibilities with only light reparation and, in addition, became a superpower making use of Asian tragedies such as the Korean War and Vietnam War. This may lead to an antipathy that the Japanese have forgotten their past and instead treat their country's growth as a natural outcome. Especially in China and Korea, where the victim mentality is still strong, the loosening of Cold War ties has yielded a movement that is revisiting Japan's past and its postwar activities.

The United States would not like to have its ally Japan distrusted by other countries in the region, but it doesn't have the same motivation to pacify the Asian nations on Japan's behalf as it did during the Cold War. The United States has refused entry of people involved in the former Unit 731 of the Japanese army, which prepared for biological warfare in the former Manchuria in the northeastern part of China (immediately after the war the United States suspended legal action against those responsible on the condition that all the materials relating to the unit be turned over.) It is similarly significant that the State of California has authorized retroactive trials regarding wartime oppression and forced labor imposed by the Japanese army and companies.

These things all happened more than half a century ago, but they can relate to today's human rights problems around the world. In principle it would be best if Japan could solemnly deal with these issues in accordance with the law, but accusers are counting on the support of America's public opinion and are also looking to make political use of other countries involved. Japan needs to face its problems, admit responsibility for those things which it is responsible, and to seek the understanding of the American public. "Public diplomacy," which has been largely ignored in Japanese diplomatic

activities, is of special importance in facing this problem. The premise here is that Japan doesn't conceal or manipulate the historical facts of its past.

Beyond Asia

In the beginning I stated that the toxic memories of invasions and control by the Western European powers still remain like magma in the hearts of people in East Asia. Japan later replaced the foreign powers in wielding control in the region, thereby increasing the amount of magma lying beneath the surface. And the United States has increased the likelihood of the eruption of that magma with the Taiwan issue, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Fortunately, economic development has strengthened the self-confidence of countries in this region, giving them room to objectively reflect on their own histories. The countries who had once allowed themselves to be controlled now turn the hateful magma of grudges against foreign invasions and control into an energetic magma not to repeat the same history. The Japan-U.S. cooperation in East Asia has to use the energy of their changing magma to work toward the goal of making this region a place that adheres to values of freedom and democracy, and of peace and prosperity.

Beyond East Asia are the Islamic world and the African continent, both of which have their own hidden stores of explosive magma. If East Asia can succeed at converting its magma into something useful and be a model for other regions, the Japan-U.S. partnership will truly have served a global purpose. In this regard, there aren't likely to be any differences in the *common sense* vision to create advantageous diplomatic policies between Japan and the United States. **JTI**

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