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The Improving Course of
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—History, Values, Realism in a Changing World

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INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

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The Improving Course of Japan-China Relations and the Role of the United States

– History, Values, Realism in a Changing World

TAKASHI HOSHIYAMA

Introduction

With the visit to China in October 2006 by Japanese Prime Minister Abe and the visit to Japan in April 2007 by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the relationship between Japan and China, which had been deteriorating for more than five years, at last began to turn around.

The major highlight of these reciprocal visits by the leaders of Japan and China is that the turnaround in Japan-China relations has been acknowledged. Of particular importance was the fact that for the first time China fully appreciated postwar Japan's peaceful steps in relation to the "historical issue," and acknowledged Japan's remorse and apology in relation to past war. Also remarkable was the fact that China showed signs of recognizing Japan as a political great power in the Asian region.

Behind this qualitative shift in Japan-China relations, changes on the Japanese side represent particularly important factors.

- 1) First, with Japan finally being liberated from the spell of history, 60 years after the end of the war, the Japanese public's view of China has changed into a more realistic and cautious one mainly due to generational change.
- 2) Second, in light of such threats as the military threat from North Korea, the rise of China, and the threat of international terror, the Japanese public at large is beginning to hold a realistic national security outlook.
- 3) Third, Japan is being forced to adopt a more positive and assertive brand of diplomacy amid changes in this harsh international environment in which Japan finds itself.

A superficial reading of the current state of Japan-China relations would probably yield the conclusion that, after the poisoning of relations by Prime Minister Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine, they are now in the process of being returned to their former state of amicability, due to the arrival of new Prime Minister Abe and his proclaimed emphasis on China. In reality, however, Japan-China relations have changed qualitatively due to great changes on the Japanese side, and this should be seen as the start of a break with the so-called postwar regime. The Japanese have been liberated from the spell of history by the controversy over Yasukuni Shrine, and Japan has at last set out on the path to normalization.

Based on this recognition, one of the main topics of this article is the question of what it means to say that Japan-China relations have changed qualitatively, accompanied by an examination of whether Japan-China relations will improve in the future.

The second major topic is the way in which the USA, as an important stakeholder in Japan-China relations, ought to react at this time of change in Japan and in Japan-China relations. The fact that the US House of Representatives has brought up the issue of wartime comfort women has raised awareness of the problem of how the USA can no longer ignore how Japan perceives history and values.

It goes without saying that the USA will need the right policies towards China and Japan in order to retain the same presence in Asia. More concretely, its future strategy will probably need to emphasize the delicate guidance required to search for ways to strike a balance between the two sides. For the USA, examination of the following issues can not be avoided: what kind of Asian order should the USA attempt to build, how high it should hoist the flag of freedom and democracy, and to what extent could it trust Japan, which shares its values. In this apparent period of transition, it seems to be necessary for the USA to take a principled attitude and send a clear message--one that is neither neutral nor vague--to both Japan and China, as well as to other Asian nations.

Chapter 1 The Significance of Prime Minister Wen's Visit to Japan

The joint statement to the press issued at the time of Prime Minister Abe's visit to China in October 2006, the press statement issued during Prime Minister Wen's recent visit to Japan, and Prime Minister Wen's address to the Diet all contained extremely important indicators regarding the future direction of Japan-China relations. Two points stood out in particular. The first and most important of these was that China made it clear that it would curb its use of the "history card," which has been a cornerstone of its diplomatic policy towards Japan. The second was that China signaled its willingness to recognize Japan as a regional political power and as a global power.

Although these were extensively debated in domestic Chinese academic circles at the time of the formation of the Hu administration in 2001, as "new-thinking" diplomacy with Japan, these two pillars of policy change did not win acceptance; now that the Hu administration is trying to adopt this new approach, it could be said that Japan-China relations are undergoing their first qualitative change since the normalization of relations in 1972.

1. Renouncing the history card

In his address to the Diet, Prime Minister Wen said the following: “Since the normalization of diplomatic ties between China and Japan, the Japanese government and leaders have on many occasions stated their position on the historical issue, admitted that Japan had committed aggression, and expressed deep remorse and apology to the victimized countries. The Chinese Government and people appreciate the position they have taken. We sincerely hope that the Japanese side will act as it has stated and honor its commitment.” The most notable point is China’s appreciation of Japan’s remorse and apology, as expressed in this paragraph.

At various occasions, the perception has taken hold in Chinese society and elsewhere that Japan has not been sufficiently remorseful for the past. This was exemplified by the deterioration in Japan-China relations triggered by the decision to not include the word “apology” in the joint communique issued on the occasion of President Jiang Zemin’s 1998 visit to Japan, and by the recent case in which the controversy over Japan’s failure to apologize for the history issue was rehashed when the issue of wartime comfort women was raised in the US House of Representatives. This perception has hampered Japanese diplomatic policy. In that sense it could probably be said that Wen Jiabao’s remarks on this occasion mark a major turning point for the historical issue. Although the Japanese government has reiterated sentiments of remorse and apology, from its declaration in the 1972 Japan-China Joint Communique¹ to subsequent declarations by successive prime ministers,² this was the first time that the Chinese government had explicitly acknowledged the reality of Japan’s apology and highly evaluated Japan’s remorseful attitude. As such, it was enormously significant.

There are two other important expressions relating to the historical issue that are worthy of note. The joint press statement issued when Prime Minister Abe visited China included the following sentences: “The Japanese side emphasized that, more than 60 years after the war, Japan has been consistently following the path of a peaceful country, and would continue to follow this path. The Chinese side positively appreciated this.” From a Japanese perspective, this would seem to express a recognition that is only natural. However, from a Chinese perspective, the fact that China now rightly appreciates the achievement inherent in postwar Japan’s progress is particularly notable, as China’s cliched fears of a resurgence of militarism in Japan, or of Japan becoming a military superpower, have not merely represented an expression of genuine anxiety, but have served as a political means for reining in Japan’s military buildup and the Japan-US alliance. The rhetoric that has been used up to now in China, about “a resurgence of militarism” or “certain militarists,” is now worn out, signifying a letup more than 60 years after the war’s end.

Furthermore, although the 1998 joint communique had already alluded to China’s appreciation for economic cooperation from Japan,³ which has been psychologically linked with China’s 1972 renunciation of reparations, this was reiterated in the joint press statement for the most recent visit in the following terms, in acknowledgment by China of Japan’s postwar attitude: “Both sides shared the view that the Japanese yen loans to China, which will conclude in 2008, played a positive role in the economic development of China and Japan-China economic cooperation, and the Chinese side expressed its gratitude.”

The reason why these statements and their wording are important is that a key objective of China's diplomacy towards Japan up to now has been to prevent a resurgence of nationalism in Japan, which was being fed by China's continual questioning of history. The basic underlying perception ran as follows: (1) Japan had not expressed remorse or apologized, (2) there have been militarists in Japan and a resurgence of militarism has been feared, (3) Japan had not made reparations or provided any alternative compensation. On this occasion, China declared that, having assessed Japan's achievements up to now, it has altered its perception.

It would be premature to say whether this will put an end to the quarrel between Japan and China over the historical issue. This is because at the same time, the Chinese side is demanding "action" from the Japanese side. China will protest whenever it judges that Japan is not taking appropriate action, and does not rule out the possibility of demanding revisions. Issues directly related to history, such as the Yasukuni Shrine issue and the controversy over school text books, will probably continue to be raised in the future as well. However, it can be seen as a declaration that the Chinese leadership intends to refrain in the future from politicization of the historical issue in the form of a suspension of summit meetings or acquiescence to large-scale anti-Japan demonstrations, to name a few. In addition, even for the numerous political problems between Japan and China that are only tenuously related to history, history has hovered in the background to the dispute and served to add an emotional dimension to the problems. For example, when China opposed Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in 2004, the media officer at China's foreign ministry stated that "A nation seeking to fulfill its role as a responsible member of the international community must have a clear understanding of the historical issue." This perception was part of the background to the anti-Japan demonstrations that broke out in 2005. In this sense, if China changes its policy of basing its diplomacy towards Japan on the historical issue, it is possible that the historical issue will switch from being a pivotal emotional diplomatic issue to being (in relative terms at least) a peripheral problem that can be resolved rationally.

Why the history card is important to China

As mentioned previously, China's diplomatic policy towards Japan was designed to prevent a resurgence of nationalism in Japan. Preventing a drive by Japan to become a military superpower, opposing Japan-US security, and restraining increases in Japanese defense spending by continually bringing up the past to the Japanese people have ranked as particularly significant accomplishments on the security front.

The history card is also important in relation to the issue of Taiwan--a core issue for China. Japan and China waged a struggle for supremacy on the Korean Peninsula, and when the Qing China was defeated it ceded Taiwan to Japan. China's continual reminders to Japan of the history between this war and the point when Japan relinquished Taiwan as a result of its defeat in World War Two has proved a particularly effective way for China to reject Japanese interference in Taiwan affairs. As long as the Japanese continue to harbor a sense of atonement with regard to history, it seems that Japan will not support Taiwan to the extent of opposing China's policy, which asserts that there is only "one China." In addition, if there were a crisis in the Taiwan

Strait and the USA tried to intervene, it is highly likely that it would make use of its bases in Japan. However, if remorse over history is firmly engraved on the hearts of the Japanese public, this can be expected to serve as a deterrent to the use of these bases.

In addition, China has enjoyed economic benefits in the form of a cumulative total of more than three trillion yen in ODA, more than three trillion yen in government-funded loans from the Export-Import Bank of Japan, and enormous amicable cooperation from Japanese companies. In this regard, it is said that there was a strong desire within the generation that experienced the war, from which Japan's leadership stratum was drawn, to repay China for its magnanimous attitude in renouncing reparations with cooperation on the economic front, which was Japan's forte. The diplomatic care taken by the Japanese government to avoid friction with China as much as possible, as with the issue of the Senkaku islands and with the current East China Sea oil field issue, has also probably not been without merit.

It seems that China was also aware that damaging Japan's standing in the international arena using the historical issue also had the diplomatic effect of boosting its own esteem in relative terms and deflecting attention from criticism of China. By way of recent example (although it is unclear whether the Chinese government itself is involved), ethnic Chinese anti-Japanese groups in the USA have raised the Nanjing Incident and the issue of the comfort women, causing Japan's international reputation to decline. If they can succeed in playing up the wartime US-China alliance relationship, Chinese diplomacy stands to gain. There is probably no country--China included--that would pass up the chance to play a diplomatic card like this that benefits it tangibly and intangibly. This diplomatic card proved highly effective in Japan until just recently, due to Japan's leftward tilt (due in part to US occupation policy) coupled with the Japanese sense of awe regarding China's ancient and venerable civilization. The decline in the effectiveness of this card has occurred over the past ten years or so, resulting in a deterioration in Japan-China relations during the era of the Koizumi administration, symbolized by the issue of the visits to Yasukuni Shrine. This will be referred to again later.

At the same time, raising the historical issue also serves a purpose in Chinese domestic politics.

In 1994 the Chinese government started to tighten its grip on ideas by means of patriotic education. This was in response to the defiance shown to the communist party rule by a section of the Chinese public in the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989, and up to the present time widespread ideological education has been carried out in the classroom and through the mass media.

Central to the *raison d'être* of the Communist Party rule is the history of its victory in the war against Japan, and at that time China was more directly affected by Japanese imperialism than by that of the West. In tandem with China's economic development, inequities in society, such as the increasing gap between rich and poor, have intensified. Since a change in the party's dominance cannot be countenanced, in order to fend off criticism of the party's rule, which spawned these inequities, and to assert its legitimacy, the government must necessarily emphasize history. In this regard, Japanese militarism and Taiwan independence have naturally borne the brunt of the criticism, and in the author's view this ten years of patriotic education has been a

major factor in the deterioration to date in Japan-China relations. However, this arrangement represents a double-edged sword for the Chinese Communist Party, and it harbors a growing fear that if popular anti-Japanese sentiment spills over, it will imperil the foundations of the Party's own existence.

Since the history card has thus demonstrated its multi-faceted usefulness, China's renunciation of it signifies a major change in its diplomacy towards Japan.

2. Acknowledging Japan as a political great power

Aside from China's change in attitude regarding the historical issue, another important point at issue is whether or not China recognizes Japan as a regional political great power, not solely as an economic great power. Especially when US-China relations are considered, the question of whether China views Japan as a partner with which it will build an Asian order is an important one.

When Prime Minister Abe visited China, the two nations were in accord, stating that "... both sides shared the view that the two countries would strive to build a mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests," and on the occasion of Prime Minister Wen's recent visit to Japan, the two sides reaffirmed that they are aiming to build a strategic reciprocal relationship.

Disregarding the step-up represented by the use of the term "strategic" and the definitive and detailed affirmation of the significance of the relationship, why did the two sides describe it merely as a goal for which they would strive tenaciously? This provides a striking symmetry with the declaration of the establishment of a "partnership of friendship and cooperation for peace and development" on the occasion of President Jiang's visit to Japan in 1998.

In addition to the popular sentiment existing on both sides not allowing it, the more substantial reason for this is thought to be that, by designating that the two sides have yet to arrive at establishing a strategic reciprocal relationship, China seeks to rationalize the intention that it does not yet formally recognize Japan as a regional political great power, and that it accordingly cannot support Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

Irrespective of this factual reservation, agreement on this strategic reciprocal relationship should be still regarded as important.

In the 1998 declaration of a "partnership of friendship and cooperation," a perception of the international situation and the fundamental principles of the Japan-China bilateral relationship were described only in general terms. By comparison, the phrase "it is the solemn responsibility of both countries in the new era to contribute constructively to the peace, stability, and development of Asia and the world" in the latest joint statement sets out very clearly the facts that the strategic reciprocal relationship is not simply a bilateral affair and that the two countries are responsible powers in the Asian region and the international community. In addition, with the stipulation that "In this context, both countries will benefit mutually and expand their common interests. In so doing, Japan-China relations will be elevated to new heights," the two nations stressed positive aspects and committed themselves to aiming to improve relations, while acknowledging that various problems exist between the two nations.

In plain terms, this can be interpreted to mean that, although the two nations have not gone as far as to announce a strategic reciprocal relationship, they affirm that they share a mutual grasp on the fate of Asia and that the bilateral relationship is highly strategic in nature; and that China effectively recognizes Japan as a political great power in the region, despite the fact that it has held back from doing so formally. Stated another way, it can probably be said that this stipulates a onetime reset of the untenable Japan-China relationship based solely on “friendship” that has existed up until now, and that in the new era the two nations will aim for a new relationship founded on the principles of appropriate competition and cooperation.

3. Reasons for China’s change in policy to “new-thinking” diplomacy

What then are the likely reasons for this change, which sees China shifting emphasis to adopt a course of new-thinking diplomacy towards Japan? As has already been seen, the history card was an extremely useful diplomatic tool for curbing Japanese nationalism and checking Japan’s evolution into a superpower, and to make this change will have required a significant decision. It appears that there are three major reasons for China’s decision.

(1) Change in Japanese public opinion

With Japan’s liberation from the “spell of history,” 60 years after the end of the war, the emergence of a major change in the way in which the Japanese public views China has simultaneously reduced the effectiveness of the history card. If China stops playing the history card, Japanese public opinion will become favorably disposed towards China again, and it will be possible to prevent the Japan-China economic relationship, Japanese defense policy, and Japanese policy on Taiwan taking courses that are undesirable for China.

(2) The effects on China’s relationship with the USA

If Japanese public opinion on China hardens, it will serve to strengthen Japan’s inclination towards the USA, which has been growing stronger of late, and to further solidify the USA’s unipolar dominance. For China, enhancing East Asian unity and vying with the USA for influence in this region will require Japan’s active participation, and a change in China’s diplomacy towards Japan will change the tide in this regard. China also fears that if Japan-China relations are marked by confrontation and renewed mass anti-Japanese demonstrations occur, this will turn into a liability in terms of US and international opinion of China.

(3) The effects within China

If anti-Japanese sentiment in China grows any stronger, unwholesome domestic nationalism in China (as seen in the anti-Japanese demonstrations of 2005) will become a real fear for the Communist Party itself--not just for Japan. In China, there is a structure in which dissatisfaction of the Chinese people at growing inequities in their society can easily be directed towards Japan due to the historical issue. For example, if some unforeseen incident were to befall a Japanese

company in China, this could have a knock-on effect on other foreign capital and deal a deadly blow to the Chinese economy. More conducive to China's "peaceful rise" would be to make continued use of Japan's economic might and technological capability.

China is almost certainly considering all these factors in combination and attempting to make an overarching decision. Since Chinese diplomacy puts top priority on the pursuit of China's national interests, any decision taken could not possibly be based on simply forcing Japan's prime minister not to visit Yasukuni Shrine or solely in consideration of Japanese public opinion; the result will thus probably be a cool-headed strategic decision involving the larger national interest that transcends matters such as these.

4. The switch to realism in Japanese public opinion

Although it has been China acting out of strategic consideration that has brought about the qualitative change in Japan-China relations, in the author's view the change in public opinion on the Japanese side has been particularly important as a background factor. This should be examined in a little more detail. The key theme of this change is "realism," as listed in the three points in the introduction; to recapitulate, Japan's view of China has become more realistic due to China's rise, the threat from North Korea, as well as Japan's generational change, and, therefore, Japanese diplomacy has been forced to change in response to these conditions.

For a long time after the war, Japan entrusted its security to the USA and devoted itself to economic development. Due to a strong sense of remorse for and an aversion to the war, most Japanese have come to believe in an unrealistic faith that Japan will be secure as long as it professes to be a peaceful state, no matter what security environment Japan is surrounded by, a belief that some ridicule as "one-nation pacifism." This has been sustained by US occupation policy aimed at preventing a resurgence of militarism and by the leftist ideology that it spawned. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, US policy towards Japan changed, and Japan underwent remilitarization as a member of the West. Within Japanese society, however, a liberal leftist ideology with a pro-China flavor continued to predominate. In this atmosphere, Japan kept its defensive capability to a minimum (notwithstanding US demands for Japan to strengthen its military capability); it successively adopted and confined itself to security policies such as a defense-only policy, the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, and the Three Arms Export Principles. After the end of the Cold War, a change at last began to emerge. An immediate opportunity arrived in the shape of the Gulf War, which took place in 1991. However, despite the fact that Japan provided as much as 13 billion dollars in funding to the multinational force led by the USA, it was not prepared to dispatch personnel institutionally or mentally, and questions about what Japan's international role should be began to arise among the Japanese public. Even then, this new way of thinking, involving a change to a pragmatic approach, did not immediately enter the mainstream, and even in 1994 Japan's leftwing tendencies showed resiliency with the formation of a coalition administration headed by the Japan Socialist Party. In 1995, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, Prime Minister Murayama gave a speech expressing deeper remorse and apology than any of his predecessors, in which he used clear language and unequivocally termed the war a "war of aggression." The public also hoped that

this would draw a line under the postwar era. Over approximately the same period, a number of incidents started to unfold in rapid succession, including nuclear suspicions regarding North Korea, nuclear tests by China, the Taiwan Strait crisis, the persistent utterance of the historical issue on the occasion of President Jiang Zemin's visit to Japan, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Yasukuni Shrine issue, incursions by Chinese warships into Japanese territorial waters, anti-Japanese demonstrations in response to Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and sustained military build-up by China. As a result, the sense of threat to Japan's security and antipathy against China began to intensify. In this security environment, Japan's alliance relationship with the USA gradually strengthened. In the course of all this, Prime Minister Koizumi came to power in 2001, calling for a reform of domestic politics. On the foreign policy front, he strongly supported the USA on the issues of Iraq and Afghanistan, dispatched the Japan Self-Defense Forces overseas, and adopted a course that emphasized the Japan-US alliance. Although he was not anti-China, the public pledge to continue his annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine that he made on assuming office became a major factor in the deterioration in Japan-China relations, which lasted for five years. Public opinion regarding the rights and wrongs of his visits to Yasukuni Shrine was split right down the middle, and tumultuous public debate took place between the pro faction and the opposing faction. Debate raged ceaselessly in relation to fundamental questions of history, such as whether or not it was appropriate in light of past history for the prime minister to commemorate the dead at Yasukuni Shrine, where war criminals are enshrined; whether it was ethically and politically right for him to go so far as to sacrifice Japan-China relations by visiting the shrine; whether China's stubborn protests constituted interference in Japan's internal affairs by a foreign country; whether the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, which judged the class-A war criminals (war leaders who were convicted of crimes against peace, whose enshrinement attracted China's strongest protests) had any legitimacy; and whether the war had really been a clear contravention of the international law of the day in the first place. In this way, the Yasukuni Shrine issue coupled with the domestic political situation afforded the first opportunity since the war for public debate of historical perception (hitherto effectively regarded as taboo), and became a chance for the Japanese people to face the war directly. Prime Minister Koizumi probably did not intend to bring about this situation and it could probably be said that this was a purely natural occurrence in the changing times.

After the overwhelming victory by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the elections for the House of Representatives in 2005, a Chinese scholar posed the following question "Why does Prime Minister Koizumi visit Yasukuni Shrine? Half of the Japanese people are opposed to it, are they not?" The author's response was as follows: "From a wider perspective, I (the author) also oppose Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, since they cause a deterioration in Japan-China relations. However, as long as Japan-China relations do not deteriorate too far, I would like him to visit the shrine as a private citizen. Many ordinary Japanese who oppose the prime minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine share this view (in an opinion poll regarding Prime Minister Koizumi's aforementioned visit to Yasukuni Shrine on 15 August 2006, the anniversary of the end of the war, a majority of Japanese said that they appreciated it.⁴ The electorate's assent to his plans for privatization of the postal services was not the only factor behind Prime

Minister Koizumi's sweeping victory in the elections to the House of Representatives--it should be understood that this also represented their assent to his visits to Yasukuni Shrine, to his stance towards China, and to his forceful line on the Japan-US alliance, including his dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces. Japanese people's perceptions of history and security are clearly changing. If China believes that this is due to Prime Minister Koizumi's personal qualities, it is misreading Japanese public opinion." In short, confronted by the threat of North Korea, Japan and the Japanese are beginning to entertain a realistic perception of security, and are at the same time being liberated from the spell of history. The facts that Prime Minister Abe, who belongs to the same conservative wing as his predecessor, succeeded the Koizumi government and that, in an unprecedented circumstance, his conservative policies do not meet strong opposition from the public, also proves that this change is taking root.

This is not to say that narrow-minded nationalism is on the rise in Japan, however. There has been not the slightest suggestion of any occurrences like the violent mass anti-Japanese demonstrations and Japanese-product boycott movements witnessed in China taking place in Japan. This is probably because democracy, which existed in Japan since the late 19th century, is ingrained in Japan's postwar experience. Both the moves to revise the constitution and the debate over the right to collective self-defense are also proceeding amid public discussion based on the democratic system. Although Japan has a strong nuclear allergy, in light of the threat from North Korea, the taboo over the debate involving "consideration of the possibility" of becoming a nuclear power is fading. Amid this trend, it is highly likely that historical perceptions will change towards the future. The historical view that Japan alone was completely in the wrong will probably be corrected--chiefly by academics and the press. This is a by-product of the climate of head-on debate over the historical issue which has been unleashed by the arguments over the visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Disputes over revising the constitution drawn up by the occupying US army, the characterization of the Greater East Asia War, and the truth regarding the Nanjing Massacre and the issue of comfort women appear to be intensifying--not as conflicts between the political left and right, but as a factual pursuit from an academic research perspective.

It would be superficial to view this trend as an indication that Japan is tilting to the right, or as a movement towards a resurgence of militarism. Although the direction of the vector does describe the same rightward course, the trend should probably be viewed as movement from the left to the middle-of-the-road that constitutes steps towards "normalization" based on realism. In fact, the threat from North Korea notwithstanding, Japan's defense expenditure has been declining over the past ten years, and lacking offensive weapons, Japan will never become a military superpower. The Abe Cabinet is clearly setting out its "values-oriented diplomacy"⁵ based on freedom and democracy, and, therefore, is seeking to strengthen relations with Australia and India. It also strongly supports US policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, even further by dispatching the Self-Defense Forces overseas, aiming to strengthen Japan's relationship with the USA and attempting to respond to genuine threats. Also, the reason why Prime Minister Abe is setting out his "assertive diplomacy" so soon after taking office is that, if Japan does not respond to these real threats by clearly setting out its national interests (as with its strong response to the North Korean problem), it could lead to the consequences that Japan's position is ignored and that Japan faces security crises.

Under these circumstances, Japanese sentiment regarding China continued to deteriorate (according to an October 2006 cabinet office survey, only 34.3% of respondents said that they “feel affection” for China, compared to a high of 78.6% in 1980).⁶ If Japan-China relations improve in the near future, it is anticipated that this trend will reverse. However, it seems unlikely that this favorability rating will return to its former heights. This is due less to disillusionment with socialism in Japan than to the expectation that the soft power that China wields in Japan (in terms of adulation and reverence for a time-honored nation whose development dates back to ancient times) is expected to be eclipsed by the potent hard power that it has acquired through its rise, and to become relatively weak. The trend for Japanese people, who have started to wake up to a sense of reality, to judge the real China on its merits will probably grow stronger. China would likely be mistaken if it assumed that the departure of the Koizumi administration would lead to a restoration of Japanese public opinion of China to its former state. In 1982 the Nakasone cabinet touted the notion of an end to the postwar period, and in 1995 the Murayama cabinet tried to draw a line under the period on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the war’s end; however, these attempts were unsuccessful. At the time neither Japanese public opinion nor Japanese perceptions of China could fully go along with this idea. The difference between then and now is that public opinion now backs the Koizumi administration and the Abe administration, and a nationalism that seeks to extricate Japan from the postwar period appears to be emerging naturally. As regards a departure from the “postwar regime” touted by Prime Minister Abe too, notwithstanding the fact that up until now the discussion of problems relating to perceptions of history has been regarded as taboo, there is little sign of evasion in Japan now, and this is surely a good time to take a look at the reality of the international community.

Chapter 2 Structural Problems between Japan and China, and How They Relate to the USA

So will the recent visit of Prime Minister Wen mark the start of a dramatic improvement in Japan-China relations? This seems unlikely. There are three structural problems between Japan and China that will be difficult to resolve. At the same time, from the Chinese point of view, the Japan-US alliance remains a constraint on its national interests. A structural problem means a complex problem that cannot easily be resolved through negotiation and compromise between the two governments, as exemplified by the issue of Taiwan, the historical issue, and the East China Sea issue. Each of these problems is inherently difficult, and as well as being interconnected, they are also affected by US Asia policy. Furthermore, Japan occupies a passive position, characterized fundamentally by the degree to which Chinese policy affects it and secondarily by the effects of the US posture to it. In addition, as already mentioned, China has made the decision not to play the history card, and if it sticks to this policy, there is sure to be a considerable improvement in relations.

There follows a brief introduction to each of the three problems that exist between Japan and China, and a summary of US interests in relation to them.

1. The issue of Taiwan

There are four main players involved in the issue of Taiwan: China and Taiwan (the parties directly concerned), the USA, and Japan. Of the four, Japan is clearly the most passive presence, with its position at the mercy of the activities of the other three. This is because Japan's position is non-involvement in the issue of the jurisdiction of Taiwan, since it relinquished Taiwan under the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and with the issue of the Japan-China Joint Communiqué in 1972 declared to China that it "fully understands and respects" China's "one China" stand. However, Taiwan is situated in sea lanes that are strategically important for Japan--a maritime nation that relies on sea transportation for at least 99% of its trade. It is in Japan's security interests that the seas surrounding Taiwan be free and stable, and the question of whether or not there will be conflict in Taiwan or its environs is a matter of international concern related to Japan's survival.

It goes without saying that for China's communist administration the issue of Taiwan is in every sense a pivotal issue. For the USA too, it is an important issue that has a bearing on its own economic interests, security, and political influence in the Asian region. The USA supplies weapons to Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act, part of its own domestic law, and has deterred China from liberating Taiwan by force of arms by reserving possible military intervention. In addition, the way in which the USA handles Taiwan symbolizes its presence in Asia; if free and democratic Taiwan were to be unified with China through the use of force, this would come as a shock to the democracies of Asia--including Japan. Accordingly, the issue of Taiwan is the most difficult and sensitive issue on which US and Chinese interests directly collide, and unless the situation improves, Japan-China relations will inevitably be exposed to its effects.

In particular, the question of what action Japan (home to US frontline bases) would take in the event of a crisis involving Taiwan is of interest to the other three parties--the USA, China, and Taiwan. As far as China is concerned, it wants to avoid at all costs a situation in which Japan would support Taiwan's independence along with the USA, and that in the event of a crisis it would back any military intervention by the USA, based on the Japan-US security treaty. For this reason the objective of China's diplomacy is to restrain Japan, using tactics such as dissolving or weakening the Japan-US alliance, preventing Japan from improving its defense capability, perpetuating the Japanese people's antiwar consciousness, and increasing their feelings of affinity for China. In this regard, using the historical issue as a diplomatic card--based on the remorse over World War Two that exists among the Japanese and their sense of atonement towards China--would have been an effective strategy.

As for the USA, it has accorded the Japan-US security treaty a pivotal status in the protection of the security of Asia--including Taiwan--and consistently requests that Japan strengthen its defense capability. Meanwhile, the USA has adopted an essentially contradictory position on Japan stating to China that the USA would play the role of a bottle cap, holding Japan back within the framework of the treaty, to China's fears of Japan developing into a military superpower.

The problem is that after 20 years of democratic progress in Taiwan, the currently elected administration in Taiwan has come to insist on "Taiwan independence." The principle of "one

China,” which has hitherto been regarded as a necessity, is wavering, and the more than ten-year cross-strait conflict is boiling over. The military balance between the two sides is collapsing due to China’s military build-up, and China is attaining a level of capability that would enable it to liberate Taiwan by force. The missile tests that China conducted off the coast of Taiwan in 1996 suggested that this danger could become a reality. In addition, there are said to be 700-800 short-range missiles pointed at Taiwan, and as the principal rationale for China’s military expansion, the issue of Taiwan will pose a military threat to Japan as well if it continues to escalate in this manner. In fact, the weapons that are said to be pointed at Taiwan could reach Okinawa in Japan, and there are fears that China’s increased military expenditure could lead to a build-up of medium-range missiles directed at the Japanese mainland. At the same time, the fact that the Chinese navy is engaging in active operations in waters close to Japan is ramping up the sense of crisis.

As far as Japan is concerned, it will be necessary for both China and Taiwan to stay in the present status-quo framework and to restrain from escalating the crisis threatening Japan. To this end, Japan should request China (1) to strengthen dialogue between China and the relevant Taiwanese authorities building confidence-building structure, and (2) to restrain China’s military expansion and make its military power and intention transparent to the outside world. In his speech to the Diet during his recent visit, Prime Minister Wen stated that “it is hoped that Japan will appreciate the highly sensitive nature of the Taiwan issue, honor its commitment, and handle this issue prudently.” In reply, Japan reiterated its existing position in the joint press statement as follows: “Regarding the Taiwan issue, the Japanese side expressed its adherence to the position which was set forth in the Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People’s Republic of China.” This would seem to represent a declaration by Japan that it will continue to act under the “one China” premise in the framework of the “status quo,” just as it has up until now, from the point of view of conflict prevention and ensuring stability, notwithstanding the fact that Taiwan’s circumstances have changed since the issue of the Joint Communiqué in 1972.

In this environment, the USA is strengthening its two-fold deterrence policy and concentrating its efforts to meet any unexpected contingency that might arise. However, as China rises, the instability will inevitably increase. In order to continue maintaining the current effective status quo and ensure relative stability, the Chinese government and the relevant Taiwanese authorities will have to engage in dialogue, and security-related mechanisms for preventing military clashes, which the Taiwan administration proposed, will have to be built. As has been pointed out by a considerable number of US academics, it would be also advisable to establish a political framework for the next 50-some years, and to agree to freeze the present conditions in place. It is desirable that such an agreement become a reality on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and that it be monitored and guaranteed by the entire region, including Japan and the USA. If maintenance of the status quo is institutionalized in this manner, it will be possible to head off the threat of conflict taking place on Japan’s very doorstep. Even China and Taiwan can probably just about agree on this. Only the USA has the kind of diplomatic clout to call for this type of agreement to be established.

In addition, it is important for the USA and Japan to jointly hoist the flag of freedom and democracy in the Asian community. The value that the inhabitants of both China and Taiwan should choose their own system of government and oppose unification by force of arms or coercion against the wishes of a large majority of the inhabitants (currently 85% of the inhabitants of Taiwan want the status quo to be maintained, with neither “independence” nor “unification”) will strongly support the Japanese and US policy of calling on the two sides for a peaceful resolution through dialogue. To summarize, for Japan the issue of Taiwan is a two-fold problem--as well as the fear of the prospect of war in its immediate vicinity and its possible spread, there is also the possibility that China’s military expansion could be directed at Japan. Moreover, Japan is becoming the object of a tug-of-war between the USA and China with regard to applying the Japan-US security treaty to Taiwan conflict. Thus, as long as the issue of Taiwan persists, neither China’s suspicions of Japan nor Japan’s fears regarding China will be allayed.

2. The historical issue

The USA probably has a strong sense that it is an outsider with regard to the historical issue between China and Japan; however, it is in fact an important stakeholder. The USA would like to maintain friendly relations with both Japan and China, and if the two nations are at loggerheads with one another over the historical issue, not only will it find itself in the awkward position of having to intervene--there would also be deeper strategic implications for it. The two major ramifications would be as follows:

The first is that the way in which the USA sees the history dispute between Japan and China is closely related to the USA’s perception of Japan; consequently it is bound up with the USA’s entire Asian strategy, in terms of how it should take forward its relationship with Japan, with whom it has an alliance.

It goes without saying that in the Pacific War, China was an ally of the USA against the common enemy Japan. Under the leadership of the USA, the status of postwar Japan turned around completely, and it became an ally as a member of the West. However, the question of whether the USA judges Japan to be a dangerous country that might start another war or to be a trustworthy ally is bound up with the US perception of history, and remains a current topic.

Stated another way, the USA will have to make the following strategic judgments: despite the differences between their respective systems and ideologies, does it see a rising China--its former ally--as a more trustworthy partner, and ought it to be continually wary of its alliance partner Japan, despite the similarity in their respective systems and ideologies, which China insists is not remorseful about the past.

Judging from the recent uproar over the resolution on the comfort women in the US House of Representatives, notwithstanding the fact that the war ended more than 60 years ago, it is highly likely that Americans harbor two different images of Japan--as a trustworthy nation and as a dangerous nation. It should probably be recognized that the view of Japan which lay behind the "bottle cap" theory, as explained to Prime Minister Chou Enlai by Kissinger, has not yet

been completely eradicated. The kind of rhetoric that China has been willingly employing, with phrases such as “Japan is not remorseful over history” and “there are signs of a resurgence of militarism,” has not only influenced the perceptions of the Japanese people, as already seen, but has also been affecting the views of Japan formed internationally--including views in the USA. In this sense, China’s history card is not simply a device for generating pressure and propaganda inside Japan, it is also an international card for running down the image of Japan and favorably advancing China’s diplomacy in relative terms.

If the average American’s perception of Japan continues to waver over problems of the past and the USA cannot place its trust in democratic Japan, its foremost Asian alliance partner, future US diplomacy in Asia will inevitably vacillate. This is why the US government must consider measures to address US public opinion.

The second ramification, which has already been touched on, is the effect on Japan-US security arrangements. Left-wing thinking is still deep-rooted in Japan, and this tendency is particularly conspicuous on the security front. For this reason, as an alliance nation, Japan has so far been unable to adequately implement the military measures requested by the USA. This was mainly because the Japanese were unable to take a realistic and direct look at the security environment surrounding Japan--which was a captive to the spell of history. Another reason may be that Japanese are still unable to put full confidence in their own judgment on military build-up.

Having observed whatever steps Japan has taken since the war, the US government is in the ideal position to be able to judge whether or not Japan is headed on the path to becoming a military superpower. If the USA does not judge the Japanese people’s perception of history or Japan’s postwar pacifist path squarely, this could end up being an impediment to Japan’s role in security in Asia (which is also important for the USA), or, more to the point, to the development of the Japan-US security arrangements. In addition, Japan finally began to move slowly from the left to the center after the Cold War. However, in the USA there has been a tenor of criticism of this move as being a tilt to the right or even as being ultra rightwing, and it is probably necessary for US diplomacy to accurately perceive and assess the historical tides swirling around its alliance partner Japan.

Specifically, in Japan the historical view that the Pacific War was not a war of aggression but was a war of self-defense enjoys a firm footing, and in the future there will be more and more discussion on the problem of historical perception. In addition, on the Nanjing Incident and the comfort women issue, research results are seemingly coming out that have been influenced by Chinese propaganda and that in fact differ completely from the generally disseminated versions of events. Chinese and Americans are probably intuitively opposed to these types of historical view and perception of fact, and in this sense US and Chinese views of history are seemingly in accord. Irrespective of this, the questions of whether they can relate their own views of history to the perception of history asserted by Japan (which enjoys freedom of speech) and make fresh assessments, and whether or not they are magnanimous enough to be flexible in not adhering to their own views of history and to try to understand Japan’s view, would seem to be important indicators of whether in the future the USA will be able to move forward with a stable policy towards Japan and with its Asia policy, and in any comparison with China’s policy towards Japan.

3. The East China Sea issue

Various problems surrounding the East China Sea constitute the third structural problem. There are problems regarding the Senkaku islands that lie between Japan and China, and there are also problems with the demarcation line between the exclusive economic zones in relation to the East China Sea oil field. Neither problem is a territorial problem; however, if in fact a dispute were to break out, as with the issue of Taiwan, it is an issue that could involve Japan, China, Taiwan, and the USA, in the sense that attention would focus on the standpoint adopted by the USA.

(1) The Senkaku islands

In 1895 Japan formally incorporated the Senkaku islands into its territory through “prior occupation,” and continued to exercise effective control over them. From that time on, no foreign country lodged any objection and during the occupation era the US army administered the islands as Japanese territory. In 1968 an oceanographic survey was conducted by the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, which established the presence of rich deposits of oil and natural gas resources. This is said to have influenced China and Taiwan, which started to make claims of sovereignty shortly after the conclusion of the Okinawa Reversion Agreement in 1971. Both then and now the Japanese government has maintained the consistent position that under international law there exists no territorial issue. Irrespective of this, China asserts that a territorial problem exists, among other things having in 1992 specified in its own Territorial Sea Law that the Senkaku islands are Chinese territory. However, this assertion has no basis in international law. Deputy Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping made a visit to Japan in 1978 to conclude a peace treaty between Japan and China. Amid the atmosphere of Japan-China friendship that prevailed in the 1970s, he stated that territorial issues would be shelved and promised to prevent any recurrence of an incident that had taken place the day before his visit, in which a large number of Chinese fishing boats had made an incursion into the Senkaku islands’ territorial waters. The problem was that his remarks regarding shelving of territorial issues could have been incorrectly reported both in China and abroad--despite the fact that the Japanese side did not provide any consent to it. In addition, there is the problem that even today private Chinese organizations (unconcerned with Deputy Prime Minister Deng’s promise) are making incursions into the Senkaku islands’ territorial waters, and the Chinese government is failing to exercise strict control over such actions.

As far as the USA’s involvement goes, up until the return of Okinawa in 1972, the US army held administrative authority over the Senkaku islands and made use of them in practice.

Walter Mondale, US ambassador to Japan during the Clinton administration, attracted criticism when he stated that, even if a dispute were to arise over the Senkaku islands, it was outside the scope of the Japan-US Security Treaty. However, under the terms of the treaty, joint action is to be taken against “armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan,” and since Japan is currently in effective control of the islands, they are clearly covered by the treaty. What the USA ought to consider is that if China were to illegally occupy the Senkaku islands, which are a part of Okinawa prefecture, since the US army in Japan is also

stationed in Okinawa prefecture, the US army and the Chinese army would be facing off just a stone's throw away from one other.

Incidentally, when the USA adopted a tone suggesting that it did not acknowledge its obligations under the treaty with regard to the issue of the Senkaku islands, this would give rise to two serious problems. The first is that a power vacuum and change of power balance would give rise to conflict as the one that took place between China and the Philippines over the Spratly islands, shortly after the US army withdrew from the Philippines in 1992. Second it is feared that the Japan-US alliance is encountering a fundamental inconsistency. It is understandable that the USA would wish to avoid a direct confrontation with a rising China; however, it would be troublesome to leave it vague as to whether or not the USA had an obligation to take joint action with Japan in the event of armed conflict over the Senkaku islands. Given its commitment based on the treaty in the case of Japan, the USA could not possibly adopt the same kind of vague policy that it is adopting with regard to Taiwan.⁷ The current posture of the USA on this issue is to express no opinion in relation to sovereignty of the islands, but to maintain that they would be within the scope of the Japan-US security treaty in the event of a dispute--which can be said to be a reasonable position. The strength of the Japan-US alliance is key, as the ability to control the outbreak and spread of armed conflict will be dependent on the attitude of the USA.

(2) The East China Sea exclusive economic zones

In addition, the East China Sea gas field development issue should be resolved according to justice and international law. However, there is dispute between Japan, which asserts the view that the intermediate line is the line of demarcation, and China, which argues the theory of the natural extension of the continental shelf. Recent precedent has consistently come down on the side of the intermediate-line principle. As the two sides' assertions are mutually inconsistent, hopefully, both should exercise self-restraint. However, in its rush to develop domestically produced energy for the sake of economic development and energy security, China's action has triggered friction. Clearly, it is not simply an issue of economic interests where, although China conducts development on the seabed on the Chinese side, the seabed gas fields are connected underground, and the gas in the seabed on the Japanese side ends up being sucked to China as if through a straw. At the root of the problem are fears that if China's argument regarding the natural extension of the continental shelf were to trump Japan's claims, which are grounded in international law, this would result in virtually the entire East China Sea coming within the Chinese sphere of influence, and Chinese power extending right up to Okinawa's doorstep. Information that Chinese navy warships have been dispatched to the gas development field area to stand guard is also stoking fears in Japan. This is perceived as a major problem with respect to Japan's security, in the sense that China is consistently strengthening its naval power, and it is impossible to forget its track record of using armed force and engaging in intimidation to Vietnam over the conflict surrounding the jurisdiction of the islands in the South China Sea with the reason of protesting its economic interests, such as fishing boats and fisheries facilities. In this sense, both the fact that the two nations indirectly suggested a repudiation of armed force when they agreed to make the East China Sea a "sea of peace" in the most recent joint press statement, and the fact that they demonstrated concrete negotiation plan for preventing deterioration in disputes seem to hold enormous significance.

As regards the USA, under the treaty it has no obligation to take any action in connection with issues over economic sea zones. However, in the event of an actual conflict arising, in the interests of peace in the Far East, it would be forced to make a firm decision all the same. In addition, if China's argument regarding the natural extension of the continental shelf were to be accepted, bringing virtually the entire East China Sea within the Chinese sphere of influence, this would probably inspire US security concerns as well.

On a historical note, one of the claims that China and Taiwan make in asserting their territorial rights to the Senkaku islands is that when Japan went through the formal procedure for incorporating the territory in January 1895, it was in reality making use of its superiority in the Sino-Japanese War to "steal" the islands. This is groundless, however. In this way, China is tying even the issue of the Senkaku islands to "history."

4. The three structural problems and their relation to the USA

As described above, the three structural problems between Japan and China are interconnected. In addition, all of the problems have an effect on both Japanese and Chinese security, and thus relate to overall US interests. The significance of this is that the future direction of Japan-China relations is strongly affected by US policy decisions and that it is impossible for the USA to be a mere onlooker.

Irrespective of this, if the USA does not harbor a sense of ownership regarding the historical issue and the East China Sea issue, not to mention the issue of Taiwan, this will greatly affect not only Japan-China relations, but inevitably affect the USA's own Asian diplomacy. Stated from another point of view, the slightest change in the USA's position on Japan-China relations will affect Japan as well as its own strategy on Asia.

Specifically, the issue of Taiwan is the most important, in the sense that it will more strongly affect the other two issues. To put it bluntly, if stability of some kind cannot be seen on the issue of Taiwan, or in other words, if a definite agreement over Taiwan cannot be reached through US-China relations, no stability will be attained in the structural problems between Japan and China. An agreement reached through US-China relations would mean that either one side would concede completely or that China and Taiwan would peacefully conclude either a final or a provisional agreement. Until such accommodation is attained, it is inevitable that friction will frequently arise in Japan-China relations. If China wishes to rebuke the Japan-US side over the issue of Taiwan, it is easier for it to direct its attack at Japan, as it fears that it might otherwise harm its relations with the USA. For example, when the Taiwan Strait issue was stipulated as one of the common strategic objectives in the 2+2 joint statement issued in February 2005, China heaped severe criticism on Japan rather than on the USA. It should probably be recalled that subsequently large-scale anti-Japanese demonstrations broke out in April.

Chapter 3 Japan's New-Thinking Diplomacy towards China in the New Era

After the restoration of diplomatic relations between Japan and China in 1972, Japan's strategy towards China was to support China on its course of reform and liberalization, promote democratization, and usher it into the international community. Its objective has been to integrate communist China into the international community by engaging with it, and, consequently, this is in step with the US policies of engagement and integration. Japan's way of doing things differed from that of the USA, in that Japan used the extensive provision of ODA as a pivotal policy device; it can probably be said that the necessity of fully supporting the course of Deng Xiaoping was more acute for Japan as a neighboring country than it was for the USA, in the sense of the need to prevent extreme leftwing policies such as the Cultural Revolution spreading to Japan, or to prevent China from engaging in risky military adventures (as seen in the conflict between China and Vietnam) directed against Japan. In the Cold War era Japan has used soft power to bring China closer to the West and, as a result, this has enabled a division of roles between Japan and the USA.

What policies should Japan now adopt towards China, with the Cold War over and China having risen? Specifically, Japan should probably take the opportunity afforded by the message delivered during Prime Minister Wen's recent visit to Japan, and work on a "new-thinking diplomacy towards China," as synchronized with China's "new-thinking diplomacy towards Japan." As has already been stated, in general Japan occupies a passive position, and from the outset there is in reality little scope for a major change in policy. However, Japan needs a "new thinking" in response to China's actions, and the following six points are suggested in line with such a course.

(1) Strategically strengthen diplomacy towards China with attention and care similar to the diplomacy to the USA. This will promote engagement and partnership. Emphasize continuous dialogue between the leaders of Japan and China, and work on managing pending issues in a continuous and focused manner by establishing a framework for comprehensive dialogue and cooperation under their direct supervision. In this sense, the progress in negotiations on the East China Sea issue and the establishment of a high-level Japan-China economic dialogue framework to be co-chaired by cabinet members represent significant first steps. In particular, the promotion of consultation is necessary in the area of crisis management, to deal with unforeseen emergencies in the East China Sea and mishaps involving anti-Japanese demonstrations or unfair treatment of Japanese businesses. It is to be hoped that in the near future comprehensive dispute-handling mechanisms will be established and deal with crisis related issues.

(2) Put the attitude of "assertive diplomacy" touted by Prime Minister Abe into practice and shift over to a modus operandi that involves expressing Japan's position candidly and distinctly, and reacting in an evenhanded manner. Explain and communicate Japan's point of view to the peoples of both Japan and China. Do not refrain from saying what needs to be said due to too much concern about "Japan-China friendship" and reservations about "history." Even on the issue of Taiwan, Japan should probably communicate its anxieties and demands candidly because the Taiwan issue is of international interest in some sense. In addition, assert the sense of values

that Japan emphasizes, such as freedom and democracy. This does not mean that Japan should impose its sense of values on China. Rather, in asserting their respective senses of values, the two nations should strive to reach an understanding aimed at coexistence and fully realizing fundamental differences.

(3) Actively advance cooperation for mutual benefit between Japan and China, and think hard together about how to alleviate various difficulties facing Chinese society. With the issuing of new yen loans set to cease in 2008, make the transition from assistance in economic construction to eradicating social inequity and cooperation on mutual understanding. Promote cultural exchange and student exchanges, as well as the cooperation in the environmental and energy fields that was agreed to on Prime Minister Wen's recent visit.

(4) Strengthen multilateral diplomacy in Asia and engage in high-level dialogue with China regarding the nature of the regional order in East Asia and Northeast Asia, and the policies that it should adopt. Promote cooperation between the two nations in order to build a regional order that encompasses the security dimension. In the process, clarify Japan's attitude of emphasizing Asia, and at the same time prevail upon China to show understanding of the importance of Japan becoming a permanent member, as a representative of Asia, of the United Nations Security Council.

(5) Take whatever measures it deems necessary regarding history on its own initiative. It goes without saying that Japan should carefully avoid any unnecessary words or actions during the present thawing period. On the other hand, Japan should actively promote joint history research with relevant foreign entities, such as China, the USA, Taiwan and others in order to diminish the gaps between the respective perceptions of history (if only slightly) and promote mutual understanding.

(6) Continuously attempt to strengthen the Japan-US alliance for regional stability. China intrinsically opposes the US-led international order and US-led military alliances, and there are certainly fundamentally conflicting aspects between the Japan-US alliance and Japan-China friendship. However, from a realistic perspective, Japan must rely on the Japan-US alliance until a stable regional order encompassing fewer threats can be constructed. Until such time, Japan, the USA, and China should strengthen their policy of engagement, both bilaterally and multilaterally in order to build relations of mutual trust, premised on the existence the Japan-US alliance. To this end, Japan should positively strive for such strengthened trilateral relations.

Chapter 4 The US Stance on Japan-China Relations

As we have seen thus far, Japan-China relations have entered a new phase of development, during which Japan's comparative position has declined as China has changed and gained in influence. Against this backdrop, what policy stance should the USA take regarding the Japan-China relationship? As a recapitulation of the discussion thus far, the following section looks at Japanese expectations regarding the US role in this relationship. The most salient point may be that slighting the symbiotic and mutually important Japan-US relationship would create a rift between the two countries, and that it may be time to reevaluate the regional order aimed for by both countries.

1. A proper understanding of Japanese nationalism

Japanese nationalism is clearly rising in the post-Cold War period, and it is a fact that the people are becoming more and more sensitive to the issue of national pride and identity. What is important is to examine the essence of this nationalism. It would be a mistake to try to lump Japanese nationalism in with Chinese nationalism. The question is if Japanese nationalism is an unhealthy right-leaning nationalism or an unreasonable nationalism. Japanese nationalism springs mainly from the two causes below, and it is actually moving from a leftist to a centrist school of thought, which is, needless to say, a healthy nationalism. This is very important for the USA to understand.

(1) A clear and present danger

The North Korean threat and the rise of China have hastened the spread of concerns that Japan's existing defense capabilities and today's Japan-US security regime may not be enough to ensure Japan's security. The threat perceptions of Japan and the USA differ fundamentally on this point, and Japan may have a more pressing concern. This situation has for the first time created serious discussion among Japanese people about what type of security policy is possible with the restrictions on the national budget and the legal framework. This is a departure from the notion of "one-nation pacifism" and is seen even by some in the USA as a shift to the right and a return to militarism; however, this is in fact a natural dialog to have in a country that believes in freedom of speech. The crux of the discussion is whether Japan should have a regular military, whether Japan has a constitutional right to collective selfdefense, and whether Japan's defense budget should be allowed to exceed 1% of GNP (the US defense budget is roughly 4% of GNP). This type of discussion, which is common in Western countries, has come late to Japan, and is thus being discussed rather intensely. Regarding nuclear arms as well, IIPS published the Vision for Japan in the Twenty-First Century, which suggested that "Japan should maintain its stance as a non-nuclear nation and work to strengthen the non-proliferation treaty regime. At the same time, in order to prepare for drastic changes in the international situation in the future, a thorough study of the nuclear issue should be conducted." Even this proposal is regarded provocative.

Recently, many in the USA have described Japan as striving against China for leadership in the region and Japanese diplomacy has begun to assert; however, this view does not sit well with Japan. The criticism that Japan is vying for leadership in the Asia-Pacific region was extended by China when the Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security was released in 1996; however, from Japan's point of view, the assertiveness is necessary for its own preservation in the face of a decaying security environment. In Japan, there seems to be no strong public opinion about actively striving for a leadership position in Asia; however, there is strong opinion about Japan's due response to the growing concern over its security and about fair treatment of Japan in the international community, commensurate with Japan's fiscal burden and other contributions.

(2) Breaking the spell of history

As stated earlier, Japanese people have begun to face the history and discuss how Japan's defeat in World War Two should be assessed. In response to this question, successive cabinets have carefully avoided clear utterance by saying that Japan should defer judgment to future historians. This stance has been taken because it has been thought that politicians' judgments are easily affected by ideology or the era's political climate. Was the war a war of aggression, or was it a war of self-defense? Opinions have always differed depending on who was speaking or the angle from which the question was viewed, but it became a heated debate among the general population when former Prime Minister Koizumi made his controversial multiple visits to Yasukuni Shrine. While there has been broad freedom of speech guaranteed within Japanese institutions, self-restraint and dominant leftist ideology influenced by postwar gag rules (set by the Occupation Forces) long formed a psychological barrier to historical discussion.⁸ In 1995, after the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, the Japanese finally, though gradually, began to release themselves from the spell of history mainly due to generational change, and became able to discuss the war in earnest, particularly in academic and journalistic circles. Some in China and the USA did not want to confront this frank discussion; however, this is the inevitability of history. Certainly, this was in response to the recent freedom of expression that until recently had been frowned upon by Japanese society. However, the discussion seems to be predominantly conservative in tone, given the fact that there was too long a time-lag before psychological liberation. There was certainly nothing that could be construed as unhealthy nationalism, and the direction of the discussion was certainly natural for a democratic society such as Japan.

2. The US perception of Japan

As described earlier, it is expected that the USA will understand well the Japanese people's perception of the very real threat to Japan's security, and the nature of the nationalism now rising in Japan. Regarding future US Asia policy, the important question is whether the USA will be sensitive to the fact that its ally Japan is a nation with a firm democratic foundation, and will recognize that it is a trustworthy partner. However, there are several situations within the USA that may retard the formation of a proper awareness of Japan and that may invite misunderstanding. In that sense, as China has inferred changes in Japanese opinion and is moving to change the government policy to Japan, the USA may also need to pursue a new diplomatic approach in the same manner.

(1) History

Speaking about the recent US congressional resolution on comfort women, Ambassador Schieffer reportedly said, "I think that the former comfort women were forced into prostitution by the Imperial Japanese Army... and it is self-evident that this kind of act of barbarism did take place. In 1993, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono acknowledged that the comfort women were forced laborers, and I hope that this awareness of history does not recede." In addition, before

passing this resolution, a report of the Congressional Research Service pointed out that if other countries sue Japan for official reparations now, then “Japan may possibly sue for reparations for the 80,000 killed in the fire bombing of Tokyo and the damage caused by the atomic bombs.” Even without these examples, the general opinion in the USA is that Japanese reevaluation of World War II and changes in the Japanese perception of history are not desirable for the USA. Regarding the so-called Nanjing Massacre in 1937, Iris Chan’s book on that topic became a bestseller in the USA, and what she wrote was seemingly accepted at face value. Thus, the outcry and conservative arguments from Japan did not find a receptive audience.

In the procession of modern history, when Japan went from imperialist country triggering the war to pacifist country, in contrast to China, the USA is expected to view Japan with an open mind, and so will probably develop a balanced view of Japan. During his official visit to the USA in April, Prime Minister Abe said, “The twentieth century was an era marked by gross human rights violations, and it is my hope that the twenty-first century will be a bright century unmarred by such tragedies.” This statement presumably means that Abe requested the USA to view history in an objective and balanced manner, even considering Japan’s historical standpoint and that not only Japan but many countries bear the responsibility for wars and their victims and all the countries involved should forgive each other.

(2) Militarism

For those that view the Tokyo Trials as fair and the war prosecuted by Japan as illegal, it would be easy to fall prey to the fear that Japan might one day return to militarism. According to the Chinese, Japan has a regular cadre of militarists that are considering how to revive militarism in Japan. From that point of view, it is very easy to interpret official visits to Yasukuni Shrine and efforts to revise the constitution as signs of a return to militarism and the building of a great military power and current Japanese nationalism simply as immoral rightist movement. Although the Japan-US alliance is the lynchpin in the US strategy for Asia, if this view prevailed in the USA, the US strategy for Asia would not be very strong.

It is very likely that US public opinion is not well informed about the situation in Japan. The Americans say that the Japan-US security regime has a role of a bottle cap that prevents Japan from becoming a great military nation, and this not only appeases China but may also plant a seed of doubt in the American people inferring a high potential for Japan to once again become militaristic. The image of militaristic Japan was also repeatedly broadcast when friction arose between Japan and China over historical views, and this too may have had an effect. It also should be pointed out that the Japanese mass media--some major newspapers in particular--have a liberal tendency because of the feeling of remorse for having fanned the aggressive military advance during the war, and even now they adopt the same critical tone as China towards any departure from one-nation pacifism. As a result, the media continues to mislead international opinion regarding the situation in Japan.

What is important is for the Japanese and US governments not to waver in their security policy and to be persistent in their efforts to accurately convey the situation surrounding Japan to the peoples of both countries.

(3) Freedom and democracy

Not a few Americans view Japanese and Chinese nationalism as one and the same, and as the source of the decaying relationship between the two countries. However, this oversimplified view is not seen only in the USA. Regarding the US House of Representatives' resolution on comfort women, it is understood that human rights is an important issue in the USA; however, because so many congressional representatives supported the decision, it would be easy for Japanese to believe that there is a misunderstanding regarding human rights protections and freedom in Japan today. Some in the USA see the almost total postwar reign of a single party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), as evidence of a dictatorial administration on a par with the Chinese Communist Party. Japan has a democratic tradition with prewar origins, and even today Japan is a leading democratic nation that serves as a model of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law in Asia. If this mistaken view broadly penetrates public opinion in the USA, the Japan-US security regime may cease to be the most important alliance between democratic nations in Asia and, in turn, may become viewed as a mere agreement regarding the placement of US military bases.

Thus, the Abe administration's strong international pushing of its "values-oriented diplomacy" is significant in the effort to dispel this misunderstanding.

(4) The USA's hopes for Japan

During Prime Minister Abe's official visit to the USA, he explained to President Bush his plan to break free of the postwar regime, and although he reportedly gained the understanding of the US president, it still remains to be seen whether this reflects popular US opinion. Thus, it will be very important for both Japan and the USA to see how people in the USA interpret trends in Japan and what type of national image can be expected from Japan in the future. Opinion in the USA seems to be split. Would it be better to have a Japan that binds itself with the spell of history by refusing to alter the constitution and refusing to establish a regular military? Alternatively, would it be better to have a "normal country" that is free from history and that is able to play a leadership role in essential security and regional order?

If the latter, the question then becomes how far the role of Japan is expected to extend. The second Armitage report was issued in February 2007, and it reaffirmed the importance of the Japan-US relationship. Yet, one troubling point was the apparent implication that one of the conditions for Japan to attain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council would be for Japan to have the unrestricted military capabilities commensurate with a global political power. That viewpoint shares a common thread with the Chinese logic for not recognizing Japan as a global political force. As this report rightly pointed out, the source of Japan's power as a nation has historically been soft power. It must be recognized there is still a limit to Japan's role in the military sphere. Continuing to strengthen the bonds of the Japan-US security regime is vital to the peace and prosperity of Asia; however, for the present (until the Japanese public is released from the spell of history), the USA should consider how best to use Japan's soft power and limited hard power when determining roles in this relationship. Without a doubt, the main

objective should be mutual support to practically strengthen the relationship in consideration of the security situation Japan faces in the region. Again, public opinion in Japan still tends to be left-leaning, and it seems that the public has a strong aversion to quick changes to previous policies--particularly those related to security.

Regarding Japan's role, as the USA does not have a consistent and firm stance toward Japan, partly due to a deep-seated perception of history, so does Japan have a swaying view on how much diplomatic priority should be placed with the USA compared with Asia. By way of a recent example from the July upper-house election, the policy platform of the Democratic Party of Japan, the largest opposition party in Japan, had a stated foreign policy/security goal of "correcting the failure of US-centric foreign policy" as exemplified by its recent opposition to Japan's maritime force's refueling activity to multilateral forces in the Indian Ocean for anti-terrorism in Afghanistan. As Japanese foreign policy increasingly needs to place more emphasis on relations with China and Asia in the future, the diplomatic fault line between Japan and the USA will likely grow, and thus the effect of trends in public opinion should not be underestimated.

3. Choosing sides: Japan vs. China

With the underlying US view of Japan as stated above, US foreign policy will have to face the rise of China, and it will be interesting to see what balance will be struck between Japan and China within this policy. In a nutshell, which side will the USA choose--Japan or China? There seems to be some discord on this decision within the USA, but the answer is probably that US policy should favor the country that shares similar values and favors the "status quo" of international order--namely, Japan. On this basis, efforts should be invested in strengthening cooperation between Japan, the USA, and China. With the uncertainties of the international scene, it is obvious that the top priority is establishing regional stability based on the democratic peace theory. In the current era, when public opinion has so much influence on foreign affairs, the questions are whether or not the American public can learn to trust Japan more and whether the American people can be convinced to accept the Japan-US alliance as the core of its Asia policy.

As the USA increasingly finds that it needs the cooperation of China to address global problems, it will take a more tolerant stance toward China. But if, in this process, Japanese interests are unjustly harmed, it is possible that the sentiment of the Japanese people toward the USA will worsen. The countries of Asia as well will take notice of the signals. Former Ambassador Mondale's statement about the Senkaku islands and Ambassador Schieffer's statement about comfort women have had a profound effect. The US government's statement up until now about the problems between Japan and China⁹ can be said generally neutral. Although the expression of concern itself is worthy, the statement, if judged unfair, could alienate Japanese public opinion. The Japanese side hopes at the very least that more effective messages will be sent by a slight change in nuance--even within the range of neutrality. As stated earlier, the reevaluation of the historical issue is expected to become a more lively issue in Japan in the future. Along this current, government action will also be relatively quick, including a revision

of the constitution, and the time is quite ripe for seeking the understanding of the USA regarding Japan's actions. In contrast, the US government's pro-Japan posture, if any, related to history may create a backlash from US public opinion, and in addition to incurring the displeasure of the Chinese, may also meet with disapproval from US ally South Korea. However, if the USA does not work out a new approach, it will not be able to enhance a Japan-US agreement backed by mutual trust, and this will create a serious problem for US diplomacy in Asia.

Fortunately, the Chinese are also changing their stance on the problem of history, and a Japan-China joint research project on history is already in the works. The former Deputy Secretary of the USA, Robert Zoellick, also made a trilateral joint research proposal between Japan, the USA, and China. In the Japan-US summit meeting in April, Prime Minister Abe explained his policy motto, "beyond the postwar regime," and agreed to strengthen CULCON consisting of US and Japanese experts, both governmental and academic.¹⁰ The opportunity to quietly reevaluate history has arrived in the USA. Ideally, the US government is expected to prioritize history on its Asian diplomacy agenda and make an effort to influence the opinion of its people.

Conclusion

This paper asserts that while it is very possible that future Japan-China relations would improve if China changed its view of history dramatically--history being the card that China has been playing in diplomatic relations with Japan--it will be very difficult to markedly alleviate relations basically due to the structural problems existing between the two nations. Above all, it is very likely that China will continue its military build-up and take a hard line on matters as shown in the East China Sea issue and incursions into Japanese territorial waters; hard power is expected to offset, for the most part, the effect that can be expected from China abandoning or greatly curtailing its use of the history card. Rather, with China's hard-line posture, it is even possible for Japan and China to fall into skirmish.

However, there is still room for great improvement in relations if China restricts its use of hard power. In fact, since Prime Minister Abe's visit to China, the Chinese government has shown an inclination towards restraint--at least regarding the historical issue. The improvement in relations between Japan and China represents a chance for regional stability, and this represents an important opportunity to build a regional order centered on Japan, the USA, and China. In contrast, if the Japanese public starts to lose sight of the importance of the Japan-US relationship, the possibility that Japan may change the position leaning more toward an autonomous foreign policy and thus trigger changing the balance of power in the region cannot be discounted.

If the USA becomes uncertain about vulnerability that Japanese feel over security and misinterprets the nationalist trend, including the reevaluation of history and institutions, this might precipitate a widening schism between the two countries. The historical issue is, in a sense, related to a sense of values ranging from freedom of speech and thought to an outlook on the world. The denial of freedom of speech and thought, particularly on the historical issue, will put a crack in the psychological foundation of the Japan-US relationship, which is premised on "shared values." If trust is damaged in such a soft dimension, this may also influence the Japan-US security regime (the hard dimension). During the search for a new world order just after

the post Cold War era, the Japan-US alliance was temporarily shaken as its role was redefined. In addition, the terrorist attacks of September 11 revealed differences between countries that shared similar values: differences in their perception of global threats, differences in their views of the international order, and differences in geopolitical and historical circumstances. Japan, the USA, and the EU are now confronting the issue of how to overcome these differences and maintain mutual trust and solidarity.

In 2003, China domestically embarked on discussion of a new Japan policy, and one of the goals of this new policy was to strengthen its diplomatic position with the USA. The cornerstone of this new policy was China's treatment of the historical issue between Japan and China. China was aware that this would influence the Japan-US alliance. With this recognition, one of the objectives of this paper is to raise awareness of the importance of history issue to the USA and raise questions about the US perception of Japan. The point is that Japan and the USA must reaffirm their alliance of shared values.

In addition to this strengthening of trust and mutual values, there is another important facet of US policy on Japan-China relations. This is the thought that the USA should adopt the enhanced engagement policy for "Japan-China relations." The USA should contribute as an active member of this relationship, rather than simply contributing to the relationship as a third party. From Japan's point of view, in the many problems that create friction between Japan and China, Japan remains in a passive position, and the USA would ideally play an active part in encouraging self-restraint on the part of China in general. In addition, the USA could take the initiative in building a framework in which the three parties could engage in joint discussions and actions on the various important issues that face them, including joint research on history, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, mechanisms to promote an atmosphere of confidence between the respective militaries, building a regional order in Asia, disseminating the values of human rights and democracy, energy cooperation, Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, creating regional security structures (such as the establishment of ARF, or an Asian OSCE), and coordinated aid to Asia. This framework would also promote mutual trust among the three parties.

Strengthening of the Japan-US relationship and the building of a stable order shared by Japan, the USA, and China are both possible, and the establishment by the three parties of shared mechanisms will be one important factor in the construction of the multi-layered structure that is needed in Asia.

In September 2007, Prime Minister Abe was forced to resign after the LDP suffered an ignominious defeat in the July upper-house election mainly due to domestic scandals such as a defective national pension system and Cabinet members' various problems. The next Prime Minister Fukuda, newly elected within the LDP, is now regarded as standing in a less reform-oriented and conservative position than Koizumi and Abe did, and his administration is viewed as a kind of setback of the emerging line of realism which the two predecessors had set. But even if this is the case, the replacement of a prime minister presumably will not change the current of the times described above, given the recent structural changes taking place domestically and internationally.

(This paper is issued in September 2007.)

Notes

- 1 "The Japanese side is keenly conscious of the responsibility for the serious damage that Japan caused in the past to the Chinese people through war, and deeply reproaches itself." (Japan-China Joint Communiqué of 1972).
- 2 Up to the present time, the Japanese government has repeatedly expressed its acute remorse and heartfelt apologies, and in 1995 Prime Minister Murayama stated that "During a certain period in the not too distant past, 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. ... [I] express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology." Subsequently, successive prime ministers have repeated this expression of remorse and apology.
- 3 "The Japanese side reiterated that a stable, open, and developing China is significant for the peace and development of the Asia-Pacific region and the entire world, and restated its policy of continuing cooperation and assistance for the economic development of China. The Chinese side expressed its gratitude for the economic cooperation extended by Japan to China." Joint Communiqué issued in November 1998 during President Jiang Zemin's visit to Japan.
- 4 On 15 August 2006, the anniversary of the end of the war, which China detests the most, Prime Minister Koizumi made his sixth visit to Yasukuni Shrine. In opinion polls conducted immediately afterwards, Kyodo News found that 51.5% of Japanese respondents "appreciated" the prime minister's visit, while the Mainichi Shimbun put the figure at 50%, and the Yomiuri Shimbun reported a figure of 53%. Even with this deviation, the number who approved exceeded the number who "did not appreciate" it. Furthermore, an NHK survey broadcast on 15 August indicated a strong trend of support among the younger generation, with 72% of people in their twenties and thirties saying that they "approved."
- 5 In a lecture at a seminar hosted by the Japan Institute of International Affairs, Minister for Foreign Affairs Aso described this as building "an arc of freedom and prosperity."
- 6 In October 2006 the cabinet office conducted an opinion poll on diplomacy, in which 34.3% of respondents stated that they "feel affection" for China. This question on whether people "feel affection" for China was first posed in 1978, when the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China was concluded. In the past, the highest percentage of respondents stating that they "feel affection" for China was 78.6% in 1980. However, in the opinion poll conducted after the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989, this figure plunged to 51.6%--down 16.9 points compared to the previous year. Response levels remained virtually identical after this; however, the figure has been dropping further since the 2004 poll.

- 7 According to a briefing by the US Department of State on 24 March 2004, the position of the USA is as follows: “Article 5 of the Mutual Security Treaty applies to the Senkaku islands. ... The US does not take a position on the question of the ultimate sovereignty of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. This has been our longstanding view. We expect the claimants will resolve this issue through peaceful means and we urge all claimants to exercise restraint.”
- 8 For example, Okazaki’s “A Century of Japanese Diplomacy 1853-1952 (“Chapter 69: Closed Language Space”).
- 9 For example, the US statement on official visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister included the words “we value cooperative action by all countries involved, and we hope that the countries will work to overcome different views of history. Whether or not these actions are taken is up to the countries in the region.”
- 10 The United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON).

About the author

Takashi Hoshiyama graduated from Keio University and joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1982. He received an MA in Art & Science from Harvard University. Previous posts include the Economic Counselor of the Japanese Embassy in the Philippines, Director of MOFA Cultural Policy Division, and Director of the MOFA Information and Communication Division. He was seconded to IIPS in 2005.