

Japan-China Relationships

By *Shiraishi Takashi*

THE storm of anti-Japan protests that took place in many urban centers in China last month has passed. Although calls for anti-Japan protests were made over the internet, this year's May 4 celebrations commemorating the "birthday" of Chinese nationalism were peaceful. In the wake of the Jakarta meeting between Chinese president Hu Jintao and Japanese prime minister Koizumi Junichiro, the Chinese government has clamped down on further public protest.

But the impact of these demonstrations has been substantial. On April 12, when asked about the demonstrations, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao stated that "Only the country that respects the past and assumes responsibility for history will be trusted by the peoples of Asia and the world, and can play a big, responsible role in international society." In effect, Wen expressed China's opposition to Japan becoming a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

I do not believe that the anti-Japan protests in April were all stage-managed by the Chinese government. There is no

question that anti-Japan sentiments among Chinese youths exist. But the Chinese government undoubtedly mobilized these sentiments to achieve its political purposes. In the past three years, the Japanese government has been trying to deal separately with important diplomatic issues such as UN reform and Japan becoming a permanent member of the Security Council, Sino-Japanese relations and Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni shrine, the East Asia economic partnership, and the US military transformation and Japan's adjustment to that fact. But this time, the Chinese government made it clear, in a way that could no longer be ignored, that some of these issues are connected. There is no use in getting angry at the way the Chinese went about making their point. The legitimacy of the current regime in China is dependent on nationalism and the performance of its socialist market economy. Besides, the Chinese government is confronted with the daunting challenge of overcoming a serious internal social crisis, manifested in regional imbalances and class tensions. The Chinese government can be expected to use patriotism to shore up its regime and achieve its political objectives. No diplomacy worth its name can afford to ignore this reality. Fortunately, the recent summit meeting in Jakarta prevented the further worsening of Sino-Japanese relations. Now is the time for both countries to do their homeworks.

What are the homeworks? There are a lot of things that need to be done. But the bottom line is: How do we deal with the mutual distrust between Japan and China? Seen from

the Japanese perspective, the anti-Japan protests at the Asian Cup soccer matches last year, China's exploration of natural gas resources in the East China Sea, the incursion of a Chinese submarine into Japanese territorial waters, the recent nationwide anti-Japan protests, and China's opposition to Japan's aspirations to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council all appear to signify China's hostility to Japan. Seen from the Chinese perspective, Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni, references to Taiwan in the Japan-US strategic dialogue, discussions in Japan about ending Official Development Assistance to China, and the history textbook controversy all appear to signify Japan's hostility to China. Dissolving this mutual distrust, however slowly, is the primary task.

What to do then? Strategic decisions on the history question must be made by both sides.

It is a mistake to say that Japan has never apologized for its colonialism and wartime past. The Japanese government, for instance, expressed its "deep regret" in the 1972 Sino-Japanese Joint Statement, the 1978 Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty, and the 1995 Sino-Japanese Joint Declaration. The Chinese government accepted these statements. At the recent Jakarta summit meeting, Hu Jintao proposed that the principle and spirit of these three documents be upheld. In 1995, then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi declared that "Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history." This Japanese official policy was decided on by

Photo: The Mainichi Newspapers



Prime Minister Koizumi announces Japan's aspiration to obtain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council

Photo: REUTERS • SUN

the Cabinet and has since been reaffirmed, most recently by Koizumi himself in his speech at the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung this April.

And yet Japan continues to be criticized for not confronting its wartime past. This criticism is shared not only by Chinese and Koreans, but by the world, as is evident in the Southeast Asian, American and European reportage on the demonstrations. There are two reasons for this.

The first is Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni shrine. The prime minister's three visits to the shrine where "Class-A war criminals" are enshrined have created the impression that the Koizumi administration has quietly undermined the government policy formulated by Murayama. But the policy committee headed by then-Cabinet Secretary Fukuda Yasuo had already recommended in 2002 the building of a new national war memorial. What the prime minister should do now is stop visiting the shrine and decide on the establishment of a new war memorial to back up his speech at the Asia-Africa Conference.

The second reason is the history textbook controversy. The Japanese government has proposed to undertake collaborative research on history with the Chinese. This is welcome, but takes time. Besides, only one out of eight junior high school history textbooks argues that the "Great East Asia War" was a war of liberation, and this textbook is used by less than 0.1% of high schools (or less than ten schools). But it is useless to argue this point. As long as the current national textbook authorization system is there, whatever it authorizes will be viewed as state-sanctioned by people in China and South Korea, countries which use state-sanctioned textbooks. A third-party inspection system similar to the one in Germany should replace the current national authorization system.

I am not proposing this because of external pressure. Japan's freedom of action has been constrained by its colonialist and wartime past. This is not desirable. The Chinese prime minister opposed Japan's aspiration to become a



Thousands of protesters participate in an anti-Japan protest

permanent member of the UN Security Council by stating that "only the country that respects the past and assumes responsibility for history...can play a big, responsible role in international society." What the Japanese government should do is to deal with this question in a way that cannot be misunderstood by anyone so that no one can criticize the Japanese government for its failure to deal with the past.

But at the same time, restoring the friendship between Japan and China is not solely Japan's responsibility. What the Chinese government must do is up to the Chinese themselves, of course. However, I urge the Chinese government to consider two points. First of all, the Chinese government should punish those who damaged Japanese properties and injured Japanese civilians during the demonstrations, and provide compensation for the damage and the injuries suffered. Second, the Chinese government should stop disseminating misinformation concerning Japan's "failure" to apologize for its colonialist and wartime history. As long as the Chinese government relies on anti-Japanese patriotism and occupies the moral high ground in rela-

tion to Japan, there can be no Sino-Japanese friendship built on the equality of both sides. The Chinese government should educate the Chinese people about post-war Sino-Japanese efforts at promoting amity and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Stabilizing and strengthening Sino-Japanese relations is crucial for Japan and China as well as for Asia and the world. Sino-Japanese rapprochement is indispensable for building an East Asia Community. What is needed is to transform the current relationship of mutual distrust into a relationship of mutual trust. It is natural for people to love their countries, but the kind of nationalism that seeks its enemies outside the nation is dangerous in this age of growing interdependence. Containing such nationalism and channeling its energies into forging mutual trust and cooperation between these neighboring countries is the task of political leaders. **J.S**

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