

## Japan's Responsibility for the Worsening in Japan-China Relations: Reflections on recent conflicts

Asai Motofumi

Japan's Responsibility for the Worsening in  
Japan-China Relations: Reflections on recent  
conflicts

By Asai Motofumi

Translation by Emanuel Pastreich

### Anti-Japanese Sentiment at the Asia Cup Soccer Tournament

Chinese fans subjected the Japanese team to intense booing at the Asia Cup Games held in China in August. They also made their disgust evident when *Kimigayo* the Japanese anthem, was sung. Chinese fans vandalized Japanese Embassy cars in Beijing after the final match. These events sent shockwaves through Japan and the incidents were taken up by the foreign media.



Chinese fans burn Japanese flag at Asia Cup

The impact was not limited to the attention given to the radical actions of the Chinese fans by the Japanese media. Japan's China experts also categorized the violent behavior of the Chinese fans as a product of the nationalistic anti-Japanese education that young Chinese receive. Some like Professor Kojima Tomoyuki of Keio University harshly criticized China. "The anti-Japanese bias in their education has gone too far," he wrote in *The Asahi Shimbun* of August 31,

2004. Television news and variety “Wideshow” Programs went as far as to assert that if China continues to drag politics into sports, it is not qualified to host the 2008 Olympics. An August 8 editorial of the *Asahi Shimbun* states, “[The actions of Chinese fans] at the final match between China and Japan gave us an opportunity to see the mindset of the Chinese who will be welcoming us at the Olympics in four years.”

Before analyzing the political circumstances, let us consider the criticism that such actions stem from excessive anti-Japanese content in Chinese education, and the suggestion that if such incidents occur, China is not qualified to host the 2008 Olympics.

The strengthening of nationalistic education in China can be traced back to the Japan's history textbook controversy of 1982. The importance of resistance to Japanese aggression in China's nationalistic education is clearly demonstrated by the construction of the Nanjing Massacre Museum in Nanjing and the Memorial Hall to the Chinese People's Anti-Japanese War immediately adjacent to the Marco Polo Bridge, site of the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. Both museums, their names written in glittering gold characters, were constructed under Deng Xiaoping's instructions. Japan's history textbook controversy stirs Chinese memories of Japan's war of aggression against China which unfolded after the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The May Fourth movement was not only directed

against Japan's Twenty-One Demands, it is the very embodiment of China's nationalist movement. The fact that Japan has shown not the slightest sincerity toward learning from the past has fostered deep Chinese suspicion.



Memorial and Museum for Nanjing Massacre

To Chinese patriotic education as simply anti-Japanese education is a serious error. I happened to read the *Chugoku Shimbun* when I visited Hiroshima on August 3, 2004. The paper featured an interview with Professor Wang Xiaoqiu of Peking University and Chairman of the Association for the Study of the History of China-Japan Relations. Professor Wang said, “There are two aspects of an accurate awareness of history. First, one must determine exactly what happened and observe objectively. Second, one must grasp its contemporary significance. There is no way to return to the past. We must fix our eyes on history so that we can build a bright future.”

When asked, “Will exhibitions at the War of Resistance Memorial Hall stoke anti-Japanese feelings among the youth?” Professor Wang

responded, “The purpose of the hall is not to put forth anti-Japanese propaganda. We want Chinese youth to be conscious of how the Chinese nation, with its five thousand years of history, stood up and confronted the suffering and humiliation resulting from the Japanese invasion. When our youth know about that humiliation, they will be inspired to make great progress.”

Inevitably much nationalistic education is related to Japanese aggression in the 1930s and 40s as that was the greatest humiliation that modern China suffered. Nonetheless, as Professor Wang suggests, the intention of that education is not to fan the flames of anti-Japanese emotion, but rather to inspire Chinese with the feats of the past so they can move forward. Having repeatedly visited both the Nanjing Massacre Museum and War of Resistance Memorial Hall repeatedly, I find myself nodding in agreement with those words.

As for the suggestion that if such an event can occur in China then China is not qualified to host the Olympic games, it is simply indicative of the shallowness of Japanese refusal to confront the serious problem we face.



Beijing prepares for 2008 Olympics

The riotous actions of Chinese fans deserve serious criticism. But the reports in the Japanese press that give the impression that the entire stadium was filled with Chinese fans engaged in chanting anti-Japanese slogans are ludicrous. Nothing of the sort took place according to postings on the web pages of Japanese fans who saw the match, as well as the impressions conveyed by some of my former students who were present.

Suppose that the rioting was in part a byproduct of nationalistic education. The fact that Chinese fans did not take similar riotous actions at any of the other matches is crucial to understanding the meaning of that event. In short, the actions of Chinese fans should be clearly distinguished from narrow-minded xenophobia.

If China was indeed seized by xenophobic nationalism, it would be sufficient grounds to argue that China is unqualified to host the Olympic Games. But what would be the worst-case scenario if the political discord between

China and Japan does not improve before the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games? Judging from the extraordinary security measures taken by the Chinese during the playoffs in Beijing, instructions concerning the separation between politics and sports will be enforced.

In the worst-case scenario Chinese fans will boo Japanese athletes when they walk onto the field, and only then. Such an event will, without doubt, let the world know that there are tensions in Sino-Japanese relations. Because China-Japan relations have a profound impact not just on Asia, but on international relations in general, this will raise international awareness of the issue. The result will be consideration by people throughout the world of the causes of the extraordinary state of affairs in Sino-Japanese relations. It will become immediately obvious that the heart of the problem lies not with China, but rather overwhelmingly with Japan. Let me explain the reasons why.

### **The reasons and the responsibility for worsening China-Japan Relations**

The first tangible progress in Sino-Japanese relations after the Second World War can be seen in the policies of reform and opening that took off in earnest under Deng Xiaoping's leadership. Diplomatic relations were restored in 1972, but with the chaos of the Cultural Revolution it was several more years before the Chinese seriously reassessed China-Japan relations. Economic ties

subsequently expanded quite smoothly. In the political realm, however, three problems have dogged Sino-Japanese relations since the reestablishment of formal diplomatic ties. They are the problem of history (the nature of the Japanese war of aggression against China in the 1930s and 40s), the problem of Taiwan (the Japanese attitude towards Taiwan's political and economic status) and the US-Japan Alliance (an article in the U.S.- Japan Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement designating Taiwan as a possible target for deployment in the Far East). These issues are treated in detail in my book *How Should China be Understood* (Chugoku wo do miru) Kobunken, pp. 62-66).



Deng Xiaoping

There is also the problem of how lines are drawn around ocean areas to make exclusive territorial claims pertinent to the presence of undersea oil reserves. Recently, there has been much media attention given to the ocean prospecting activities of both Japan and China. Finally, there is the territorial issue of the Senkaku/Diaoyutai



Islands, an issue that was not even raised during the negotiations concerning normalization of diplomatic relations.

As previously mentioned, conflicts rooted in history have been felt in the controversy surrounding the Japanese government's 1992 selection of history textbooks. The decision of two Japanese prime ministers (Nakasone Yasuhiro in 1985 and Hashimoto Ryutaro in 1996) to pay their respects at Yasukuni Shrine—where many of the planners of Japan's war of aggression are honored—makes patently obvious the disregard of history by Japan's conservative politicians that prevents coming to terms with the unfortunate past. The absence of appropriate understanding of history in Japan heightens Chinese apprehensions. Notably, when Japan completely ignored the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its defeat in World War Two ("the victory in the struggle against Japanese aggression" for the Chinese), large-scale demonstrations erupted throughout the China.



## Yasukuni Shrine

The movement to write a textbook that categorically sanitizes Japan's past that was initiated by the Committee to Draft a History Textbook (Tsukurukai, founded in 1996) illustrates the extent of anti-Chinese thought in Japan. Such examples of ignoring history have infuriated the Chinese. The culmination of these actions was Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's decision to pay his respects at the Yasukuni Shrine for four consecutive years after taking office in 2001. Koizumi stated that "the visits are a tenet of my political position, so there will be no change." Professor Shi Yinhong of People's University has commented that "As long as Koizumi continues to make official visits to Yasukuni Shrine in the formal role of prime minister, there can be no interaction between heads of state. China has already made vehement protests." He explains "one must understand the psychology of the Chinese people with regard to the problem of history."

As for the Taiwan question, Japan's actions have irritated China off and on for more than thirty years since the normalization of diplomatic relations. Japan agreed to limit all relations with Taiwan to the non-governmental sphere at the moment of diplomatic normalization. Since that time, however, Japanese ties to Taiwan have expanded exponentially. The controversy surrounding Taiwan President Lee Tenghui's planned visit to Japan (which fortunately never

took place) arose in 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of China's victory in the war of resistance against Japan. Sino-Japanese relations, having already deteriorated, took a turn for the worse.

Developments in US-China relations cast a long shadow over the Taiwan issue. The fundamental texts governing U.S.-China relations are the Shanghai Communiqué (1972), which established a strategic relationship between the two nations, the US- China Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations (1978) and the Communiqué on Weapons Sales to Taiwan (1991). Under the Clinton and second Bush administrations, however, the US vastly expanded sales of advanced weapons to Taiwan as part of an upgrading of Taiwan's defensive capability. Since the Clinton administration permitted President Lee Teng-hui to visit the United States, and especially during the second Bush administration, exchanges between high-level US government representatives and those of the Republic of China (Taiwan) have been conducted openly.

Two significant developments in the US-Japan military alliance have had profound implications for the Taiwan issue and increased both apprehension and interest on the part of the People's Republic of China. The first is the move to increase the offensive capacity within the US-Japan military alliance in accordance with US preemptive strike strategy. The rear support offered to the United States by the Naval Self-

Defense Forces during the War in Afghanistan, the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces to Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the military participation of Japan in the US preemptive war in Iraq have had important ramifications.

"The Legislation to Deal With Military Attacks" seeks to provide rear support in the Afghan war, to dispatch Self-Defense Forces to Iraq in the Iraq war, and to cope with counter attacks against a Japan that participates in a war that was initiated with a US preemptive attack. Japan's national protection laws, meant to concretize that law, are viewed in China with wariness as stepping stones toward an aggressive Japanese-American alliance. The Bush administration has initiated a program of reassignment of United States overseas forces. One implication of this has been strengthening the role of US bases in Japan to serve as a hub for the US military. This cannot simply be ignored by China.

Moreover, America has gone so far as to openly demand that Japan dispatch its troops abroad in earnest. The start of this shift can be traced to the so-called Armitage Report of 2000. Although the dispatch of Self Defense Forces to Iraq was strongly criticised within Japan as a violation of international law and the Japanese constitution, the inability to initiate military action independently (because of the restrictions embodied in Article Nine of the constitution) seems simply too wishy-washy from the American perspective.

Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage has stated openly that “Article Nine of the Japanese constitution has become an obstacle in relations within the Japan-America alliance” (July 21, 2004). Secretary of State Colin Powell also stated that “If Japan intends to play a significant role in the international community and become a full member of the Security Council of the United Nations, it must take up the responsibilities incumbent to that role. A reconsideration of Article Nine of the constitution would be in order” (August 12, 2004). The move to modify the constitution has accelerated in conservative politics since the Koizumi cabinet came to power. Overt pressure from the United States has strengthened this shift in thinking. There can be no doubt that China views these actions by a Japan that will not repent for its history of aggressive war as a rush down the path to making Japan once again a “nation that wages war.”

One more noteworthy development is the acceleration of cooperation between the US and Japan in development research and deployment of missile defense. Although it is generally accepted within Japan that missile defense is a precaution against the threat of a missile attack from North Korea, that argument misses the point entirely. America has posited China as a potential threat. The possibility of a war arising between China and the United States over the issue of Taiwanese independence (China is

particularly apprehensive about the influence wielded by the supporters of Taiwanese independence in the legislatures of the United States and Japan and the resulting coordination with Taiwan in both countries) is a serious concern. Considering that countering China's missiles will at that point be critical, Japan and the United States are devoting their energy to setting up a missile defense system to neutralize China's missiles. Such a system would assure Japan and the United a decisive advantage in a war with China.

Clearly there has been progress in cooperation on counter-terrorism between the United States and China since the 9-11 terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, the Bush administration's preemptive strikes, and the reconfiguration and strengthening of the attack capability of the U.S.-Japan military alliance, as well as directly related Japanese moves to modify Article Nine of the constitution, have unmistakably increased Chinese apprehensions about Japan. We must take this matter very seriously. One significant comment of Professor Shi is that “the core issue in China's relationship with Japan is the Taiwan issue. Japan should not support Taiwanese independence and should not seriously regress on the history textbook issue.”

### **Conclusion**

Prime Minister Koizumi's annual visit to Yasukuni Shrine already has damaged Chinese

perceptions of Japan. Emotions about Japan have been further roiled by a series of events in 2003. These included injuries and deaths caused by poison gas weapons that were abandoned by Japanese forces at Chichihar in Heilongjiang province, (August 2003 and again in July 2004 when two children in Jilin province were injured), an incident involving a group purchase of sexual favors by Japanese at Zhuhai, Guangdong province (September), and the performance of a lewd skit by Japanese students studying in Xi'an (October). Cases of Japanese who have been arrested and severely punished for trying to smuggle drugs out of China have also increased dramatically.



Prime Minister Koizumi at Yasukuni Shrine

Prime Minister Koizumi would never have visited Yasukuni Shrine at the start of 2004 if he had taken seriously the precariousness of relations with China and been aware of the importance of avoiding further deterioration in China-Japan relations. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister insisted on visiting Yasukuni Shrine as if no issue existed. The Chinese perceive Japan and the Japanese people as refusing to seriously

recognize their responsibility as victimizers in the invasion of China.

It should now be clear that we have been not only off the mark in our pointless irritation about the actions of Chinese fans at the Asian Soccer Cup, but also just how irresponsible and reckless our actions have been as far as Japanese relations with China and the Chinese people are concerned. The issue we should concern ourselves with is not Chinese nationalistic sentiment.

Our concern should be to sincerely respond to the three issues of historical memory, the Taiwan Straits problem, and the US-Japan Military alliance in ways that will be ameliorate increasing negative feelings and impressions about Japan in China. The essential and critical first step is for Prime Minister Koizumi to give up his visits to Yasukuni Shrine and make that decision manifest. Such a move would make possible exchanges between Japan and China at the level of heads of state and might offer a path to reopening dialog and negotiations on such divisive issues as historical memory, the Taiwan Straits problem and the U.S.-Japan Military Alliance.

The primary reasons for the deterioration in Japan-China relations can be traced to Japan. We Japanese must take responsibility for this state of affairs by taking action to eliminate the causes.



*Asai Motofumi is a Professor of International Relations at Meiji Gakuin University*  
*Translation for Japan Focus by Emanuel Pastreich,*  
*Assistant Professor, Parkland College, Champaign*  
*Illinois.*

*This is a slightly abbreviated version of an article*  
*appeared in Gunshuku (Disarmament), November 2004,*  
*Posted at Japan Focus on February 25, 2005*  
*2004, pp. 14-19.*