



## **China's anti-Japan campaign** by Hiroshi Hirabayashi

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China's anti-Japan campaign has crossed the limits of both decency and geography. Since the visit by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to Yasukuni Shrine in December, China has fully mobilized its media and diplomatic resources overseas to vilify Abe in an attempt to damage Japan's international status. This campaign, if it continues, may hurt Japan to some extent but it could backfire against China itself.

To understand the current Japan-China relationship, it is useful to put it in a historical perspective. The normalization of relations between Japan and Communist China was made possible by the Joint Statement of 1972. The statement was the fruit of farsightedness and strong leadership by Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei of Japan. The preamble of the statement declares that the two countries are "separated only by a strip of water with a long history of friendship." Japan and China are destined to coexist and cooperate. Together they can bring enormous benefits to the two nations and uphold peace and prosperity in East Asia and even beyond.

I worked in Beijing as a young diplomat from 1974 to 1976. I witnessed the last years of the Cultural Revolution and had the chance to see the funerals of the three founding fathers of the Chinese communist regime: Mao, Zhou Enlai, and Gen. Zhu De. I was one of the first foreigners to report on the fall of "the Gang of Four."

Deng Xiaoping, a target of criticism during the Cultural Revolution and persecuted by Red Guards and Mao himself, then took the reins of China as uncontested leader. He introduced a sort of state-managed capitalism while maintaining a communist dictatorship. On the diplomatic front, he led China's foreign policy and military development with the slogan "Hide our brightness and bide our time." Since then, China enjoyed remarkable economic development that benefitted the Chinese people and their neighbors, including Japan. Under his guidance, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Japan was signed in 1978. Since then, Japan aided China's economic development, especially infrastructure building, by providing a large amount of Official Development Assistance. Despite a rapid increase in and lack of transparency regarding military expenditure, the "peaceful rise" of China did not alarm its neighbors.

With the tenure of Communist Party Chairman Jiang Zemin, Japan-China relations plummeted as he encouraged "patriotic education," which was interpreted as a euphemism for anti-Japan education. After more or less normal relations

under his successor Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping seems to have abandoned Deng's admonition to "bide our time." He proclaimed that his dream was to regain the great China of yesteryear. With increased military might, China has started to challenge the status quo of East Asia with threatening claims on the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and the Spratly and Paracel islands in the South China Sea.

China's denunciation of Japan under the Abe administration centers on two themes. One is what China describes as a "revival of Japanese militarism." The other is "historical revisionism," by which Abe allegedly intends to change the post-World War II order imposed by the "victorious powers." Rather than mobilizing the Chinese public and invoking anti-Japanese riots, which would risk a backlash against the communist dictatorship, China has opted to appeal to the allied powers of WWII. By presenting the Abe administration as challenging the post-WWII regime, China intends to mobilize international pressure on Japan. In addition, China wants to drive a wedge into the Japan-US alliance and between Japan-ROK relations.

China's anti-Japan rhetoric appears to be falling on deaf ears, however. No country has joined the anti-Japan campaign, except South Korea, which is led by the openly anti-Japan administration of President Park Geun-hye and a national media known for its negative portrayal of Japan. China's excessive actions may backfire and will, in any case, work against its national interests.

The weakness of China's anti-Japan campaign stems from the fact that the rhetoric betrays the facts and contrasts sharply with how China has behaved. China's national military spending has grown significantly in the past 20 years, with double-digit increases every year during this period. Meanwhile, Beijing's military expenditure continues to lack transparency. By contrast, Japanese defense expenditure has been minimal, at around 1 percent of GDP and has, over the course of a decade, in fact, decreased by 6 percent. While Chinese military expenditure tends to concentrate on offensive weaponry, including nuclear and offensive missile systems, Japanese expenditure has been directed only to defensive weaponry, reflecting a self-imposed "defense only" policy.

China's communist government and its powerful military establishment have made clear, through words and deeds, their intention to use these increased capabilities to pursue and eventually secure territorial gains against neighboring countries, including Japan and Southeast Asian states.

It is clear which of the two nations is moving aggressively against the international order. China's increasing threats tend to destabilize the status quo, which has been accepted for decades by all countries. In a drive for regional hegemony, China has been proposing to the US a "new type of great power relationship" to manage world affairs. Some Chinese

military leaders and opinion-makers have gone so far as to propose the division of the Pacific Ocean into east and west, with the former under US dominance and the latter under Chinese dominance. The US will not take the bait. China is also working to establish posts in the Indian Ocean in countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar, as part of the “the String of Pearls” strategy, to encircle India with the ports of China’s construction.

During the negotiations to conclude the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the Chinese government requested that Japan accept an “anti-hegemony clause” in the Treaty as a warning to the Soviet Union. The Japanese government acquiesced to this request and the “anti-hegemony” clause was introduced as Article 2 of the Treaty. It stipulates that both countries would not seek hegemony in Asia-Pacific region nor in any other part of the globe, and that both countries would oppose hegemony by any third party. China’s expansionist policy of today in Asia clearly betrays the words and spirit of the Treaty.

When Prime Minister Abe visited Yasukuni Shrine, he made it clear that he prays for the souls of soldiers and civilians who sacrificed their lives for the nation, from the civil wars fought around the Meiji Restoration until WWII. He made a solemn pledge that Japan would never again wage war. To further clarify his intent, Abe also visited “Chinrei-sha (“Sooth the Souls Shrine)” located in the same compound, which commemorates all who died in war, irrespective of nationality. Abe has no intention to pay tribute to Class A war criminals, even though they have been enshrined since 1978. Roughly 5 million Japanese people visit Yasukuni Shrine every year and they have no intention to pray for war criminals. They visit Yasukuni Shrine with the same spirit and good intentions as Americans (and others) who visit Arlington Cemetery.

China blames Japan for a revival of “militarism.” Yet after WWII Japan has never used any weapon against any nation, while China has been involved in armed conflicts with its neighbors. During the Korean War, China sent PLA soldiers to South Korea to fight against South Korean armies and UN troops. In 1979, China attacked Vietnam. China’s PLA soldiers periodically intrude on Indian territories in Northeast Arnachal Pradesh region and Northwest Kashmir. Chinese coast guard ships violate Japanese territorial and adjacent waters around the Senkaku Islands on an almost daily basis. They also patrol in the South China Sea to impose territorial claims on the Spratly and Paracel islands, which lay close to the shores of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei. It seems like China will eventually use its first aircraft carrier *Liaoning* to exert pressure against its neighbors. Neighboring countries including Japan practice the utmost restraint to avoid giving China a pretext to attack.

I believe that China is one of the great nations in world history. Chairman Xi Jinping stated that he would realize his “dream” to revive an old “China-centered world”. However, I firmly believe that China’s expansionism and its drive to hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region will not serve well this “dream.” In fact, these actions will alienate and antagonize current and future friends of China. China’s anti-Japan campaign seeks to isolate Japan in the international community through grossly misleading demagoguery. Countries

know, however, that as a defender and practitioner of democracy and human rights, law-abiding Japan has been one of the most peace-loving nations since WWII. Conversely, China is a totalitarian regime that violates the human rights of its own people.

If China wants to become a truly great nation, its leadership would be well advised not to follow the example of the Chin Dynasty, which gained the biggest territorial space through the military conquests of its neighbors. It would do better to follow the example of the Tang Dynasty, which attracted peoples along the Silk Road and Japan with its great cultural, technological, and religious achievements.

My dream is different from that of Xi. I wish to see China become a great nation that is respected and admired, with a corresponding soft power capacity. I would hate to see China to become merely a big nation, treated with fear by its neighbors and with suspicion by the international community.

*PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed.*