

Fifty Years of Japan-U.S. Relations

By Matsuyama Yukio

As with individuals, some nations have good luck while others have poor. In retrospect, one might say that rather than simply having been one of the world's few countries with good luck Japan has had solid luck in the 50 years since the end of World War II.

It goes without saying that the Japanese experienced unprecedented misery and humiliation with the loss of the war in the Pacific and subsequent Occupation, which might be referred to as a tragic case of cause and effect or "reaping what one sows," for which we cannot blame anyone but ourselves.

However, it was doubtless a great stroke of luck that the Occupation of Japan, although undertaken by the allied forces in name, was in fact carried out by the U.S. forces alone. If the surrender had come a bit later and Japan had been partitioned between U.S. and Soviet occupiers as Germany was, Japan's post-war course would have been full of further suffering.

The U.S. showed an historically unparalleled magnanimity as a victor nation. Naturally, as with the US military trusteeship of Okinawa, there were various cases in which the people concerned found it hard to endure, but on the whole a strong impression that the U.S. comported itself not as a conqueror but as a protector of its former enemy remains. Not only were reparations not demanded of Japan, the U.S. provided large amounts of food aid to rescue Japanese who were on the verge of starvation. The U.S. enacted agrarian reforms, broke up the *zaibatsu* groups, reformed the tax system, ended inflation, and resolutely implemented other drastic measures that the Japanese government would probably not have been able to bring off, creating the foundations for subsequent economic growth. During the Occupation the U.S. nominally administered Japan indirectly, through the Japanese government, but the Occupation Forces' de facto direct rule was more akin to a peaceful revolution.

The Occupation Forces' inherent authority also first enabled the tremendous trans-

formation from militarism and totalitarianism to democracy, pacifism, and liberalism. Whether freedom of speech or women's suffrage, Japan was able to instantly acquire what many other countries had literally required long, desperate struggles to finally obtain. In other words, defeat in war turned out to be a windfall, which is why Japan is a country whose luck is solid.

An anecdote relates the story of a certain Latin American ambassador who completes a three-year tour in Japan and, upon returning home, reports to the president, "Unlike our country, peaceful, free, and democratic Japan enjoys prosperity." The president asks, "How did Japan achieve this?" The ambassador replies, "Japan declared war on America and got lucky by losing. Maybe we should try making war on the U.S., too." To this the president quickly responds, "What if we won?"

The Cold War

The harsh international situation involving the conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was behind America's well-meaning policies toward its former enemies, along with a particularly American brand of humanitarianism and sense of mission. That is, Washington tried to cultivate in Japan a bastion against communism in Asia. Strategic anti-Soviet calculations were also the basis for the rush to sign the peace treaty with Japan and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Even after the occupation had ended the U.S. ungrudgingly provided Japan expertise, lending a hand in boosting productivity. Japan was striving to become a trade-oriented nation and was aided by the existence of a huge U.S. consumer market. If relations with the U.S. had cooled, Japan's recovery would doubtlessly have been substantially delayed.

The solid luck continued. The Korean War and the war in Vietnam, tragedies in nearby nations, acted as catalysts in spurring the Japanese economy. Combined with the Japanese people's own resourcefulness, effort, and industriousness, this added up to remarkable industrial and

technological advances in Japan. Japanese products had a cheap, shoddy image 40 years ago, as symbolized by the "one dollar blouse," but in cameras, electronic goods, cars, and every other sector Japanese goods are now valued as high quality products.

This American line toward Japan strengthened the bonds between the two countries, but had the fault of diluting the perception of Japan as part of Asia. Moreover, in a nearly 180-degree turn-about from the initial pacifist course that had high-handedly been forced on Japan, vehement opposition arose among those within Japan who had adopted a stance of neutrality toward all. The coercive establishment of the Self-Defense Forces turned the clauses on renunciation of war and the policy of not maintaining military forces in Article Nine of the constitution into meaningless statements, and the extent to which Japan should cooperate on U.S. military strategies was a continual, major point of contention between Japan's conservatives and reformers.

From the start, the U.S. has been a highly litigious country, tending to divide the world into white or black and friend or foe, and Washington's tendency to prioritize military affairs was particularly apparent in its foreign policy during the Cold War. If Japan also took the position that it was fighting communism then it would also be considered a friend of the U.S., regardless of the past or its ideological leanings.

A typical example was Washington's backing of Kishi Nobusuke, formerly a minister in Tojo Hideki's cabinet, to become prime minister in the expectation that he would amend the constitution converting Japan from a pacifist nation to one that would battle communism. This was completely at variance with the attitude toward West Germany, another defeated nation of World War II. Tacit approval for support of former Hitler cabinet members in attaining the chancellorship in post-war West Germany was not forthcoming, but it was inconceivable that Washington would

offer aggressive support nonetheless. Not a few Japanese sensed an American racial bias toward Asians in this.

It is no coincidence that many of the Asian leaders of the time who were considered friends of America—Taiwan's President Chiang Kai-shek, South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem, and the Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos—were anti-communists who had no affinity either for democracy or liberalism. With the increasing severity of the East-West Cold War nothing was more important to Washington than the value of exploiting the anti-communist bloc.

Supposing that, at the time, the U.S. had shown undisguised displeasure regarding the creation of the Kishi cabinet, the history of post-war Japanese politics would probably have been considerably different. As is clear from the resignation of Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko 20 years ago after losing America's confidence or, as demonstrated by Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro's lengthy hold on the reins of power, playing off the trust conferred on him by President Ronald Reagan, American support has always been a valuable asset for Japan's prime ministers.

Along with Kishi, Japan's conservatives came to believe that if they only cooperated with America's anti-communist policies they would be recognized as "pro-American." Either that or they underestimated the situation. As a result, proponents of philosophies that were incompatible with those of people such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln passed as "pro-Americans." It is ironic that influential LDP leaders who, having derided the quality of the American labor force and brought up human rights issues, have all professed to be U.S. loyalists in the case of defense matters.

Japan goes with the flow

Today, 50 years since the war's end, Japan is being reproached by international society for its amnesia regarding historical matters. Of course, this is first and foremost due to a lack of introspection on the part of the Japanese themselves, but at the same time it could be said that part of the respon-



Photo: Kyodo News Service

Just after the war's end General Douglas MacArthur arrives at the Atsugi Air Field.

sibility lies in Washington's emphasis on a military approach regarding Japan, and further, the "Soviet threat" that caused the U.S. to adopt those overzealous policies.

Taking shelter under America's large umbrella has finally turned Japan, which, from the outset, has been poor at pondering foreign policy issues independently, into a "raft country" (in the words of the late Prime Minister Ohira Masayoshi). Foreign policy could be described in terms of the captain who, lacking engine or rudder, leaves the boat to drift in the current, merely using the barge pole to keep from hitting the rocks. The late Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato was once asked in the Diet when Japan would recognize China, to which he replied, "when the world agrees that it should become a UN member." However, Japan's method has always been to follow current trends, particularly adopting positions only after scrutinizing America's course of action.

Diplomatic relations between Japan and China were actually restored when the U.S. dropped its containment policy toward China, with the visit of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and when it became a UN member. Kissinger has said, "Japan is a country that changes its policy without philosophical conviction." But this sort of "wait and see foreign policy" is just another by-product of the Japan-U.S. alliance.

While coddling the pro-American, anti-communist hawks on the one hand, the U.S. made the mistake of denigrating

those who opposed Washington's foreign policy as "anti-American." This was truly typified by the analysis of and response to the anti-security treaty campaign of 1960 when, from the American Embassy in Tokyo, Ambassador Douglas MacArthur Jr. was convinced that the demonstrations against the security pact were "an anti-American campaign manipulated by the international communist conspiracy."

However, Prime Minister Ishibashi Tanzan's sudden illness and collapse and the popular discontent with the inability of Kishi, who was utterly disliked, to form a cabinet was at the root of the anti-security treaty demonstrations. Moreover, when Prime Minister Kishi failed to learn his lesson after botching a surprise attempt to enact an amendment to the Police Duties Execution Act (in an effort to expand the official authority of the police force) and began talking about an issue as important as forcing through amendments to the security pact without holding a general election, the indignation against his methods was expressed in the form of an anti-security treaty. This unfortunately led to the postponement of President Dwight Eisenhower's trip to Japan and U.S. suspicions regarding Japan increased.

In those days the average Japanese was definitely not "anti-American." Everyone was fascinated with American culture and loved pro baseball, Hollywood movies, and jazz. Even in the midst of the uproar over the security treaty, applications for visas to visit the U.S. continued to increase.

One of the greatest Japanophiles in the U.S., Harvard University professor Edwin O. Reischauer, noted the risks of mixing the U.S. up with the unpopular Kishi government early on and his appointment to the post of ambassador to Japan by the Kennedy administration marked a significant turning point in Japan-U.S. relations, a shift away from an emphasis on military affairs to an inclusion of cultural affairs.

The basic approach toward Japan during the Kennedy-Reischauer era was to elevate the relationship from protector and protected to an equal partnership. The adoption of incentives toward Japan that at the time were ground-breaking, such as the U.S.-Japan Cabinet Ministers Meeting on Trade and Economics, which brought

members from both countries together for meetings, successfully salvaged the wounds caused by the 1960 split in Japan-U.S. relations over the security treaty.

Rift in relations

However, two unanticipated, unfortunate events subsequently occurred: the assassination of President Kennedy and the war in Vietnam. Compared to Kennedy, who understood Japan's importance and distinctness well, his successor, President Lyndon Johnson, had little or no interest in Japan, nor were Japanese favorably disposed toward him. The Japanese government offered quiet support for his all-out efforts in Vietnam, but the Japanese public was opposed from the outset. The bombing of North Vietnam in particular, (according to Professor George Kennan of Princeton University) "resulted in the loss of the goodwill felt toward the U.S. by the Japanese, the greatest asset the U.S. possessed in East Asia."

In due course the U.S. completely withdrew from Vietnam. One of the highest-ranking leaders of the time, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, recently confessed that "the Vietnam War was a mistake" and the war's impact on American prestige and popularity in Asia was clearly negative.

Thanks to the Watergate affair, Richard Nixon, who followed Johnson as president, was for the most part personally unpopular not only in the U.S., but in Japan as well. However, he was much praised in Japan for his decisions to withdraw from Vietnam, restore Okinawa to nuclear weapon-free mainland Japan, and revive relations with China. The next U.S. president, Gerald Ford, had had almost no involvement in Japan-U.S. relations during his political career, but in a strange twist of fate became the first American president to visit Japan and then immediately hosted Emperor Hirohito's first trip to the U.S. These both had a tremendously positive impact on relations between the two countries.

It was from this time, however, that dark clouds in the form of trade friction began to appear anew over the Pacific. Japanese industry, which at first had been taught, helped, and encouraged by the U.S., grew rapidly, blessed with the American market's huge consumer base. In 1955 Japan's

GNP was only 6% of America's, but had grown to 85% 40 years later.

At the beginning of the 1960s Japan tried everything to erase the trade deficit with the U.S., but now runs an annual surplus of \$50 billion, irritating the U.S. American industry has reacted against the conquest of one U.S. market after another by Japanese products such as textiles, steel, televisions, semiconductors, and cars. On the other hand, dissatisfaction with the closed nature of Japanese markets, starting with rice, has been increasing in governmental and business circles, making the Japan-U.S. trade imbalance a major political issue.

The belief is that the trade friction between Japan and the U.S. will continue into the foreseeable future, if only because both countries are confronted by structural defects that have proven difficult to mend.

Domestic handicaps

Japan is, in reality, a country managed by bureaucrats who are inclined to protect their vested interests and resist responding to change. It appears that deregulation demanded by the U.S. will face heavy resistance from Japanese bureaucrats. Moreover, it should be noted that young bureaucrats have recently begun to have confidence in Japan's economic and technological capabilities and to exhibit an air of contempt for the U.S.

On the other hand, with the U.S. afflicted by budget and trade deficits, unemployment, racial problems, crime, and drugs, many politicians now devote most of their efforts to domestic issues and an isolationist mood is generally increasing. Washington has long been under the thumb of legalistic elements and there is an inability to change the habit of deciding on matters on a short-term rather than long-term perspective.

Then there is the danger that faces both countries: the declining quality of politics and second-rate political leadership. Compared to 30 years ago, when John F. Kennedy, William Fulbright, Mike Mansfield, Hubert Humphrey, and other men of insight were active, American politicians have clearly lost their appeal.

As opposed to the era of Yoshida Shigeru, Hatoyama Ichiro, and Ishibashi Tanzan, as well as Ikeda Hayato or Sato

Eisaku, the political leadership below the prime minister has become Lilliputian. Judging from the way that elections are held today, there appears to be little hope for politicians of better quality and this is also clouding the outlook for relations between Japan and the US.

Japanese still fond of US

However, various opinion polls show that the average Japanese retains the same favorable feelings toward the U.S. as before. Many Japanese tourists and exchange students visit the U.S. and, as indicated by the warm welcome to the Major League shown LA Dodgers pitcher Nomo Hideo, American society as a whole is as magnanimous as ever, which is a help. Even when there are political or economic clashes in relations between nations there is not much to worry about if their people feel close to each other.

As former ambassador Mansfield noted, "The U.S.-Japanese relationship is the most important bilateral relationship, bar none." This is so and all the more so for the reason there is one thing that both countries must remember: a friendly relationship does not necessarily mean solidarity in everything. Rather, the closer Japan and the U.S. become the more they must create sturdy relations, prepared for problems that may arise and not become panicky or get up in arms over every instance of discord or conflict.

In Yosano Buson's haiku verse—*Haru same ya, monogatari yuku, mino to kasa* (In a spring shower, trading tales as they go along, a raincoat and hat)—two close friends converse as they walk along in the rain. One wears a plaited straw raincoat, the other, a conical bamboo hat. There is no need for friends to wear matching raincoats or share the same umbrella, but they can carry on without interruption to their conversation. The U.S. and Japan will not always encounter blue skies—they both must learn to relax, select their respective rain gear and continue their leisurely, amiable conversation as they stroll along in the rain.

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