

The Importance of Facing History

By Wakamatsu Kenji

Ceremonies and celebrations were held in San Francisco on Sep. 8 to mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Peace Treaty between Japan and 48 Allied nations that had fought in World War II. The treaty terminated the U.S.-led Allied occupation and restored Japanese sovereignty, enabling Japan to re-enter the international community. The Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was signed on the same day, establishing an alliance and providing for close mutual cooperation to deal with the Cold War, which was highlighted by the Korean War that broken out in the previous year. So 1951 was a decisive year in the development of postwar Japan.

The anniversary of these two treaties prompted a noticeable number of articles in the Japanese press that reminisced, analyzed and assessed the last 50 years. While most of the articles drew attention to the problems of the successive periods, they also praised the growing trust and strengthening of cooperative ties between Japan and the United States. Japan achieved spectacular reconstruction and high economic growth during the 1950s and 1960s when the U.S. military held absolute sway. In the 1970s, trade disputes developed as the United States experienced mounting balance of payments deficits while Japan's trade surplus with the United States continued to grow.

The Bretton Woods system that established the postwar financial arrangements collapsed when the United States in 1971 suspended the convertibility of dollars into gold. The year 1973 saw the first oil shock, while the first summit of the major industrialized countries took place in 1975. Japan by then had become an economic superpower and was asked to work with the United States to contribute more to the international community.

In the 1980s, the United States was experiencing economic decline and the American public began to fear that their country would be overtaken by Japan's economic might. Arguments were increasingly voiced that Japan's society was fundamentally different, despite the fact that Japan and the United

States seemed to share common values.

In the 1990s, Japan's economic bubble burst and Japan has since experienced economic stagnation, leading some domestic commentators to argue that Japanese society is being ruined by the values and education introduced in the postwar period by the United States. In the midst of this climate, a controversial history textbook and Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro's visit to Yasukuni Shrine, which honors the nation's war dead, aroused the ire of South Korea and China. In the United States there been noticeable moves to seek damages for Japan's wartime actions. All of these events have provided an opportunity for the Japanese to carry out a historical reassessment of their country's position in the international community. Naturally there are differing views of history – the way in which history is read will differ in each era and in each country. John Dower's book *Embracing Defeat* last year won the Pulitzer Prize and has also received critical acclaim in Japan. When we read this book, we understand that many of the problems Japan is currently experiencing can be traced to the equivocal nature of many reforms in the occupation period.

There are currently fears that we are heading for a worldwide depression. The management of the Japanese economy has entered a very difficult stage as Koizumi is trying to rebuild the economy with drastic structural reforms. Meanwhile, we accelerate toward a new epoch as economic globalization continues, and it becomes clear that China will join the World Trade Organization. While Japan will continue to base its foreign relations on the alliance with the United States, it must take a long-term view and make the effort to develop more cordial and cooperative ties with China, South Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries. There must be efforts on the private level to develop mutual trust and an understanding of history.

Hopes for a More Peaceful World

We were appalled by the atrocities at the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon on Sep. 11 which have changed America and the world. We are now standing together against terrorism. Amid growing concerns about the further decline of the global economy, we hope that we will be able to build a more prosperous world while overcoming difficulties.

JEF Editorial Staff

COMING UP

The next issue of *JTI* will examine the changing Japanese employment systems amid the ongoing process of structural reform. The end of life-time employment practices and Japanese youth's changing values toward work will also be analyzed. In addition, a new series of articles will introduce leading figures of the Meiji period (1868-1912) who were internationally well-known. Nitobe Inazo will be the first subject of the series.

TO READERS

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