

日中関係を見直す-第三の視点から

Japan-China Relations: Perspectives from Washington

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Japan or China: America Looks Across the Pacific

Historically, American perceptions of Japan and China have tended to oscillate between two extremes: on the one hand, the two peoples constitute the same “yellow people;” on the other, there are those who see nothing in common between Japanese and Chinese “except their slant eyes.” For the most part of the 20th century, the American leaders, both government and intellectual, have been debating which of the two America should befriend. For much of the 1970s, the common threat from the Soviet Union created a rare period where all three countries belonged to the same side of a confrontation. Moreover, the architect of this strategic alliance—Henry Kissinger (and Mao, his counter-part in China) found more in common in their suspicion of the Japanese. When China started opening up and reforming its socialist economy in the late 1970s, all three countries now seem to be bound by an economic partnership as well.

The Cold War is over, or so they say. If this is indeed the case for most of Europe, in northeast Asia the story is quite different. The Clinton Administration, reversing its campaign rhetoric of getting tough with China, made significant improvement in relations with China despite an often-hostile Congress. Incidents like the embassy bombing in Belgrade in 1999 notwithstanding, Clinton Administration de-linked bilateral trade from China’s human rights, cleared way for China’s entry into WTO, and favored China with two presidential visits (with family members). Complaints began to be heard in Japan about “Japan passing” and “alliance drifting.” Together with more ominous developments like China’s missile test in the Taiwan Strait in 1996, a bipartisan effort was formed to re-affirm US-Japan alliance as the cornerstone of US strategic presence in the region.

Some of the attacks on Clinton for being a “panda hugger” were perhaps partisan politics, and each administration seems to have following a learning curve when it comes to China policy. 911 and the ensuing “war on terror,” of course, changed the priority of the Bush administration. One architect of that bipartisan effort, Mr. Armitage, is the number two in the State Department in

the current Bush Administration. Gen. Colin Powell, Armitage's direct boss, has recently described US-relations with China as the best time in decades.ⁱ In terms of the ideological spectrum within the Administration, however, the State Department is of course on the moderate end, so much so that Newt Gingrich has termed it the "Rouge State Department." Pentagon and much of the national security brain trust of the Bush Administration consider China – given its size, the growing economy, and its polity (though some would discount the last) – the most likely power to challenge the American hegemony in the post-Cold War world. It is not clear to what extent 911 has changed their outlook in a fundamental way, although in a recent speech Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld spoke of the need for the US and world to engage China in a way so that its rise will be in a reasonably peaceful way. He expressed hope about China's peaceful transformation, in part because "Japan is playing a more important part in the world."ⁱⁱ

In the wider foreign policy community in Washington and elsewhere, there is no question China commands a great deal of attention these days. So much so compared to Japan that many a Japanese observer has felt neglected. Attention does not equal affection, however. No one in Japan would like to return to the rancorous 1980s when US-Japan trade frictions captured headlines in both countries. These days, of new interest to American consumers and policy-makers alike are Japan's "soft power" ("Japan's gross national cool")ⁱⁱⁱ. Japan's role as a loyal and invaluable ally is no longer questioned.

Understandably, America's interest has tended to be on bilateral relations between the US and a particular country.^{iv} Though still small in number, there seem to be a steady growing studies of relations between Japan and China.^v The persistent frictions over history issues certainly are important backdrops, but increasingly attention is also given to the potential rivalries for resources and for leadership in Asia.

What Lies Ahead for Japan-China relations?

There seems to be a consensus on the importance of Japan-China relations for the stability of the East Asian region. There is also a general agreement that bilateral political relations have deteriorated in the last decade while economic relations have deepened. Opinions seem to be divided as to the prospect of relationship in the near future, however, often depending on the weight one gives to various forces.

In terms of domestic politics, **rising nationalisms** in both countries are receiving scholarly attention. In the case of China, its official as well as popular nationalisms are seen more and more

as a potential de-stabilizer (in contrast to what Chinese themselves think). On the other hand, Japan's rising nationalism is generally considered a healthy force that enables Japan play a great role, either primarily as an US ally or on its own.^{vi} Two growing nationalisms along side of each other, coupled with the history issues between the two countries, obviously do not bode well, although no one seems to have discussed this matter in depth. Conflicting popular nationalisms tend to poison atmosphere of already difficult situations (territorial dispute) and narrow options of policy-makers. At times, they tend to create crisis on their own (i.e. the recent Asian Cup soccer fiasco). In addition, political leaders in both countries have domestic interests to look after, sometime as their priority.

Looking at the **security environment**, prospects are equally gloomy.^{vii} The Taiwan issue obviously stands out as a flaring point with serious implications for not only the US but Japan as well. Moreover, a potential military rivalry between the two East Asian powers seems to be on the horizon: Japan's concern of its sea lane security and China's double-digit increase in military spending and purchase of advanced weaponry from Russia is matched by equally worrisome signs (for China) such as Japan's participation in Missile Defense and increasing military profile overseas (though yet not in combat roles). Confidence-building measures do not seem to be moving forward.

Will the increasingly interdependent **economic relationship** function as a kind of safety valve for an otherwise volatile relationship? The two economies are more intertwined than ever, and political leaders on both sides should realize the heavy cost of a disruption of cooperative relations.^{viii} On the other hand, closer economic relations do not always foster better feelings among the trading partners—as evidenced by popular polls in both countries. Moreover, economic frictions are likely to multiply, even though the two economies are still more complementary than directly competitive. There is already a competition for energy between the two countries, as with the Russian pipeline project as well as the development of resources in the sea. There is no agreement that economic ties can prevent political relations from further deteriorating.

Finally, **regional integration** that is taking place slowly but steadily in East Asia offers some hope that the rising bilateral tensions can be ameliorated and even reduced. Indeed, meetings of regional leaders in (East) Asia have provided the only opportunities for Prime Minister Koizumi and Chinese leaders to hold their own summit. Other countries in the region—Korea in particular—which fear the fall-out of a Japan-China confrontation, may need to double their effort to push for institutionalization of regional cooperation in all possible areas including security.

What can be done to influence Japan-China relations from the US?

Needless to say, changing Japan-China relations have important implications for US policy for East Asia. What kind of relations between China and Japan would the US like to see the most? Although no one speaks in terms of the “yellow peril” of the late 19th century, foreign policy community in the US does not seem to welcome a Japan-China entente for fear of eroding US influence in the region. As James Hoge, editor of the influential *Foreign Affairs*, reminded his audience recently, “even worse [than Japan going alone], from the American perspective, would be if China and Japan were to seek a strategic alliance between themselves rather than parallel relations with the United States.”^{ix} So far, it is by reaffirming the US commitment under the US-Japan alliance (regarding the defense of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, for instance) that the US has sought to prevent Japan from losing confidence in the US and bandwagon with a rising China.

This is not to say they necessarily favor a showdown between the two, either (except perhaps in time of crisis over Taiwan.) The best scenario of the Japan-China relations for the US, following this logic, is “not too cold, not too hot.” But has the threshold be reached now that relations between the two are steadily deteriorating? If the answer is yes, it would follow then the US needs to apply some brakes from now on in case the Japan-China relations from further downward spiral. There are calls for the US government to pay more attentions to the potential conflict of the two nationalisms, but given the US priority on North Korean crisis and other issues, it is not clear whether it would take up such advice soon.

Not everyone sees greater regional cooperation in East Asia and the US interest in the region as a zero sum game. In fact, many argue a greater Japan-China cooperation and greater regional integration in the overall interest of the US, as long as this regionalism is not a closed one. At the least, it would diffuse tension and prevent a new regional conflict at a time when America’s security obligations have been overburdened.

In exactly a month, American voters will decide whether to give George W. Bush four more years in the White House or to hand it to the Democrats. While the outcome of the presidential election can’t be predicted, it is fair to say that the US policies toward Japan and China and their bilateral relations will not undergo major changes in the foreseeable future. It is more likely that other developments, whether in Korea or on Taiwan, that can trigger an American response that can put Japan-China relations under even further strain. Until then, it is largely up to Japan and China to sort things out themselves if they can.

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Notes:

ⁱ Colin Powell's remarks at Elliott School of International Affairs, Friday, September 5, 2003. reprinted from NewsMax.com.

ⁱⁱ Secretary Rumsfeld Remarks to The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations/Commercial Club of Chicago, August 6, 2004. Available at <http://www.dod.gov/transcripts/2004/tr20040806-secdef1121.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy* (May 2002).

^{iv} A welcome exception is CSIS's quarterly online newsletter "Critical Connections," which includes Japan-China relations. See <http://www.csis.org>.

^v Michael Green and Benjamin Self, "Japan's Changing China Policy: From Commercial Liberalism to Reluctant Realism," *Survival* 38.2 (Summer 1996), pp. 35-57.

^{vi} Eugene A. Matthews, "Japan's New Nationalism," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2003). Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

^{vii} Benjamin Self, "China and Japan: The Facade of Friendship," *The Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2002-3).

^{viii} Robert Sutter, "China and Japan: Trouble Ahead?" *The Washington Quarterly* Fall 2002.

^{ix} James F. Hoge, Jr., "A Global Power Shift in the Making," *Foreign Affairs*, (July/August 2004).