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Japan's Neonationalists on China
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Criticism of China in Japan's public space has intensified since the Senkaku collision incident of September 2010. Despite the resulting strain in bilateral relations, however, the Kan Naoto government seems to be laying down plans for détente as described here and here.

The political rift takes place against a background of ever increasing economic ties between the two countries. Even a conservative publication such as the *Sankei Shimbun* refers to renewal of stable relations as a "business chance" for Japan. Japan's neo-nationalists, however, continue to flirt with the idea that the only way of dealing with China is to sever relations across the board - economic, political, and cultural.

In a piece titled "China Phobia Saps Japan's Strength" published in the January 12 *Sankei Shimbun*, Nishio Kanji, a leading rightwing pundit, author of the late 1990s bestseller *Kokumin no Rekishi* (The History of the People of the Nation) and one of the founders of the "New History Textbook" movement, which has sought to limit mention of Japanese war crimes and twentieth century imperialism in Japanese schools, spells out in direct terms the current view of China prevalent on the Japanese extreme right.

Nishio complains that "since the Senkaku collision incident, the [Japanese] mass media has kept on saying that we cannot think about Japan's future without considering China, especially economically." In an attempt to deflate this way of thinking, Nishio notes that Japanese exports to Hong Kong and China "are only 2.8% of GDP. While imports from China . . . are around 2.4%." Nishio portrays these figures as "nothing much" and argues, "if, say, we were to totally stop exports, it would only mean a reduction of about 2% in GDP. If we stop high technology, parts, and capital from leaving Japan, it will be China that is in trouble. Future Japan will have no problem without China, right?" Nishio, however, ignores several important strands woven into the China-Japan economic relationship: the business of Chinese tourism in Japan, a growing segment of Japan's GDP; the GDP consequences of Chinese products vanishing from Japanese stores; the reliance of Japanese manufacturers on Chinese-manufactured components in key areas; and numerous other important commercial endeavors that suggest barring trade with China might deal a deathblow to an already sputtering Japanese economy.

In less turbulent times, Japanese and Chinese leaders have stressed the ancient cultural ties between the two countries. Those diplomatic niceties have not been totally forgotten, as even current Japanese Prime Minister Kan, in a recent call for better Japanese-Chinese relations, alluded to Sun Yat-sen and the warm relations that existed long before the outbreak of World War II.

Nishio, however, wants Japan to sever any sense of cultural interconnection with China. He writes, "There is no doubt that classical China, like classical Rome, gave its neighbors writing, a sense of law, and advanced religion. However, then the curtain fell on those two civilizations and Japan, Korea, and the Germanic peoples rose up, ushering in a new era in the history of world civilization." He calls on contemporary Japanese to forget historical ties to China and the idea of China as the center of Asian civilization, hoping that this "correct" view of history will be "invigorating" (the exact meaning here is unclear but it seems to refer a longstanding neonationalist assumption that Japan was doing fine until masochistic history destroyed national vitality), perhaps sparking an economic renewal. He even suggests that China has undergone "racial mixing" such that the contemporary Chinese population cannot be viewed as the direct descendants of the inhabitants of China at the height of its classical civilization. "It is really difficult to assert that today's China is the successor of the classical Chinese Empire. The true face of Chinese history is blood-splattered civil strife and the barren ruins left in the wake of destruction," he writes. What emerges is a condescending vision of modern China, deliberately shaped in ways to support calls by Nishio and other neonationalists for terminating all economic - and political - intercourse.

Voicing views similar to Nishio's is Tamogami Toshio, the ex-chief of staff of Japan's Air Self Defense Force, who became famous when he was dismissed for penning an essay denying Japanese war responsibility. In his December 2010 book *Aratanaru Nicchu Senso* (A New Sino-Japanese War) Tamogami strongly advocates limiting ties with China and a confrontational stance.

Tamogami's most recent book is *Tamogami Kokugun* (Tamogami's National Military Force), reviewed by Fumiko Halloran at the NBR Japan-US Discussion Forum. Halloran asks two important questions in her review: "Will he be seen as someone who rants against the accepted interpretation of modern history in Asia, thus not taken seriously? Or, as he seems to be trying, will he continue to educate himself, polish his writing and speeches, and emerge as an influential opinion leader on Japan's national defense?" In positing the limiting of ties with China, the same line taken by Nishio, Tamogami seems to be joining the fold of those who embrace extreme nationalism over economic pragmatism and a degree of political moderation. Thus far this has been a fringe not mainstream position in Japanese politics, but the possibility of change is in the wind.

While Nishio and Tamogami have an audience, even the conservative *Sankei*, a victim of a considerable sales slump in recent years, while happy to host their writings, takes a different view of China elsewhere in its pages, pointing, for example, to Chinese tourism as a potential way of boosting the Japanese economy.

Sankei's selectively contrary and less antagonistic view of China proliferates across the Japanese mainstream media. On January 24, the *Asahi Shimbun* printed "Putting Our Hopes on Chinese Wallets," a title that conveys the obvious thrust of the article.

On the 26th, the *Nishi Nihon Shimbun* described an ambitious plan to publish Chinese and Korean-language guidebooks on tourism in Kyushu, the mainland Japanese region closest to the Asian continent.

Last week the *Yomiuri Shimbun* looked forward to a recovery in the number of Chinese tourists visiting Japan once the negative impact on tourism of the Senkaku incident stops reverberating.

Finally, it was recently reported that the Japan Tourism Agency has begun a three month series of seminars to teach Japanese hoteliers and merchants skills for hosting Chinese tourists, including lessons in conversational Chinese.

Nishio and other neonationalist writers, however, have built their ideological brand on opposition to these pragmatic and apparently much desired deeper connections.

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