

# JAPANESE RELATIONS IN NORTHEAST ASIA: CHINA AND SOVIET INTERFERENCE

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Japan and its neighbors on the continent, China, Russia, and Korea, have had extremely difficult relations at least since the second half of the nineteenth century. Due to this legacy, even at present the relations among these neighbors are not completely free of tensions. In the past, the most powerful antagonists were Russia and China. After the demise of the Soviet empire, China is left and seems to become an increasing concern for Japan.

China and Japan, the two politically most important and spiritually most influential countries in East Asia, share a long history of changing relations. This is true also for this century. Already one hundred years ago, China experienced the overwhelming power of an imperialist Japan which raised claims and rights of sovereignty on Chinese territory. As a result of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, China was forced to cede Taiwan to Japan. In 1905, as the result of Japan's victory over Tsarist Russia, it took away all the Kurile Islands and the whole of Sakhalin. Six years later, Korea became a colony of Japan and remained so until the end of the Second World War.

After the First World War, Japan became the colonial heir of Germany in China. In 1922, Japan invaded the Shandong peninsula, established a puppet state called Manchukuo a decade later, and in 1937 started an open war against China.

The outcome is well known: Japan lost the war. After the dropping of two A-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it formally surrendered to the United States on 2 September 1945, and seven days later also to Chiang Kaishek.

The increasing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union after the Second World War deeply influenced the Sino-Japanese relationship. China, which came under communist rule in 1949, had no choice than to lean toward Moscow. In 1950, after lengthy and difficult negotiations, Mao Zedong and Stalin agreed to conclude a Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, which was explicitly directed against Japan. When a few months after the conclusion of this treaty a communist-led Korean army crossed the 38th parallel on 25 June 1950 and invaded South Korea, tensions between the communist and the non-communist

camps reached a first peak. Since China became engaged in the Korean War the relations between Japan and China, fragile as they were at that time, further deteriorated. With the Peace Treaty of San Francisco signed in 1951, Japan got back its sovereignty; the occupation of the country was formally terminated, and at the same time a security treaty with the United States was concluded.

This constellation excluded any chance between Tōkyō and Beijing to establish official relations. Under pressure from Washington, Japan had to recognize the Nationalist government of Chiang Kaishek on Taiwan and to conclude a peace treaty with Taipei. Japan, the former enemy, became a close ally of the United States and an important strategic instrument against an increasing communist threat in East Asia.

Although Washington exercised a policy of containment of the People's Republic of China and decided to impose a severe trade embargo, Japanese business circles soon reestablished private trade relations with the Chinese communists. The interest in trading with each other was on both sides. In 1964, the Japanese side even approved to open unofficial trade offices. The government in Tōkyō with regard to China adhered at that time to the principle of the "separation of politics and economy" (*seikei bunri*). The Chinese, however, always tried to undermine this principle and to link politics and economy. They made attractive economic offers in order to get political concessions.

For more than two decades—from the beginning of the Korean war in 1950 until the restoring of an American-Chinese dialogue in 1971—the Sino-American confrontation blocked official relations of almost the whole Western world with Communist China. Among the very few exceptions one was significant: France. President de Gaulle, deliberately opposing Washington's policy, officially recognized the PRC in 1964. Japan as well as West Germany did not dare to do the same, although there were influential politicians in both states who wished to improve political relations with China. Tōkyō's as well as Bonn's foreign policy was too strongly dependent on the United States.

When Henry Kissinger, then President Richard Nixon's security adviser, returned in July 1971 from a secret visit to Beijing and Nixon announced that he would visit China in 1972, the government and people of Japan were shocked. It was this so-called Nixon shock which gave Japan's policy toward China a new start: Tōkyō began to rethink its relations with Beijing. China, by skillfully exploiting the situation, was largely able to impose its own conditions for normalization with Japan. This process reveals a characteristic weakness of Japan's policy vis-à-vis China.

Analyzing the sensational news that President Nixon will visit China in

early 1972, influential Japanese public figures and mass media became louder and louder in their demands for normalization in relations with China. The Chinese question soon came to dominate treatment of foreign policy in the Japanese press. The government realized that so far no Japanese policy on China existed. Prime Minister Satō Eisaku came under increasing pressure and was confronted with the urgent demand for normalization of relations with Beijing, if possible to preempt the United States.

China exploited the Japanese reaction. It presented the Japanese government with three conditions for the establishment of official contact, all of which concerned the status of Taiwan:

- the recognition of the government of the PRC as the sole legal government of the Chinese people;
- the stipulation that Taiwan should be regarded as an inseparable part of the territory of the PRC;
- the renunciation of the peace treaty concluded in 1952 by Japan and the government of Chiang Kaishek.

The Chinese leaders reiterated these conditions at all meetings with Japanese visitors.

Prime Minister Satō wanted to normalize relations with China, but he was unwilling to accept the conditions China presented. Beijing's reaction remained firm. It strictly rejected official contact with Satō's government while agreeing in principle to normalization. In this difficult situation the Japanese mass media created a mood of normalization euphoria, combining moral viewpoints with an emotional call for peace, which received widespread support. Carefully selected invitations to influential members of the Japanese elite helped the Chinese government to influence the formation of opinions within the governing party to China's advantage. The methods China applied were a classic example of the efficiency of its "people's diplomacy": by-passing the Japanese government system and turning instead to more "open-minded" groups and influential individuals. It was the aim of this indirect approach to influence governmental decisions in China's favor. The rash of invitations alone demonstrates the resolution of this people's diplomacy during the run-up to actual normalization: 1969 saw 2,643 Japanese visiting China, while only seven (!) Chinese visited Japan. In 1971 the figures were 5,718 and 74 respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Satō, increasingly regarded as an obstacle on the path to Sino-Japanese détente, was finally forced to concede to this pressure and resigned on 6

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<sup>1</sup> Ueno Hideo, *Gendai Nitchū kankei no tenkai* (Tōkyō and Ōsaka: Futaba Shoten, 1974), 271 and *Japan Times*, 17 Jan. 1972, 5.

July 1972. The most promising candidates to succeed Satō were Fukuda Takeo and Tanaka Kakuei. Both men favored the normalization of relations between Japan and China, but with one difference: while Fukuda let it be known that he would only negotiate without the imposition of preconditions, Tanaka had repeatedly made clear that he was willing to accommodate Beijing further. China's Premier Zhou Enlai had already expressed his pessimism at the prospects of normalisation in the event of Fukuda becoming prime minister. The precise influence of this assessment on the election of the new head of government in Tōkyō is hard to estimate today; however, taking the whole atmosphere in those days into consideration it was probably effective.

The approach adopted by China clearly shows the difference in status between the United States and Japan from Beijing's point of view. China was holding talks with a high-ranking U.S. government representative, i.e., Henry Kissinger, without setting preconditions, and even declared the intention of receiving the president of the United States. At the same time, the leaders in Beijing were piling up obstacles in the path of a Japan eager to establish official contact. Only after fulfilling conditions which, if not unacceptable, were certainly on the verge of being humiliating, was Japan offered the prospect of talks at government level. At the same time, by letting Tōkyō know whom China would prefer as prime minister it was interfering in Japanese party politics. From the Chinese point of view, too early a start of official talks with Tōkyō would have improved Japan's political image, above all in Asia, which ran counter to Chinese intentions. As a consequence, priority was given to direct talks with the United States, while Japan was put on ice to increase its willingness to agree to concessions.

The majority Liberal Democratic Party elected Tanaka as its new leader and thus simultaneously as the new prime minister. At a press conference, he declared that the time was ripe for relations with China to be normalized. After having formed his first cabinet on 7 July 1972, Tanaka announced that the process of normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China would be accelerated.<sup>2</sup> Only two days later, Zhou Enlai made a statement welcoming Tanaka's intention of normalizing relations with his country. The next day, Tanaka received an invitation to visit China from Zhou Enlai. He accepted the invitation. Beijing immediately reacted by officially reporting the Japanese prime minister's intention of visiting China, adding that Zhou Enlai welcomed him and invited him to

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<sup>2</sup> Gaimushō, ed., *Waga gaikō no kinkyō*, Shōwa 48 (1973), vol. 17, (Tōkyō: [Gaimushō], 1973), 126.

visit. This followed the same pattern as the announcement of the visit by the American president. In Tanaka's case, too, it was important for China to announce publicly that the desire to visit originated not with the host, but with the guest.

In September 1972, Tanaka went to Beijing and established full diplomatic relations with the PRC. At the same time, official relations between Japan and Taiwan were severed; the 1952 peace treaty with Chiang Kaishek was declared null and void. This unprecedented decision has never been discussed in the Diet or by Japanese scholars of international law.

Looking back to these decisive events the question comes up, why was it possible that Japan yielded to China's demands giving up former positions. First, the whole issue had a lot to do with the international environment of those days. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the United States was heavily involved in the war in Vietnam, fighting an ally of China. The hostility between China and the United States appeared to be close to a military confrontation should China engage in Vietnam with its own forces. Under these circumstances Japanese politicians were convinced that their country because of its historical experience, cultural affinity, and current trade relations with China could act as a mediator between Beijing and Washington. However, this assumption turned out to be wrong. Contacts between China and the United States were a delicate matter; every step into the direction of official contacts had to be done in an atmosphere of mutual confidence not disturbed by curious journalists. Beijing and Washington very cautiously started to approach each other first via Romania, and later via Pakistan. Henry Kissinger kept apart from any public contact, took off for his secret visit to Beijing on 9 July from Islamabad. Besides Nixon and Kissinger, only a very few people were involved in the preparation of this trip. Secrecy was a precondition for the success of the mission. Therefore, none of the U.S. allies was informed in advance. Japan never played a role in this process. It was taken by complete surprise, and this considerably weakened its position vis-à-vis China.

Armin Meyer, U.S. ambassador to Japan at that time, heard President Nixon's announcement about his forthcoming visit to China on radio. His initial reaction about not having been informed in advance was bitterness, a reaction that was shared by many other Americans and Japanese in Tōkyō. Later, however, he admitted that this delicate mission could not have been handled in a different manner. His argument was that the Japanese were chronically unable to maintain confidentiality, and, as quoted by Kissinger, he added, that "Japanese policy was not undercut by ours

but only deprived of its desired opportunity to stay *ahead* of us on a road it had started traveling long before we did.”<sup>3</sup>

Another event that put pressure on Tōkyō’s China policy was the decision in September 1971 to pass the Chinese seat within the United Nations to the People’s Republic of China. So far, China was represented in the world organization by the Nationalist Chinese government (Republic of China) in Taiwan. Consequently, one Western country after another established diplomatic relations with Beijing. This development intensified the desire within Japan and especially within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party to also start official negotiations with China.

Since Japan’s mass media reported without restrictions the mood of the Japanese people, Beijing’s political elite was in an advantageous position to watch how public opinion in favor of an early normalization with China became stronger by the month. Japanese mass media played an important role by creating a normalization euphoria. The consequences of this development were vividly described by a LDP Diet member who carried out extensive preparations for Tanaka’s visit to China. He wrote in retrospect: “Last year [1971], the atmosphere in Japan suddenly changed. The wind changed its direction completely. Because of the dramatic changes in the environment around us, such as the announcement of Nixon’s China visit and China’s recovery of its UN seat, all people began to turn their faces toward Beijing at about the end of last year. I was filled with deep emotion by this drastic change.”<sup>4</sup>

Beijing exploited this climate; it realized that it did not need to compromise on its demands for normalization. In China, ruled by a Communist party, there was no such phenomenon like public opinion that could influence foreign policy decisions of the government.

There was also another source of Japanese political weakness vis-à-vis China. It has its roots in the psychological essence of Sino-Japanese relationship. Japanese intellectuals are well aware of an inferiority complex in Japan’s attitude toward China. Etō Shinkichi, outstanding expert on China, explained this situation recently in an essay:

For more than two thousand years, Japan existed on the periphery of Chinese civilization. The Han people, who were the first in East Asia to develop agriculture, built a great civilization on the wealth it provided. For Japan, China was always a target of admiration and envy,

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 762.

<sup>4</sup> Furui Yoshimi, “Inside Story of Normalisation of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations,” in *Summaries of Selected Japanese Magazines* (Tōkyō: [Embassy of the United States], January 1973), 47.

the civilization of unsurpassed wisdom. Japanese suffered from a severe inferiority complex, but at the same time they struggled with a strong sense of rivalry—they were determined not to be outdone by the Chinese. These two conflicting emotions were inextricably linked in the Japanese consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning the mass media in the early 1970s and their extraordinary praise for everything Chinese, including the Cultural Revolution, Etō remarks that this was “a manifestation of the ‘love’ aspect of the love-hate syndrome.”<sup>6</sup>

This statement might not completely explain the weakness of Japan’s China policy. There is another point which should be added: the obvious lack of a position based on principles. Nakane Chie, Japan’s most distinguished sociologist, when asked in 1973 about her insights as to where Japan is heading internationally, stated with surprising bluntness: “To even think in that pattern is not Japanese. The Japanese way of thinking depends on the situation rather than principle—while the Chinese it is the other way around. The Chinese are the people who developed the classics and so can’t do anything without principle. But we Japanese have no principles. Some people think we hide our intentions, but we have no intentions to hide.”<sup>7</sup>

The change at the top of the Japanese government was important for China. Although the leaders in Beijing were seriously interested in official relations with Japan, they did not show too much interest; they wanted to achieve their goal without paying a high political price. The improvement of relations with Washington turned out to be a useful instrument to put pressure on Japan. Beijing’s interest in Japan at that time had two basic reasons:

- At the end of the 1960s, Sino-Soviet relations had steadily worsened. The Chinese leaders did not like to see increasing Soviet activities to lure the Japanese into an economic engagement in Siberia.
- For China’s program of modernization, Japan was an important potential source of technology and capital.

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<sup>5</sup> Shinkichi Etō, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Postwar Japan,” *The Japan Foundation Newsletter* XXIII, no. 2 (September 1995): 3–4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Interview: Chie Nakane, “Japanese Have No Principles,” *Newsweek*, 15 October 1973, 60.

Only normalized relations with Japan would give China the chance to draw Japan away from Siberia, where it was going to invest and to utilize the enormous economic potential of its Soviet neighbor.

After normalization of Sino-Japanese relations had been completed in September 1972, Soviet reactions to this event were extremely negative. Moscow saw the Chinese leaders as the real driving force behind normalization, motivated by a thoroughly anti-Soviet plan. In the Soviet's view, China was attempting to involve Japan in its anti-Soviet policies and to convince Prime Minister Tanaka that the Soviet Union posed a "military threat." The Soviet leaders reacted with sharp anti-Chinese attacks since China was showing solidarity with Japan by supporting Japan's territorial claims against the Soviet Union—the demand for the return of four Kurile Islands. At the same time, Beijing attempted to slow the development of economic relations between the Soviet Union and Japan and to halt Japan's participation in the exploitation of natural resources in Siberia. China in fact tried to involve Japan in its anti-Soviet policy. In the context of this strategy, China stopped opposing the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty just before Tanaka's visit to Beijing. This was not all. China began to express positive views on the Japan-U.S. alliance and on Japan's efforts at defense, actually citing the threat posed by the Soviet Union as justification for this new position.

The territorial problem between Japan and the Soviet Union is a vivid example illustrating how the Chinese used Japan in order to keep relations between Moscow and Tōkyō rather cool. Mao Zedong had already been aware that the territorial problem was a thorn in Moscow's side. In 1964, he declared to a visiting delegation of the Socialist Party of Japan: "As far as the Kurile Islands are concerned, there is no doubt in our view; they must be returned."<sup>8</sup> Even at the United Nations General Assembly in 1973 the leader of the Chinese delegation demanded that the Soviet Union "return the four islands to Japan."<sup>9</sup>

Why did China constantly support the Japanese position on this issue? The answer is simple: In order to prevent a solution of the problem. China could not have had the slightest interest in an improvement of Japanese-Soviet relations, let alone in a solution of the territorial problem as a prerequisite for such an improvement. Obviously the Chinese support came at times when it was least welcome to the Japanese. Generally a few days before high level talks between Tōkyō and Moscow, the Chinese strongly reminded the Soviets of the rightful Japanese claim. The Soviets subsequently accused the Chinese of disturbing Soviet-Japanese relations.

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<sup>8</sup> *Asahi Shinbun*, 14 July 1964.

<sup>9</sup> *Peking Review*, no. 40 (5 October 1973): 13.



However, later in the 1980s the “resolute support” to Japan’s territorial claim ceased. In the meantime, Sino-Soviet relations had begun to improve, and Beijing no longer wanted to provoke the Kremlin. Tōkyō’s problem with Moscow had been used by the Chinese as long as it served their interests.

Another issue was also used in order to draw Japan into Beijing’s conflict with Moscow: China’s demonstrative attempts at building closer contacts with the Japanese armed forces including its interest in Japanese military technology, and its encouragement of Japan to greater defense efforts. The Chinese were very specific. Premier Hua Guofeng proposed to his Japanese counterpart Nakasone Yasuhiro that the Japanese air force should be expanded to protect shipping routes. Further, Deputy General Chief of Staff Wu Xiuquan recommended raising the percentage of GNP allotted to defense from 1 percent to 2 percent.<sup>10</sup> This was in 1980. However a few years later, when Japan actually did slightly raise the 1 percent limit of defense spending, Deng Xiaoping reacted with unmistakable concern. The Chinese Communist Party newspaper followed with a critical commentary warning of a Japan which was a military power.<sup>11</sup> Thus from the middle of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s, Japan was used by China as a pawn in the Sino-Soviet conflict.

At that time another important issue served China as an instrument to complicate Japan-Soviet relations further: the project of a Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship. In the beginning of 1975, the Chinese made it clear that they wanted the text of the treaty to include a clause by which both sides would not only renounce any attempts at hegemony, but would also commit themselves to oppose hegemonist activities by any other states or groups of states. Moscow reacted to this with extreme sensitivity, interpreting this anti-hegemony clause—not without reason—as a move by Beijing to win Japan’s alliance against the Soviet Union.

For some time Japan hesitated to conclude the treaty with China. It was unclear about the political intentions which China was attaching to the establishment of the anti-hegemony clause. Speculation arose in Tōkyō as to whether perhaps one day the clause could be interpreted against the United States just as readily as against Japan and its economic influence in Southeast Asia. Although these doubts were never put aside, eventually, the Tōkyō government had no choice but to sign the treaty in late summer 1978. It did so in spite of repeated warnings from Moscow that the Soviet Union will take retaliatory measures against Japan.

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<sup>10</sup> *Mainichi Shinbun*, 1 May 1980.

<sup>11</sup> *Renmin-ribao*, 11 February 1987.

In analyzing Japan's attitude, the effects of another phenomenon in Sino-Japanese relations should not be discounted. This was Japan's differing perceptions of its two communist neighbors. According to Miyazawa Ki-ichi, foreign minister in the mid-1970s, the Japanese people naturally felt close links with China, but they were not able to experience such feelings for the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> Another influential politician, Sonoda Sunao, foreign minister at the time when the treaty was negotiated, made a similar remark: "When China and the Soviet Union are compared, the Japanese people somehow feel an attachment and nostalgia for China."<sup>13</sup> Such sentiments had a considerable impact on Japan's policies toward China; they resulted in an all-too-great readiness to agree to normalization coupled with docile acceptance of the conditions set by Beijing, and this despite the danger of involvement in the Sino-Soviet conflict.

In the early 1980s, Beijing stopped using Japan against the Soviet Union because China's interest shifted toward an improvement in its relations with the Soviet Union. At this stage, the leaders in Beijing could feel satisfied with the results of their strategy:

- a basis for close economic cooperation had been laid;
- the long-desired Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Japan had been concluded, largely in accordance with the conditions set by the Chinese;
- the Soviet Union had been ousted as competitor for Japan's economic and political favors.

After Japan had terminated all restrictions that were enforced following the crushing of the democracy movement in 1989, all kind of relations have been restored. The exchange of high-ranking visitors is again on the agenda. This full rehabilitation was symbolized by the visit of the Japanese emperor to China at the end of 1992.

Emperor Akihito, the first Japanese monarch ever to visit China, is said to be deeply interested in Chinese culture. He played his delicate role with dignity. In the important part of his address in Beijing, he used more definite phrases than his father, Hirohito, did in order to describe Japan's behavior in the past. Akihito clearly stated "my country inflicted great sufferings (*kunan*) on the people of China. I deeply deplore this" (*kanashimi*).<sup>14</sup> The emperor probably could not go farther since Japanese conservatives maintain that he is not entitled to apologize. In China the visit was officially regarded as an important event in the history of Sino-

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<sup>12</sup> *Asahi Shinbun*, 18 September 1975.

<sup>13</sup> *Mainichi Shinbun*, evening ed., 10 August 1978.

<sup>14</sup> *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 24 October 1992.

Japanese relations; it marked the twentieth anniversary of the normalization of relations between Tōkyō and Beijing. The Chinese side, repeatedly praising China as the ideal economic partner for Japan, obviously connected with the emperor's visit the expectation of still closer economic co-operation.

In fact, Sino-Japanese relations are concentrated on the economy, on financial problems, and on the transfer of technology. China needs Japan for the modernization of its industry, of its economic system, for the construction of its underdeveloped infrastructure, and for financing of all these plans. What has been done so far demonstrates that Japan is the most important external factor of China's modernization. The bilateral trade in 1993, the year after the emperor's visit to China, reached a volume of U.S. \$39 billion, an increase of 54 percent since the previous year. In 1996, the trade volume totalled U.S. \$60.06 billion, some U.S. \$17.22 billion more than that between China and the United States. Japan has thus become China's largest trade partner for four consecutive years. Surprisingly, China is enjoying for a number of years a favorable trade balance (in 1996 \$1.7 billion), a rare achievement in trading with Japan. More than 20 percent of China's total foreign trade volume is with Japan. This figure indicates that Chinese-made products for export are becoming increasingly dependent on the Japanese market.

Further, China, among single countries, gets most of Japanese Official Development Aid. Japanese direct investment, however, was small compared with Japan's investments in other Asian countries, but it is rapidly increasing recently. In 1990, direct investment by Japanese firms in China amounted to only U.S. \$349 million. In 1995–96 the total was ten times that amount.

The funds China receives from Japan in the form of yen-denominated loans are vital to the country's projects for economic and infrastructure development. The loans have helped avert disasters that would have otherwise occurred as people tried to make do with insufficient resources. For instance, the city of Xian would most surely suffer an acute water shortage without the yen loans. It was only because Japan made funds available that the city government was able to build a reliable waterworks system and prevent the further collapse of ground in the historic city where residents in many areas had begun pumping ground water and caused the sinking of land.<sup>15</sup>

Central-government outlays for "basic construction" account for some 30 percent of the Chinese national budget. About 20 percent of these projects are at least partly financed by yen loans, the average contribution

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<sup>15</sup> *The Nikkei Weekly*, 17 February 1997.

being 40 percent of the total. This means that around 8 percent of China's public works are supported by yen loans from Japan.

When in May 1995, in a rare use of its economic clout to send a political message, Japan announced that it would cut its grant aid to China to protest Beijing's nuclear weapons tests, Beijing reacted with anger. Although the sum involved was relatively small—Japan's grant aid to China totaled only 7.8 billion yen (U.S. \$79 million)—Beijing's ambassador to Japan vehemently protested the planned reductions, asserting that this could harm bilateral relations. In March 1997, the Japanese government decided to renew its grant aid. The freeze was mainly a symbolic protest because Japan's program of low-interest yen loans, which make up the bulk of its aid to Beijing, was unaffected.

Beyond huge aid from Japan, China is very much interested in technology. Japan, however, is more reluctant than other countries to transfer know-how and placed certain restrictions on its technology export. Japan obviously does not want to nurture a strong potential competitor.

This leads us back to the issue of the deeper Japanese perception of China, but in another context. The external observer recognizes that there exists in Japan a mixture of respect and concern in regard to China. The respect for the great neighbor has its roots in its ancient culture, which was adopted by Japan. The concern or uneasiness is based on two circumstances:

- On the superiority of China, tacitly acknowledged by Japan. From this the Japanese assume that China in the long run will achieve its goal of becoming the dominating power in Asia.
- On the uncertainty about China's internal development. The possibility of turmoil, riots and anarchy—common events in Chinese history—is perceived in Japan as a serious threat.

The concern over future Chinese hegemony is based on the enormous physical and political differences between both neighbors: China has ten times the population of Japan; it is rich in strategic resources and energy, is armed with nuclear weapons, and has large conventional forces at its disposal. Besides, Beijing is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The Chinese military budget is growing since 1989 by 10 to 15 percent annually, and the modernization of the armed forces shows a tendency of great power interests: build-up of a blue-water navy, increasing capability of medium- and long-range missiles, expanding the range of the air force and improving its attacking power. Chinese purchase of Russian weapons systems, too, irritates Japan. Even if it will take a long time until China will gain a militarily dominating status in Asia, Japan already perceives China as an increasingly powerful neighbor.

Further, China claims huge areas of the South China Sea with its reefs and islands. Since important sea lanes of communication run through the South China Sea, Japan is vitally concerned about China's claim, which is also disputed by other countries, especially by Vietnam, the Philippines, and Taiwan. Three-quarters of the crude oil Japan needs are shipped from the Gulf region through the South China Sea. Besides, there exists a Sino-Japanese dispute over a small group of islands called Diaoyutai, or Senkaku, 175 km north of Taiwan. When Deng Xiaoping in 1978 visited Tōkyō, he called for a moratorium on the dispute, proposing to put a hold on it and to leave it to the next generations for resolution. Time and again the dispute has come up since then, repeatedly provoked by Japanese nationalists. On this issue, history seems to speak more in favor of China than of Japan which annexed the uninhabited islands in 1895, during the Sino-Japanese War.

The claims by Beijing and Taipei came up after the U.N. Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) in 1968 reported on oil deposits on the continental shelf in the East China Sea. Whereas Japan holds that its right to the Senkaku Islands is indisputable, Beijing and Taipei remain adamant about their claims, citing maps and archives dating back to the Ming Dynasty. Since the U.S.-Japan agreement of 1972 on Okinawa, Washington has maintained that any dispute over the islands should be resolved by the parties concerned. In autumn 1996 a State Department spokesperson reaffirmed U.S. neutrality on the issue.

Although China officially criticizes the government in Tōkyō for provoking incidents in an attempt to seize the islands, it is reluctant to support nationalist activists in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and on the mainland. The leaders in Beijing are not interested in worsening relations with Japan, which plays such an important role in the modernization of China's economy. Besides, anti-Japanese demonstrations on the mainland could easily turn against domestic deficiencies of the Chinese society. Maybe the Chinese leaders are convinced that their country in the long run will become the dominating power in Asia, and then Japan will have to give up its claim anyway.

Japan is indeed not in an enviable situation. It still has a low political profile and a defensive military potential: 250,000 men, no conscription, and a tendency to further reduce the man-power. The lack of all strategic resources as well as crude oil, coal, and natural gas makes Japan strongly dependent on the security of vital sea lanes. Since Tōkyō does regard China's enormous physical weight not exclusively as an asset, there is serious concern that in China some day chaos could prevail. The potential of disruption has raised concern in Japan about possible huge numbers of refugees. Therefore Japan is deeply interested in a stable development in

China. Japan always justifies its economic aid to China with the argument of stability. Notwithstanding, Japanese experts on China are well aware that the social dynamism of this huge country could hardly be influenced from outside.

In fact Japan is afraid of both possible variations: the rise of China to a politically and militarily dominant power of the region as well as turmoil, disruption, and chaos with the negative consequence of an unstable and unpredictable China. The variation most welcome to Japan is a China that is stable, develops slowly, and does not become too strong with regard to its military power and its economy.

Although China is concentrating on increasing economic cooperation with Japan, its willingness to cooperate politically is disappointing so far. Tōkyō expects more openness in military matters. A dialogue on problems of security and defense which Tōkyō is seriously interested in, started in 1992 but has not yet brought about substantial results.

This attitude supports a certain suspicion in Japan toward China and its so-called friendship with its neighbor. During the last years, opinion polls in Japan show signs of a change in China's image among Japanese people. During the 1970s and 1980s friendly feelings toward China reached record highs, surpassed only by those toward the United States. In 1996, an opinion poll conducted by the Prime Minister's Office in Tōkyō revealed that more than half of Japanese have negative feelings about China. The waning of warm feelings toward China are explained by Japanese analysts with the recent territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands and with a series of nuclear weapon tests conducted by Beijing.<sup>16</sup> However, the general perception of an increasingly powerful China with signs of nationalism also has an impact on China's image in Japan.

On the other hand, there is a remarkable irresponsibility among leading Japanese politicians in dealing with their country's past. In 1994, the Justice Minister Nagano Shigeto said in an interview that the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese soldiers in 1937 was a fabrication. Beijing protested and demanded "the Japanese government treat this matter with all seriousness."<sup>17</sup> The minister had to resign, but the result was severe damage to the credibility of the Japanese government. He became the third minister to lose his job since 1986 over controversial remarks about the war. He was not the last one. The next affair occurred when another member of cabinet, Etō Takami, the director general of the Management and Coordination Agency of the Japanese government maintained that Japan did some good things during its colonization of the Korean Peninsula from

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<sup>16</sup> *The Nikkei Weekly*, 3 March 1997.

<sup>17</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 6 May and 9 May 1994.

1910 to 1945. This minister, too, had to resign, but at the same time Chinese President Jiang Zemin paid a state visit to South Korea. The day after the resignation, South Korean President Kim Youngsam and President Jiang held a joint press conference to blast Japan for failing to come to terms with its militarist past. According to Kim Youngsam, Japanese politicians since 1948 have made such remarks more than 30 times. President Jiang was reported to have angrily remarked that "no part of history can be erased."<sup>18</sup> Japan's unwillingness or inability to face its imperialist past isolates the country psychologically from its two important neighbors, China and Korea.

The legacy of history has still a strong impact on the images Japan and China have of each other. The results of recent investigations on this issue in both countries show that the most prominent characteristics of the Japanese as perceived by China are "development" (*hatten*) and "aggression" (*shinryaku*) with 29 percent each; democracy (3 percent), tradition (6 percent), and friendship (6 percent), however, got very low ratings. The Japanese see their Chinese neighbors predominantly characterized by "tradition" (*dentō*, 23 percent), "control" (*tōsei*, 17 percent), "development" (17 percent) and "friendship" (12 percent); but "aggression" has a very low score (5 percent). Concerning the problems of the past, only 17 percent of Japanese but 28 percent of Chinese favor a "heartfelt apology"; for the Chinese this issue ranks at the top. The Japanese, however, seem to look more toward the future by stressing the "building of a new cooperative relationship" (61 percent) in comparison to 20 percent of Chinese.<sup>19</sup>

In view of these observations the question arises: What are the goals of China's policy toward Japan? There is an obvious tendency that China is striving for a dominant position in the region and for global influence. The only serious rival on the road to this goal in Asia is Japan; in the global arena it is the United States. Therefore, and because of its past experience, China wants Japan to confine itself to remain an economic power, which could be utilized to support China in its process of modernization. From a Chinese point of view, Tōkyō's political influence should be kept as small as possible.

China wants to avoid Japan becoming a militarily strong country capable of projecting its power beyond its vicinity. In other words, Japan must never again become a threat to Asia, notably to China. In this context, China is interested in keeping alive among other Asian countries the bad memories of Japanese imperialism and militarism. China skillfully uses

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<sup>18</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 15 November 1995.

<sup>19</sup> *Asahi Shinbun*, 22 September 1997.

Japan's past in order to shape its future. Because up to the present day Japan was unable to discuss publicly its past role in Asia, time and again China gets valuable support from politicians like Nagano, Etō, and others.

To achieve its goals, China needs an atmosphere of friendship, and the subtle Chinese diplomacy is very able to create such an atmosphere. The Chinese invitation of the Japanese emperor was an element of this strategy of tying Japan down to friendship. Tōkyō has little choice than to respond.

A complex issue of considerable importance between China and Japan is Tōkyō's relationship with Washington. On the one hand, the economic relations between Japan and China have reached a degree which makes it very difficult for Tōkyō to follow Washington if the U.S.-Chinese relations seriously deteriorate. On the other hand, there is the strong security alliance between Japan and the U.S. It would be highly unpleasant for Tōkyō to be forced to choose between keeping good relations with China or close security ties with the United States in case of a serious confrontation between China and the United States.

Beijing is aware that as long as the U.S.-Japanese security alliance holds, Japan is less likely to embark on a military path. But should this alliance unravel, then Japan may feel the need to build up an independent military capability. Since Beijing does not want Japan to play a major political or even a military role in the region, it can only wish that such a development will not come true. This might be the reason why China at present does not openly object the military presence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. At the end of 1995, China's foreign minister hinted in an interview that Beijing does not oppose the Japan-U.S. security pact. But he added that in principle China does not agree with the stationing of troops on foreign soil.<sup>20</sup> Beijing obviously hopes that the bilateral security pact will keep Japan from becoming a military power. However, for fear of an expanded Japanese security role, China opposes recent U.S. efforts to reinforce the alliance.

Based on bad experience with Japan in the past, there is in China a deep-seated suspicion about the future development of this energetic neighbor. Eventually the on-going improvement of the U.S.-Japan security system is seen as "a step further toward military intervention in global and regional affairs."<sup>21</sup> All this led to a severe attack on Japan unheard since the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations twenty-five years ago: "These acts suggest that militarism is raising its ugly head again in Japan, and that an

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<sup>20</sup> *The Nikkei Weekly*, 20 November 1995.

<sup>21</sup> *Beijing Review*, no. 9 (3-9 March 1997): 9.



economically stronger Japan is repeating its prewar mistakes and ignoring other countries' sovereignty and the feelings of their citizens.<sup>22</sup> It does not matter whether this is true; the problem is that China's perception will have an impact on formulating its policy toward Japan.

At the end of this century, rivalry between China and Japan intensifies. On the one hand, a Japan maneuvering for power and influence could well be checked by Washington, which does not want to see its own dominant position challenged. In that respect the interests of China and the United States are identical. On the other hand, the United States and Japan are ambivalent toward the rise of China: they are attracted by the huge Chinese market, but do not like to see China become a competitor and in the long run the politically and militarily dominating power of the region. In this respect the interests of Japan and the United States meet. This complex triangular relationship will probably lead to repeated frictions among its members. Within this relationship China will do everything necessary to prevent any new threat from Japan from its very outset. At the same time, Beijing will continue to utilize Japan's economic potential for its national goals as much as possible. This determination will remain the principle of Sino-Japanese relations for a long time to come.

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<sup>22</sup> *Beijing Review*, no. 46 (11–17 November 1996): 7.