The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus
In-depth critical analysis of the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific...and the world.

Nationalism and the China-Japan Conflict

by Asahi Shimbun

[As China-Japan relations entered their tensest period since the reestablishment of diplomatic relations in 1972, Japan's Asahi Shimbun appraised the situation in an article by its China bureau chief and an editorial. Noting the role of the Chinese government in fueling the current wave of protests and of the police in failing to curb violence directed against the Japanese embassy, the newspaper called on it to rein in nationalist actions that could jeopardize the flourishing economic relations between the two nations. The Asahi locates the protests in the context of Chinese responses to Japan's textbook controversy and its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. It warns the governments of both countries that the genie of nationalism, once out of the bottle, may be difficult to curb, a warning with deep historical roots in the China-Japan relationship. The Asahi texts make no mention, however, of rising nationalism in Japan, nor do they specify ways in which Japanese government and people might contribute to easing the tensions that threaten the relationship between Asia's most powerful nations. Japan Focus]

Beijing can't keep love-hate relations

By Fujiwara Hidehito

Anti-Japan feelings are also related to future issues.

BEIJING-Just last month, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao described Sino-Japanese relations as the most important bilateral relationship for China.

However, Japanese who watched TV images of the weekend protests against Japan in China cannot be blamed if they doubt the accuracy of Wen's description.

For Japanese wondering if China is truly pushing a policy of emphasizing closer ties with Japan or if it is actually anti-Japanese, the answer is Beijing always uses both stances simultaneously in its dealings with Tokyo.

Chinese leaders have emphasized close ties with Tokyo because they cannot afford to ignore Japan, the world's second largest economy. That stance has continued for the quarter-century since China embarked on economic reform.

At the same time, Beijing has fueled anti-Japanese sentiment with its long-held policy of inculcating Chinese youth about China's victory over Japan in World War II. The lessons tend to focus on the atrocities committed during Japan's invasion of the country.

Japan's own views of history, especially concerning World War II, have served as catalysts for touching off that anti-Japanese sentiment.
But the current anti-Japanese sentiment in China emerges not only from issues of the past, but is also entangled with issues related to the future.
Many of the protesters over the weekend were critical of Japan's bid to gain a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. Such a move would affect the dynamics of bilateral relations between Japan and China.

Younger Chinese have become more confident in the face of their country's amazing economic achievements. For them, a change in Sino-Japanese relations caused by an expanded Security Council is more important than issues related to the past, for example, Prime Minister Koizumi' Junichiro s visits to Yasukuni Shrine.

Complicating the situation is the fact that this year marks the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and, for China, the defeat of Japan.
Another concern is that the violent acts against the Japanese Embassy in Beijing indicate a growing inability of the Chinese leadership to grasp the depth of discontent among the public.

Six years ago, demonstrations against the U.S. Embassy were much more violent than those over the past weekend. Chinese protesters in 1999 vented their anger at the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, which led to casualties among Chinese officials.

After a few days of protests, Hu Jintao, then China's vice president, went on state television to call for securing social stability.

In a similar manner, Chinese authorities have been slow to crack down on the anti-Japanese protesters, although tighter measures will likely be taken in the near future if the authorities feel a threat to social stability.

But amid a rising surge of nationalism, Chinese youth may turn increasingly to the Internet and e-mail if they do not find the Communist Party-controlled media to their liking.

China implemented an educational policy emphasizing patriotism and state control of the media to achieve stability. However, that very policy may have sown the seeds for instability among the Chinese public.

The problem facing China's leaders may be much deeper than they realize.

This article appeared in the IHT/Asahi: April 12,2005.

Fujiwara Hidehito is Asahi Shimbun China Bureau ChiefProtests in China

Why didn't the Chinese authorities do something?

Asahi Shimbun editorial

Increasingly anti-Japan demonstrations in China have sent bilateral ties to their lowest ebb since diplomatic relations were normalized in 1972.
On Saturday, about 10,000 demonstrators took to the streets in Beijing. The protesters hurled stones and plastic water bottles at the Japanese Embassy and damaged Japanese restaurants. Demonstrations also spilled over to Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province in the south and Chengdu in Sichuan province. In Shanghai, two Japanese students were beaten and injured by protesters.

Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura summoned Chinese Ambassador Wang Yi to formally protest the incidents and request that Beijing do its best to protect Japanese businesses and citizens in China.

About a week ago, demonstrations in Chengdu resulted in smashed windowpanes of a supermarket operated by a Japanese-affiliated company. That prompted Tokyo to press Beijing to take steps to prevent a recurrence of similar incidents and to secure the safety of its citizens. Groups that are hostile to Japan had actively spent the previous few days trying to get people to join Saturday's demonstration in Beijing. Yet, the Chinese government did not take sufficient precautionary measures to deal with the demonstration. We cannot understand why it failed to do so. In Beijing, a heavy police presence was deployed in front of the Japanese Embassy. But the police did nothing when the crowd repeatedly threw stones. In fact, they looked the other way. The demonstrators went back to the university district in buses prepared after the dust had settled.

We wonder if the Chinese authorities didn't care if the protests got out of hand? The matter is beyond our comprehension.

Maybe the authorities feared the mob would turn on them if the marchers were forcibly put under control. There is widespread discontent in today's China: corruption and other forms of injustices, such as the wide disparity in people's income, top the list of grievances. Perhaps, the authorities feared this general state of disgruntlement would be directed at the Communist Party or the government as and when the opportunity permits.

Or maybe they wanted to impress upon Japan and the world the extent of anti-Japanese sentiment in China. Whatever the reason, we believe the Chinese authorities need to demonstrate that it will not tolerate such violent demonstrations. If such acts are condoned in the capital, they easily can spread to provincial districts.

Anti-China and Sinophobic sentiment in general will likely grow in Japan if such violent anti-Japanese demonstrations continue. Similar turmoil erupted at the Asian Cup soccer games in China last year. As it happens, only a handful of demonstrators actually took part in throwing stones. Most of the participants, even if they do harbor anti-Japanese feelings, would not have thought of resorting to violence.

As for how Japanese perceive history, a major issue for the Chinese people, many Japanese think seriously about it and are trying to address opinions voiced by neighboring countries. Further acts of violence will serve only to dampen sensible opinion in both countries. In fact, it could become overwhelmed by antagonistic emotions.

We wish to address the governments of the two countries: even though nationalism of one country often clashes with that of another, it is the role of governments to devise ways to prevent emotions from getting out of control.

In recent days, all the two governments have done is to simply state their positions regarding the issues including Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro 's visit to Yasukuni Shrine or China's development of oil resources in the East China Sea. Some even go so far as to say, "Let the issue take its own course."

They may think a crisis in bilateral relations will somehow be averted at the last moment. But popular sentiment of the two countries, once hurt, cannot be repaired

--The Asahi Shimbun, April 11(IHT/Asahi: April 12,2005)

Posted at Japan Focus April 13, 2005.

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