

Yasuki Akashi

Security in Asia

China and Japan have a long, intertwined and mutually beneficial relationship, extending over 2000 years. This history, however, was largely marked by the cultural superiority of China over Japan, but after the Meijin Restoration of 1868, Japan became more powerful than China, because of its rapid modernization. This period came to an abrupt end in 1945. Today, China is politically more powerful in and out of the United Nations, but Japan is economically stronger with its GDP three or four times larger than China. In their history, both China and Japan have extended to conceive of the inter-state relationship in Asia on a hierarchical order between the lord and the vassals. Their great challenge today is to construct a peaceful relationship based on horizontal equality and more symmetrical balance. In order to do so, both countries will have to shake off the stereotyped image of each other belonging to the past.

Looking back to the past 30 years since China and Japan normalized their relationship in 1972, it can be agreed that the two countries have developed an intensive and profitable economic relationship, have engaged in active cultural interchange with each other and have achieved greater mutual understanding. However, much still remained to be done in the field of political and diplomatic cooperation as well as people-to-people exchange. It is regrettable that two countries have divergent evaluations of their modern history, particularly on the relevance of Japan's past responsibility for the suffering of China to the current relationship. In this regard, Japan will have to continue to reflect upon the cruelty caused by its armed forces in the sincere desire to construct a new relationship.

In the present post-cold war, both China and Japan need to agree on their joint action to cope with urgent challenges, such as ecological issues, pressures of population, greater cooperation in trade and investment, and how to cope with regional conflicts, humanitarian tragedies and remaining pockets of poverty.

China argues for the creation of a multi—polar world, but Japan considers that at least for next 20 years, the dominance of the United States in global politics is here to stay, and therefore, it is in the best interest of Asians to work with Washington, whose value system is basically sound.

In the view of some Japanese, Chinese diplomatic behavior tends to be under the influence of tactical considerations by its leaders. In contrast, Japan's external relations tend to be motivated by sentimental factors, such as an aspiration for peace, the sense of guilt for the last war and the desire for greater international recognition and acceptance. More recently, some Japanese have shown irritation and unhappiness over the perceived slight of its sovereignty and pride.

The common challenge for the two countries today is to find an agreed agenda for actions in order to advance regional and global peace. Japan considers that excessive reliance on traditional balance of power is precarious, and therefore, it is better to work towards a more predictable system of universal and regional security, combined with some kind of modified concerns of powers. It will be necessary for Japan to overcome its sentimental or emotional tendencies, which are mixed with a sense of superiority or inferiority, due mostly to the vicissitudes of its economic fortune. On the other hand, China may be advised to move from possibilities for regional and global cooperation in mind.

An essential to observe in today's bilateral relationship between Japan and China is the adherence to non-interference in domestic affairs. As Japan goes through its delicate internal debate on its past as well as its future with Asia and the world, other countries, especially Japan's immediate neighbors may want to refrain from influencing the domestic debate in Japan, since such attempts may produce an effect opposite to what is intended.

The postwar Germany was able to resolve its problem of a rendezvous with history by allocating war responsibility to Nazi leaders. Japan could not find such simple solution, since its leadership was not completely changed after World War II, although its leaders expressed conversion to peace and cooperation with other states. Germany was also able to reconcile itself with its neighbors, due partly to its commitment to the European process of economic and then political integration

It is important to recognize that the post war Japanese people have developed a strong distaste for militarism and genuine attachment international peace, particularly non-resort to force for solving international disputes and conflicts. This anti-military belief is enshrined in Japan's postwar Constitution which has remained un-amended until today. The reaction of the Japanese masses to the recent World Cup games held in Republic of Korea and Japan proves postwar Japanese freedom from chauvinism and their spontaneous espousal of cosmopolitanism. There is a strong residue of pacifism and isolationism in Japan, which is difficult to distinguish from utopian internationalism. Although such feeling is weaker now, as compared to the immediate postwar era, it is relevant enough to prevent an outright revision of the Constitution, or the so-called three non-nuclear principles or the principle of non-sale of arms abroad. The current debate on the greater participation in UN peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building reflects contradictions in Japanese attitudes between isolationism and internationalism, and between reactive pacifism and the desire to contribute to peace. Recent economic difficulties in Japan have produced a particular anxiety for an improved international status and the opposite desire the unburden itself of the responsibility of a major developed country, as seen in the discussion of ODA. What permeates the debate in Japan is the growing lack of self-confidence about Japan's own future.

The creation of a more solid bilateral relationship between Japan and China requires greater mutual trust based on respect for each other's national interest and concerns. Bilateral dialogue should be free from excessive emotion, pride and wishful thinking. Consistency of policy and statements by leaders is vital. Aside from progress in market economy, wider acceptance by China of the rule of law, democratic practices and institutions will be helpful. Mass media in both countries have great responsibility not to fan emotions and nationalistic sentiments, although this may be too much to expect from commercial media. Moreover, China's greater transparency in military affairs will go a long way to assuage serious concerns over its rapid increase in defense expenditure in the last decade and over its military doctrine.

It is important for both countries to promote regional cooperation through ARF, ASAN+3 and APEC. I agree with the report from IDSS (Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies) Roundtable, held in Singapore in June 2002, which states that "while there are deep and distinct differences between Europe and the Asia Pacific, over-insistence on Asian 'exceptionalism' is unwarranted. Clearly there are some things that the ARF can and should learn from the OSCE experience." Working towards a six-power security with both Koreas, China, Japan, the United States and Russia would seem useful for a more stable Korean peninsula.

Last but not least, despite difficulties created by unilateral tendencies of the Bush Administration, allies and friends of the United States should continue to reason with Washington on the advantages of multilateral approaches, particularly on the greater use to be made of the United Nations, other mechanisms such as NPT review process and the Geneva Conference on

Disarmament. Too much is simply at stake in the world today to achieve one's objectives merely through unilateral or bilateral means. Oversimplification with regard to issues and national actors is dangerous in any situations. World War II as well as the Cold War which followed it have taught us the danger of simplification and demonization of adversaries.