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Stirring Samurai, Disapproving Dragon:

*Japan's Growing Security Activity
and Sino-Japan Relations*

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Stirring Samurai, Disapproving Dragon: Japan's Growing Security Activity and Sino-Japan Relations

Japan-China relations are often described as an uneasy mix of uniting and dividing issues. Upon the 30-year anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 2002, Japan's *Yomiuri Shimbun* noted that many Japanese felt "Japan-China relations are at their worst since normalization," while in China an opinion poll showed that half of respondents believed relations with Japan were "not good" and only 22 percent said relations were "good."¹ These indications of poor Sino-Japanese relations take place, curiously, amidst a thriving bilateral economic relationship and a region-wide Chinese peace and reassurance offensive. Observers note that "Notwithstanding the close and significant economic interdependence between China and Japan, there is no corresponding spillover into social, intellectual or security engagement" and that "intensifying rivalry is crowding out the positive aspects of bilateral ties."²

There is a growing asymmetry developing between Chinese society, in which young people as well as old remain unwilling to accept Japan as a "normal country" (largely because the Chinese government has continually published stories of Japanese wartime brutality through the media and education system over the last half century) and Japanese society, in which younger generations born since the end of World War II are decreasingly sympathetic to attempts to constrain Japan due to the "history issue." This generational change is reflected in Japan's leadership. Japanese politicians such as Tanaka Kakuei and Nonaka Hiromu, who previously worked with some success to build personal ties with Chinese leaders that helped stabilize the bilateral relationship, are being replaced by the likes of current Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, who is clearly less averse to angering China. There are many implications of these changes, but one of the most important consequences is that China-Japan security relations will remain tense in the future. While Japan is taking a larger, more active role as a strategic player, China's political, economic and military strength is growing, and Beijing will demand a proportionately larger position of regional leadership. The confluence of these trends could erode the incentives the two countries now have to manage their disagreements.

To be sure, one can make a case for a more optimistic prognostication. The forces of resistance to a more active Japanese defense policy are considerable. Even if left-wing political parties have weakened, some of the philosophy they espoused is entrenched in the thinking of many Japanese, including a deep distrust of the military. Japanese liberals largely share the Chinese fear that Japan is prone to a resurgence of militarism and that consequently any step toward military normalcy is perilous. Also common are a reluctance to get involved in international politics and a belief that other countries are no longer a threat to Japan since Japan threatens no one else. When the Diet, amidst a brawl between supporting and opposing legislators, authorized on July 26, 2003 the Koizumi government's plan to send Japanese peacekeeping troops to Iraq, public opinion polls showed a majority of the Japanese public was against the plan.

On the Chinese side, many strategic thinkers now see Japan as a declining power due to its stagnant economy and shrinking population. They are confident that in the future, China's expected economic superiority will force Japan to accommodate Beijing, ensuring smooth Sino-Japan relations.³

Nevertheless, a net assessment suggests several longer-term factors are likely to ensure that the Tokyo-Beijing relationship remains troubled for the foreseeable future.

New Assertiveness in Japan's Foreign and Defense Policies

For decades Japanese security policy has been largely passive and reactive, in recognition of Japan's deference toward Washington and the realization that strong Japanese military activity risked upsetting other Asia-Pacific countries. Japan's postwar foreign relations in general exhibit tendencies to adapt to the prevalent international environment and to avoid power politics and confrontations with other states. Japan intentionally accepts limits on its military capabilities and relies on the United States for its security to reassure its Asian neighbors and thereby preclude them from balancing against Tokyo.⁴ With its armed forces constrained by ideology and legal and political frameworks, Japan has relied heavily on economic levers such as investment and financial aid to exercise influence abroad.

Since the end of the Cold War, however, Japanese security policy has become more assertive. Tokyo has expressed greater interest in recognition as a major power. Japan wants a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, based on the facts that Tokyo pays 20 percent of the UN's budget—making Japan the UN's second-largest contributor—and now participates in peacekeeping operations. Japanese exhibit more sensitivity to the balance of power in Asia, less willingness to accept unique restrictions based on the experience of the Pacific War, and a greater inclination to reconsider Japan's defense policies.⁵

Most Japanese still see no preferable alternative to participation in a U.S.-Japan alliance and support a minimal Japanese military force that is limited to self-defense. At the same time, however, some Japanese elites have expressed weariness with their subordinate status in the relationship with the United States. The undeniable result has been a steady expansion of activities by the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF). This movement does not necessarily confirm that a breakout from the U.S. alliance is the end goal; it is also possible that the momentum for change will decrease after Japan achieves an adjustment of the alliance that Japanese feel makes the arrangement more equitable.

Although postwar Japan is reputedly “disarmed,” the JSDF is substantial, with 250,000 military personnel (comparable to Britain's military) and an official annual budget of about U.S.\$50 billion, the world's second highest. Japan has deployed some means of projecting military power, such as submarines armed with Harpoon missiles. Koizumi aims to push the JSDF further toward “normalcy,” promoting the idea that it be considered the nation's regular armed forces, which would dispense with the legal fiction of Article 9 and its implied restrictions.

The JSDF continues to set new postwar precedents. In March 2003, Japan launched its first dual-use surveillance satellites. Most Japanese observers accept that the main task of these satellites is to spy on North Korea. Many Chinese analysts, however, charge that the Japanese intend to monitor “neighboring countries” including China.⁶ In June 2003, Japanese fighters and an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft crossed the northern Pacific with in-flight refueling assistance from a U.S. tanker aircraft to participate in military exercises in Alaska along with contingents from the USA, Thailand, South Korea, Singapore and India. This marked the first time Japanese military aircraft have trained in the continental United States. Japan plans to acquire its own airborne refueling capability, with delivery of four Boeing tankers scheduled for early 2007. In-flight refueling is controversial because it potentially gives Japan an offensive strike capability, allowing Japanese aircraft to fly long-range missions. The Japan Defense Agency's justification is that aerial refueling is necessary to increase the loiter time of Japanese interceptors flying defensive missions.

Many factors contribute to a more active Japanese foreign and defense policy. Some are relatively short-term: the North Korean nuclear weapons crisis; heightened insecurity resulting from Japan's ongoing economic recession; and the particular agenda of the Koizumi government. Other factors are longer-term: generational change among both the Japanese public as a whole and among Japanese politicians, reducing the inclination to accommodate China and the sense of association with the events of the Pacific War; the rise of Chinese power; the decline of left-wing political influence in Japan; U.S. pressure on Tokyo to play a larger security role; and diminishing opposition to such a Japanese role from South Korea and other countries in the region.

Japan's Security Fears

Japan's abiding interests in its relationship with China are to reduce bilateral tensions, maintain a constructive working relationship, and prevent instability inside China that might have consequences harmful to Japan (such as an outflow of refugees from China, a collapse of the Chinese economy, or an aggressive turn in Chinese foreign policy). Japan also fears that China aims to become the dominant power in the region, which

could restrict Japan's freedom of action. Specific Chinese policies unwelcome to Japan include the following: (1) China's military modernization and enhancement; (2) Beijing's use of the "guilt card" to wring economic and political concessions from Japan (although this has been less frequent in recent months); (3) Chinese positions on various bilateral trade and investment disputes; (4) China's claim to ownership of the Senkaku Islands (known in China as the Diaoyutai); (5) Beijing's threats to use force against Taiwan; (6) the possibility of further Chinese nuclear tests; and (7) incursions of Chinese ships into the waters near Japan.

Tokyo has often made concessions to China to prevent or limit damage to the relationship, even at the risk of criticism from foreign countries such as the United States and from Japanese politicians who complain about going too far to accommodate Beijing. Support for such accommodation has diminished since the 1990s, with Japanese views toward China noticeably hardening. While Japan still strives to avoid a deterioration in relations with the PRC, the growing fear of Chinese power and influence and suspicion of Chinese intentions have produced stronger complaints from some politicians that Japan has tried too hard to please China and decreased hope among some Japanese that economic interdependence will improve political and security relations with China.

Territorial disputes are an ongoing problem. These are potentially serious because they often arouse nationalistic public reaction disproportionate to the material stakes involved. Chief among these disputes in Sino-Japan relations is ownership of the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands. Recent tensions over the matter arose from a report in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* that the Japanese government began leasing the islands of Kita Kojima, Minami Kojima and Uotsurijima in April 2002 from their Japanese owner Kurihara Yukihiro, who was contemplating selling the islands. Observers in both China and Taiwan saw this as a move by Tokyo to strengthen its claim over the island chain, which is surrounded by waters well stocked with fish and which may also hold substantial oil reserves. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi demanded that Tokyo "correct its mistake and avoid causing damage to Chinese territory."⁷ Japanese right-wing groups have built structures on two of these islands in the past.

Tokyo and Beijing also disagree on demarcation of the East China Sea. Japan favors drawing a line that is equidistant from the Chinese coast and Japanese territory, including the Ryukyu Island chain. China, however, asserts that its territorial waters should extend as far as the continental shelf, which would encompass a much larger share of the East China Sea.

A steady increase in Chinese military capabilities, including the ability to project power, is worrisome to Tokyo. China's desire to develop a blue-water navy has implications for control of the sea lanes on which Japan's economic vitality depends. Advanced *Kilo*-class submarines purchased from Russia can greatly increase the Chinese capability to interdict shipping inbound to or outbound from Japanese ports. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy clearly aims to achieve a capacity to operate in the South and East China Seas. Beijing's alleged efforts to establish bases allowing access to the Indian Ocean would extend the PLA Navy's ability to interdict sea lanes over a vast area straddling the Strait of Malacca. While Japan was accustomed to one or two annual incursions into Japanese waters by Chinese warships, in 2000 the number of such forays into Japan's exclusive economic zone rose dramatically to 31. These included a PLA Navy intelligence gathering operation in May that was apparently aimed at mapping the sea floor as a precursor to submarine operations.⁸ The Japanese defense white paper *Defense of Japan 2002* highlighted Japan's concerns: "[M]any countries in the region have used the remarkable growth of their economies to expand and modernize their military capabilities. Especially, China's military strength draws attention from countries in the region." The white paper goes on to question "Whether or not the objective of the modernization exceeds the scope necessary for Chinese defense."⁹ This was relatively strong language for an official Japanese policy document, with a noticeably more worried tone than that in the 2001 defense white paper.

China's Strategic Concerns

Japan itself is not the most pressing strategic issue for the Chinese, who are more concerned about dealing with U.S. “hegemonism,” preventing further movement toward Taiwan independence, and taking advantage of China’s “strategic opportunity.”¹⁰ Japan’s immediate strategic salience stems from its involvement in these more compelling challenges: Japan as a pillar of U.S. power in Asia and Japan as a possible ally of Taiwan.

China wants and encourages good relations with Japan, but presses for the fulfillment of certain conditions. From China’s perspective, the ideal Japan would be neutral and militarily weaker than it now is. The Chinese want Japan to invest more heavily in China, offer more abundant economic aid, and more generously share advanced technology. Beijing also wants Japan to consistently support China’s position regarding Taiwan and to show deference to China on major regional issues; presently, neither is the case. Several specific matters cause strain in the relationship. These include: (1) the capabilities and activities of Japan’s armed forces; (2) at least some aspects of Japan’s security relationship with the United States, such as missile defense; (3) the interpretation of the Pacific War by some Japanese (i.e., the Japanese Empire had good intentions, did some things right, and did not commit some of the war crimes it is commonly charged with); (4) support for an independent Taiwan by some Japanese politicians; and (5) Japan’s possession of the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands.

Chinese displeasure with these policies flows from a few basic assumptions about Japan that are heavily conditioned by recent history. Many ordinary Chinese believe Japan has a social and cultural inclination toward militarism, exemplified not only by Japan’s behavior in China during the 1930s and 1940s, but also by Japan’s subsequent unwillingness to face up to its Pacific War record (e.g., the denial of atrocities such as the “Nanjing Massacre” by prominent Japanese and the whitewashing of history taught to Japanese school children). Despite constitutional restraints and strong anti-military sentiment among the Japanese public, an undying core of “militarists” allegedly seeks to build up Japan’s armed forces and make Japan a major military power. Chinese widely fear this right-wing element in Japan favors separating Taiwan from China, wants to dominate Southeast Asia, and is not committed to a peaceful Japan-China relationship. Some Chinese commentators warn that Japan’s revival as a military power has progressed through several stages, beginning with acceptance of the principle of rearmament for the purpose of self-defense, through provision of logistical support for U.S. forces, to the threshold of participation in U.S.-led combat operations. Thus, Chinese have little trust in the notion that postwar Japan has become a peace-loving country that can be trusted to possess powerful, independent military forces.

The Chinese are on firm ground in their belief that Japan seeks to increase its political influence both regionally and globally to complement its economic weight (which is considerable even in a period of economic decline). But some Chinese also skew this reasonable assessment, concluding that Japan’s desire for external political influence is linked to the dark designs of Japanese militarists. Chinese strategists seem to widely accept “slippery slope” reasoning with regard to Japan: if allowed to move from disarmed country to normal country, Japan will inevitably make the next leap from normal country to aggressive militarist power. Thus Chinese commentators frequently castigate Japan’s “ambition” to be more politically influential in the same tone with which they condemn Tokyo’s alleged drive for top-rank military power, as if the two putative goals are inextricably linked and equally nefarious.

Views among Chinese elites are more complicated than those of the general Chinese public. Some progressive thinkers caution that China risks “getting bogged down in history” and should instead shelve the “old grudge” with Japan to pull Tokyo back from supporting U.S. dominance in Asia or Taiwan independence.¹¹ A

growing notion among some (mostly younger) Chinese analysts is that Japan has undergone a permanent change since the militarist era. Therefore China and Japan can and should reconcile, as have France and Germany, which moved beyond a long, bitter history to a stage where war between them now appears “obsolete.”¹²

Most informed Chinese, however, believe this is not realistic because of the history problem, the differing political systems of Japan and China, and most importantly Japan's close association with the United States, which fits a historical pattern of Japan bandwagoning with the strongest power in the international political system (a position most Chinese believe is beyond their reach for the foreseeable future).

Chinese attitudes toward Japan's alliance with the USA are ambivalent. Chinese strategists recognize that this arrangement has the benefits of precluding Japan from becoming an independent military power and from developing its own nuclear weapons. On the other hand, U.S. encouragement of Japan to make itself a greater potential contributor to American-sponsored security operations in the region strengthens those Japanese who favor revising the constitution and making Japan a “normal” military power.

Reflective of this ambivalence, there is also a debate in China about the desirability of an independent Japan. One view is that Japan would feel compelled to behave more deferentially toward China, leading to a relaxation of tensions. This would be a huge improvement over the status quo for China, at a single stroke both solving the potential problem of Sino-Japanese rivalry and greatly weakening American influence in the region through the retirement of the U.S. “junior partner.” On the other hand, absent the security of the U.S. defense umbrella, the Japanese government might decide to make up the security shortfall with more assertive policies, including full remilitarization, blue-water naval patrols and development of nuclear weapons, resulting in a cold war with China. In general, Chinese attitudes toward the U.S.-Japan alliance fluctuate with U.S.-China relations. At times of deterioration in this key relationship, the Chinese are more likely to perceive Japan as part of a larger American strategy to “contain” China and prevent unification with Taiwan.

Chinese fear some Japanese are exploiting anxiety about Chinese power to promote the idea of a “China threat” that, among other uses, may serve to justify a Japanese military buildup. Liberal Party leader Ozawa Ichiro typified this in an April 2002 statement in which he said China's “conceited attitude” could drive Japan to deploy nuclear weapons. “Japan can easily have thousands of nuclear warheads,” said Ozawa. “In fact, we have enough plutonium in use at nuclear power plants for three to four thousand warheads. If that should happen, Japan would not lose [to China] even in military terms.”¹³

Considering such statements and the suffering Chinese underwent during the Pacific War, a degree of Chinese paranoia regarding Japan is perhaps understandable. Japan, however, cannot be expected to accommodate China's paranoia limitlessly. As Michael Yahuda observes, while the Chinese have condemned every instance of Japanese assertiveness, “it is not clear what Japanese role would be acceptable to China's leaders other than one [in which Japan] is politically and strategically quiescent until such time as presumably it would be overshadowed by China.”¹⁴

The Japan-China Economic Relationship

Sino-Japanese trade continues to grow, exceeding U.S.\$100 billion in 2002. Japan is China's largest trading partner, and Japan now imports more from China than from the United States. Yet here, as well, there are significant tensions, some with political and security overtones. Trade and investment therefore generate their own set of problems while helping little to alleviate tensions in other troubled areas of the bilateral relationship.

China demands freer access to Japan's domestic market. Most Japanese, however, are leery of Chinese economic penetration, seeing China's economic development as a threat to Japan's prosperity. Many Japanese manufacturing firms have relocated to China to take advantage of lower production costs, raising fears of Japan's economy being "hollowed out." China is also positioned to shut down many Japanese suppliers of a wide variety of goods available at lower prices from China. A contending view, expressed by Japanese scholar Toshio Watanabe, is that China continues to rely heavily on foreign capital, and that expanding Chinese trade is part of an economic regionalization and division of labor from which Japan stands to benefit. The real "threat" is the social and political turmoil that might prevail in China if economic development falters.¹⁵ Thus China is an economic problem whether it is too strong or too weak.

The economic relationship provides Japan's largest lever for influencing China. Many Japanese believe China's economic development is still at a vulnerable stage with many challenges (such as World Trade Organization [WTO] membership) yet to conquer, and therefore remains dependent on outside support, including economic aid from Japan.¹⁶ Cumulative Japanese economic aid to China amounts to about U.S.\$15 billion. This aid has at least two important political purposes: (1) it represents *de facto* reparations that help compensate China for the harm done by the Japanese during the Pacific War; and (2) it is an investment in China's stability, forestalling the problems a Chinese breakdown would pose for Japan.

China began receiving Official Development Assistance (ODA) from Tokyo in 1979 and has become the largest single recipient. Japan's ODA to China mostly takes the form of low-interest loans, and the emphasis in recent years has shifted from the development of industrial infrastructure to alleviating poverty and addressing environmental problems (such as acid rain, which affects Japan).¹⁷ While the Chinese government has never failed to remind the Chinese public about Japan's misdeeds during World War II on certain anniversaries or in reaction to "militaristic" Japanese policies, Japan has complained that the Chinese government does not publicize the amount of ODA Tokyo gives to China. When Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji visited Japan in 2000, his hosts raised this issue with him. That same year Japanese Foreign Minister Kono Yohei linked ODA with Japanese security concerns about China, saying China's rapid economic development and heavy investment in military modernization prompted Japan to reconsider its financial aid to China.

In 2001 Japan invoked the WTO Agreement on Safeguards to impose restrictions on certain Chinese agricultural imports. China retaliated by levying customs duties on imported Japanese automobiles, air conditioners and mobile telephones. The two governments reached a solution after six months of negotiations, but the episode made many Japanese more conscious of the idea that China might pose an economic threat to Japan.

Japan and China are potential rivals for economic leadership in Southeast Asia. Japan has substantial trade and investment in this sub-region. Many Southeast Asians welcome a Japanese economic presence to balance China's growing economic penetration. With the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Tokyo unsuccessfully attempted to promote an Asian Monetary Fund as the principal solution. China, by contrast, earned praise and prestige for resisting the temptation to devalue its currency, which would have benefited Chinese businesses at the expense of already-ailing Southeast Asian economies. More recently, something of a competition has developed in the efforts of Japan and China to separately negotiate free trade agreements with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states.

If the Chinese are displeased with Koizumi's efforts to raise the profile of the JSDF, at least Koizumi has publicly said he does not view China's economy as a threat. Furthermore, Tokyo gave China a financial aid package to help combat Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that was larger than the SARS aid offered by any of the other G-8 countries. For this Chinese President Hu Jintao rewarded Koizumi with a meeting and a statement expressing Chinese gratitude.

The History Issue Festers

Chinese believe Japan has not adequately acknowledged its aggression and atrocities against China and other countries during the Pacific War, and that the Japanese government remains permissive if not supportive of apologists for Japan's behavior during the militarist era. As the Japanese are well aware, the Chinese government has an interest in exploiting the historical guilt issue to wring additional economic aid out of Tokyo and to undermine Japan's potential growth in military power and regional leadership. Officially organized campaigns in the Chinese media have in recent decades continuously reiterated Japan's war crimes from the mid-twentieth century. Consequently, negative feelings toward Japan among even younger generations of Chinese remain intense. China has joined South Korea in demanding that the history textbooks approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education for use in schools should chronicle the aggression and atrocities of militarist Japan more forthrightly. In a 2001 flare-up of the textbook controversy, the Chinese government demanded that the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform make eight specific changes to the standard junior high school history textbook, but after an investigation Japan refused.

Recent court cases in Japan have poured salt into old Chinese wounds. The Chinese claim Japanese forces killed some 270,000 Chinese, both combatants and civilians, with biological weapons between 1933 and 1945. A point of focus for Chinese indignation is the "731 Unit," which conducted biological warfare research at a secret facility in Harbin, Manchuria and used Chinese civilians as test subjects. As part of their ghastly experiments, the 731 Unit exposed thousands of Chinese to frostbite and to diseases such as bubonic plague and cholera. The unit's activities came to light despite the retreating Japanese Army's desperate attempts to erase the evidence, including tearing down the 731's buildings and burning and burying corpses, equipment and tools.¹⁸ Emblematic of the history problem, the average Chinese knows more about the 731 Unit than the average Japanese because the Chinese media regularly recapitulates this saga. A recent decision by a Japanese court elicited a new round of publicity and resentment in China over the history issue. In 1997, a group of more than 100 Chinese survivors and family members of victims of alleged Japanese biological warfare activities filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government. In August 2002 the Tokyo Court handed down a ruling that acknowledged the 731 Unit's misdeeds but did not require the Japanese government to compensate the plaintiffs. Chinese media called the decision "ridiculous" and "hard to understand for any people with conscience."¹⁹

Other Chinese victims of militarist Japan, as well, have unsuccessfully sought redress from the Japanese government. Each of these cases revives Chinese indignation toward Japan. In January 2003 the Kyoto District Court ruled against damage payments to five Chinese men and family members of a deceased sixth man who sued the Japanese government and the Nippon Yakin Kogyo mining company for forcing them to be slave laborers during the war. Again, the court acknowledged the grievances of the plaintiffs were legitimate. It ruled, however, that in accordance with Japan's civil code such claims must be made within 20 years of the offense, and that the Chinese suit was therefore too late.

Regular visits by high-ranking Japanese officials to Yasukuni Shrine, which honors all Japanese soldiers killed in war including those judged guilty of war crimes, draw protests from Beijing. After visiting the shrine in 2001, Koizumi attempted to mend fences with China by touring the Anti-Japanese War Memorial during a trip to China. Despite a blunt warning from then Chinese President Jiang in late 2002, Koizumi made his third visit to the shrine as prime minister in January 2003. (Koizumi's predecessors Nakasone Yasuhiro and

Hashimoto Ryutaro each visited the shrine only once while in office.) Koizumi has publicly justified the visits by saying it is his duty as a national leader to pay respect to the fallen soldiers because “today’s peace and prosperity in Japan are based on the sacrifices of the many who lost their precious lives in war.”²⁰ The visits to the shrine are apparently calculated to please conservatives in the Liberal Democratic Party, whose support is crucial for Koizumi’s success.²¹ Koizumi clearly attempted to mitigate the anticipated damage to Sino-Japanese relations. He said his purpose in going to the shrine was “to meditate on peace with a clear mind and [on Japan] never again causing a war.” He reportedly spent only one minute at the shrine. Nevertheless, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) immediately called in the Japanese ambassador for a rebuke and an MFA spokeswoman said “The Chinese government and people express strong dissatisfaction and indignation.”²²

Jiang’s visit to Japan in November 1998 was a watershed. Reacting to then Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo’s refusal to make a more strongly pro-PRC statement on Taiwan or to produce a written apology for Japan’s war crimes, Jiang employed the same tactic that had previously been successful for the Chinese, lecturing his hosts on Japan’s failure to adequately address the history issue. On this occasion, however, Jiang encountered Japanese guilt fatigue. Having seen their leaders make several apologies for the Pacific War and give billions of dollars of Japanese economic aid to China, Japanese hoped the Chinese were ready to lay the history issue to rest, as Korean President Kim Dae Jung had promised to do earlier in the year. The dominant Japanese reactions to Jiang’s visit, therefore, were disappointment and anger. Japanese concluded that while their country was prepared to move ahead with a constructive relationship despite the troubles of the (increasingly distant) past, the Chinese government’s demands had grown unreasonable and were probably impossible to satisfy.

Beijing may have concluded it has overplayed the history card. Early indications suggest the new Hu Jintao government may be more willing than its predecessors to forebear from raising the history issue to attempt to force concessions from Japan. In May 2003, when politicians from Japan’s ruling coalition visited China and when Koizumi met with Hu in Russia, Hu and other Chinese leaders were noticeably quiet about matters related to Japan’s war guilt, such as Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine. This sparks hope in Japan that China’s new leaders may be inclined, as the Japanese advocate, to “move beyond the legacy of World War II in favor of pursuing mutual long-term interests.”²³

Complicating Factors: the USA and Taiwan

Third parties affect the China-Japan relationship, and chief among these are the United States and Taiwan. Tokyo prefers that U.S. relations with China are neither too close nor too distant. Thus, Japanese privately worried that the Clinton administration’s “strategic partnership” with China reduced the significance of Japan and the alliance for Washington, while a souring of Sino-U.S. relations, such as occurred in the early months of the Bush administration, threatens to drag down Japan’s own relations with China.²⁴

Despite complaints over certain aspects of the arrangement, Japanese generally place high value on the Japan-U.S. security alliance and dread the possibility of its demise. Part of the price of maintaining the health of the alliance is addressing Washington’s encouragement that Japan to take on greater international security responsibilities, as advocated by the 2000 report by the Institute for National Strategic Studies, *Advancing Toward a More Mature Partnership* (better known as the “Armitage Report”). While some Japanese welcome

such *gaiatsu* (external pressure), this forces Japan to continuously balance American demands against Chinese sensitivities, which are offended by any indication of increased capability or activity of Japan's military.

With the release of the revised guidelines for U.S.-Japan security cooperation in 1997, many Chinese concluded the alliance had become on balance negative rather than positive for China. Beijing was particularly worried that the guidelines would permit Japan to assist in a U.S. military operation to defend Taiwan from attack. Tokyo refused Chinese demands to explicitly rule out any Japanese involvement in a Taiwan contingency.

Americans were disappointed by Japan's support for the 1991 Gulf War, which amounted to U.S.\$13 billion and dispatch of a minesweeper after hostilities had ended. Although the financial contribution was substantial, it came only after protracted argument in the Diet, prompting many Americans to conclude Japan was ungrateful for Coalition blood shed in a conflict that would help protect the oil supplies on which Japan's prosperity depended. In response to September 11, by contrast, the Diet relatively quickly passed Emergency Legislation that approved sending Japanese warships to the Indian Ocean in support of the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan.

The Emergency Legislation was an example of how the war against terrorism has given the JSDF additional opportunities to expand the scope of its activities, contrary to China's wishes. The dispatch of Japanese warships in connection with the war in Afghanistan marked the first instance since World War II of Japanese naval vessels traveling to foreign seas to assist ongoing combat operations. The July 2003 authorization to send Japanese ground troops to Iraq for peacekeeping duties cleared the way for the first dispatch of Japanese peacekeepers outside of United Nations auspices.

Along with the war against terrorism, another immediate catalyst for expanded Japanese security activity within the context of Japan's relationship with the United States is the North Korean nuclear crisis. The prospect of North Korea, which appears even more bitter and hostile toward the Japanese than does China, deploying missiles with nuclear warheads that could strike any of Japan's major cities has facilitated the legislative approval of measures such as the June 2003 National Emergency Bills, which allow the JSDF to respond more adroitly to an attack on Japan. The North Korean crisis also prompted many Japanese to re-evaluate some of the general restrictions in their national defense policy. Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Diet member Nishimura Shingo and Korea expert Nishioka Tsutomu, for example, called for disavowing one of Japan's Three Non-nuclear Principles and inviting the Americans to base nuclear weapons in Japan to counter North Korea's nuclear threats.²⁵ Defense Minister Ishiba Shigeru warned in February 2003 that Japan would launch a pre-emptive strike against North Korea if Tokyo believed a missile launch was imminent.²⁶

The North Korea crisis also stimulated Japanese support for missile defense, which is a particularly thorny issue because the Americans and the Chinese present Japan with strong but opposite demands. While Pyongyang provides the ostensible impetus for Japanese participation, Chinese observers generally believe, with some justification, that the North Korean threat is a smokescreen for a project that is really aimed against China. An effective anti-missile defense system could potentially negate China's ability to strike Japan with nuclear weapons. In China's view, such a Japanese capability is unnecessary because China has pledged not to use nuclear weapons first in any conflict and Japan already has strong conventional forces. Japanese interest in an anti-ballistic missile defense serves to strengthen U.S.-Japan military cooperation, because any such Japanese system would rely heavily on data supplied by U.S. satellites and surveillance aircraft. Perhaps most serious from the Chinese standpoint is the possibility that a U.S.-Japan missile system could help protect Taiwan from the threat of a PLA missile attack, which is presently China's most effective means of intimidating Taiwan.

In June 2003, Tokyo took two important additional steps toward deploying a missile defense system. First, the Japan Defense Agency announced plans to purchase from the United States both the SM-3 missile and the Patriot PAC-3. The former is designed to destroy incoming missiles in outer space after being fired from destroyers equipped with the Aegis radar system. The latter targets ballistic missiles that have already re-entered the atmosphere. Japan is thus on track to participate in two distinct anti-missile systems. Second, the Japan Defense Agency said the Japanese constitutional prohibition against participation in a collective security arrangement would not prevent Japan from attempting to destroy missiles flying over Japanese territory en route to a strike on some other country. This ruling would allow Japan to shoot down missiles heading toward the United States.²⁷

Some aspects of Japan's ties to the United States clearly generate friction between Japan and China. The issues that draw Chinese criticism should not obscure the larger picture, which includes the positive elements of the U.S.-Japan alliance. If one possible outcome of the interaction between China and an independent Japan is a Sino-Japan cold war that would be detrimental to China as well as to the entire region, the alliance sustains a safety net that has thus far prevented such a conflict.

Taiwan's impact on Sino-Japan relations is more straightforward: a de facto independent Taiwan is an irritant, and will remain so at least until China and Taiwan achieve a resolution (and potentially beyond, if this resolution does not satisfy Taiwan). Japan officially subscribes to the one-China principle in accordance with the 1972 bilateral communiqué, which states that Tokyo "understands and respects" that "Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China." Nevertheless, a large number of Japanese politicians are sympathetic to Taiwan. Among all the peoples of Asia, the Japanese feel a relative closeness to the Taiwanese, based not only on geography (the southwest end of Japan's Ryukyu Island chain is only about 50 miles from the main island of Taiwan) but by close historical association (Japan occupied and administered Taiwan for 50 years before the end of World War II, and Taiwanese are far less bitter about that experience than Koreans or mainland Chinese). There is a tacit alliance between the Japanese right wing, which takes a relatively favorable view of the motivations underlying Japan's twentieth-century colonialism in Asia, and those Taiwanese who hold a largely positive interpretation of Japan's occupation of Taiwan.

Former ROC President Lee Teng-hui, who lived and studied in Japan, epitomizes this Japan-friendly generation of Taiwanese. Beijing holds Lee in particularly deep contempt, blaming him for attempting to set Taiwan on a path toward formal independence from China while he was president. In April 2001, Japan allowed Lee to visit to receive medical treatment. China strongly protested and cancelled a scheduled visit to Japan by then National People's Congress head Li Peng.

Taiwan's current president, Chen Shui-bian, has continued to court Japan, keeping Beijing on edge. In April 2003 Chen told a group of visiting Japanese lawmakers that a Taiwan-Japan free trade agreement could help slow the relocation of industry and business people to China. He also suggested that Japan and Taiwan establish an institution for bilateral security dialogue in view of the threats each faced from North Korea and China, respectively.

Chinese link the Taiwan issue with the Japan war-guilt issue: any Japanese support for "Taiwan independence," such as issuing a visa for Lee to visit Japan, indicates the Japanese have not fully repented for the harm they did to China during the Pacific War because they continue to infringe on Chinese sovereignty in other ways.

Conclusions

Multiple factors, both external and domestic, impinge on Japan's relations with China. On balance, the most likely outcome for the foreseeable future, absent an external security shock that could speed up the process, is continued gradual expansion of Japan's security activity, with Japan's armed forces participating in additional regional security activities (including joint exercises, multilateral dialogue, and certain joint operations). Evolving Japanese domestic attitudes make Tokyo more amenable to meeting U.S. pressures on Japan to take up additional responsibilities within the framework of the alliance. In most of Southeast Asia, there is little objection to Japan moving closer toward "normalcy," especially since Japan can help offset burgeoning Chinese influence.

Tensions between China and Japan flow from divergent and deep-seated assumptions on several key issues. One such issue is the notion of China as a threat to its neighbors. The prevailing Chinese view is that since China is a past victim of Japanese aggression, the argument that Japan fears China is bogus and can only be a cloak for Japanese militarists. It is Japan that must accommodate Chinese worries, not the reverse. Conversely, the Japanese view is that with its size and advantages, Beijing must accept responsibility for assuring the Japanese that China poses no security danger. Not only is China free from the kind of military constraints that prevent Japan from building serious power-projecting capabilities or fielding nuclear weapons, but China is also years into a major upgrade of its armed forces. In the absence of credible assurances from China, Japan feels justified in contemplating a military expansion of its own.

This leads to another, related area of divergent assumptions: the possibility of a revival of Japanese militarism. The common Chinese perspective emphasizes that Japan has both a history of militarism and imperialism and an enduring core of right-wing sentiment. Therefore, Japan remains prone to recrudescence of militarists recapturing control of Japanese foreign policy. An alternative view, however, is that postwar Japan has made a break with the past. Strong social and institutional obstacles forged over nearly six decades stand in the way of any possible interest in militarism beyond the political fringe. Consequently, rather than being inherently inclined toward militarism, Japan is less likely than the average country of its size and weight to become aggressive.

These contrasting interpretations of self and other are difficult to reconcile. Although these ideational considerations are pliable, the stakeholders in the relationship have shown little interest in supporting a reinterpretation that reduces bilateral enmity and suspicion. And even if the "history issue" eventually fades, the longer-term structural causes of Sino-Japanese tension will endure. China and Japan, after all, are two large, powerful states that aspire to leadership and influence over the same geographic region.

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