

## Japan's Images of China in the 1990s: Are They Ready for China's 'Smile Diplomacy' or Bush's 'Strong Diplomacy'?

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### ABSTRACT

Both the US and China are pressing Japan to tilt its foreign policy in their direction. Japan's response depends on views of China, which turned negative as assumptions proved incorrect. Early expectations were challenged in 1990–94, despite hopes of becoming a bridge between the US and China, and were dashed from 1995. The struggle among four schools of thought intensified. The full engagement group lost the most ground. The predominantly engagement, potential threat group was attacked as the mainstream, but it survived as the best option for global political leverage. The predominantly containment, possible engagement group gained as China allowed rising nationalism to target Japan. The full containment group also gained, boosted by Japanese nationalism anxious to rationalize the war era. More than reacting to Chinese or US actions, Japanese views are driven by instability in national identity. The US should be wary of encouraging containment of China because of its impact on rising Japanese nationalism.

A tug-of-war over Japan is beginning. On one side is the Bush administration's new 'strong diplomacy' under a foreign policy team steeped in containment. On the other is the Chinese government's 'smile diplomacy' symbolized by Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's October 2000 visit to Tokyo.<sup>1</sup> From late 1999 Beijing has taken an increasingly 'soft' approach toward Tokyo, recognizing that the 'hard' image projected during President Jiang Zemin's visit to Japan in November 1998 had alienated Japanese public opinion.<sup>2</sup> Through most of the 1990s Chinese leaders had paid scant regard to their country's image in Japan, seemingly indifferent to the plunge in support and sympathy. But, as prospects dimmed for ameliorating relations with the US and tensions across the Taiwan straits showed little sign of

<sup>1</sup> 'Zhu Rongji no "bisho" no imi', *Sentaku*, November 2000, pp. 32–3.

<sup>2</sup> *Asahi shimbun*, 21 October 1999, p. 4. In an interview in Beijing Asahi's political observer was told that China is ready 'to throw a peach and get back a pear' in an attempt to shift relations mired in doubt and distrust from 'emotions' to 'national interests'.

easing, Beijing decided that Japan is its best bet in the triangular lineup across the China Sea. In the election campaign of 2000 Republicans who criticized the Clinton administration as weak on China and as having neglected Japan called for a closer alliance with Japan.<sup>3</sup> The Bush team rode into office confident that a further tilt in US preferences in Asia toward Japan would be welcome and would lead to a more unified and effective approach toward China.<sup>4</sup> In order to predict the outcome of this unprecedented struggle we need to start with Japanese views of China.

Early in our new century, Sino-Japanese ties are, arguably, the most important global relationship not involving the US directly. Those ties have been changing in ways not well understood in much of the world, and Japanese perceptions of China are one of the driving forces. They also serve as a guide to the evolution of Japan's own great power identity, perched between membership in the 'West' and 'reentry' into Asia, between an identity as a non-nuclear 'peace' state and a shift to a 'normal' power ready for an arms race with a regional rival. More than perceptions of any other country, perceptions of China in Japan were the swing perceptions of the 1990s. Instead of following the example of China in the Cold War by switching sides from its patron and close ally, Japan moved closer to the US, influenced by negative images of China. But in the year 2000 the momentum may have shifted towards a forward-looking approach toward China.

Outsiders have had difficulty understanding Japanese attitudes toward China. On the one hand, many who regard China as a threat were perplexed by Japanese hesitancy to recognize the danger from China's growing military power, human rights violations, and inclination to resort to force over Taiwan. In 1989–93 they pondered why Japan was so 'soft' on China, exercising 'the maximum autonomy it felt Washington would tolerate'.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, those hopeful about winning the hearts and minds of the Chinese people have been dismayed by the inability of the Japanese government, reinforced by the apathy of the Japanese people, to express and feel true contrition about an invasion that left a horrible stain on humanity. In 1995, when Diet resolutions marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of Japan's military occupation were eviscerated, and again in 1997–8, at the time of the sixtieth anniversary of the 'rape of Nanjing', there was talk about why the Japanese keep denying the truth about history. Negative coverage continues, along with reports of very negative attitudes in China toward Japan.<sup>6</sup> Even when Chinese leaders elect to minimize their reactions to new verbal provocations, such as remarks by Prime

<sup>3</sup> Robert Zoellick, 'A Republican Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000, pp. 74–5.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Green, 'Preparing for New Teams in Tokyo and Washington', *Pacific Forum CSIS: Comparative Connections*, 2, 4, January 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Michael H. Armacost, *Friends or Rivals? The Insider's Account of US–Japan Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 140

<sup>6</sup> On the Public Broadcasting System and in other media targeted at the elite in the US, there is no sympathy for Japanese explanations of the history of Sino-Japanese relations, although doubts are raised too about Chinese overreactions. *The New York Times*, 7 August 2000, p. A6.

Minister Mori Yoshiro waffling over whether the war with China was a war of aggression,<sup>7</sup> others recognize that the impact would do no good for Japan's image. It is easy to be confused about the true inclinations of the Japanese.<sup>8</sup>

Already in October 1999 after Beijing made known to Tokyo its readiness to improve relations, newspapers in Japan began to discuss who would play the role of a 'pipe' to try to bridge the differences between the two countries. In the shadow of deteriorating US–Chinese relations, the Japanese considered at least three options. On the right, as reflected in *Sankei shimbun*, they could oppose the choice of anyone suspected of being soft on China and insist that this was a time to stand tough.<sup>9</sup> Some equated the conditions to those facing the US and Japan in the first half of the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan led the way in opposing the 'evil empire' in the Soviet Union and helped to induce change in a weakening system. In the center, as reported in the English-language *The Japan Times*, new overtures from Japan could supplement efforts by the Clinton administration to bring China into the WTO and calm its fears after the regrettable bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Cautious engagement through coordination could maximize the chances of responsible Chinese behavior. And, on the left, there was a renewal of interest in forging a China policy that gave Japan some independence of the US and halted the mounting pressure at home for constitutional revision to allow more leeway to Japan's military in the face of China and North Korea. Although *Asahi shimbun* had lost some of its zeal in supporting an independent foreign policy toward China, it welcomed the role as a pipe of Kato Koichi, a top LDP politician who had offended the right by asserting that the new Japan–US defense guidelines did not reach as far as Taiwan.<sup>10</sup> With Sino-US tensions mounting over Taiwan and proposals for a US national missile defense, divisions within Japan were sharpening even before Beijing's 'smile diplomacy' had really begun and the Bush administration had taken power.

This paper covers a broad range of views; culled from the writings of academics, state officials, the media, and business voices. It traces the mainstream response over

<sup>7</sup> James Pryzstup, 'Japan-China Relations, April–June 2000, Old Issues . . . And New Approaches?', *Comparative Connections: An E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, [www.csis.org/pacfor](http://www.csis.org/pacfor), 21 July 2000, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Usually, analysts interested in relations from the Japanese side survey policies toward China, treating a succession of milestones that have proven to be newsworthy, mostly high-level meetings between leaders that emphasize the positive, interrupted by periodic outrageous statements by Japanese officials that result in howls of protest in China and their forced resignation. The result is a contradictory image, feeding views of superficial support for improved ties, buttressed less and less by lingering guilt and barely holding in check deep-seated Japanese feelings of resentment. Increasingly, such 'arrogance' is treated in Japan and abroad as no more a problem in relations than is Chinese 'arrogance' in using 'history' to force unequal relations in which only China has the moral right to build up its armed forces and stir up nationalism.

<sup>9</sup> *Sankei shimbun*, 29 October 1999, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Asahi shimbun*, 29 October 1999, p. 7.

the decade, then differentiating four main viewpoints as they competed for acceptance.<sup>11</sup> The final section draws lessons from the balance of views, at the same time reviewing factors that may decide the Japanese elite's response to the choice before it. Without claiming to do justice to the diversity of thinking, I divide Japanese views of China into four groups:<sup>12</sup> (1) full engagement; (2) predominantly engagement, but also preparation for a potential threat; (3) predominantly containment, but also preparedness to engage China; and (4) full containment. These positions largely follow the political spectrum from left to right, although at times in the 1990s some on the right have preferred limited engagement in the hope that this would enhance Japan's leverage versus the US. Through the 1990s the 'full engagement' school was losing steam as the 'full containment' school began to be noticed, but at the decade's end the struggle was mostly between the middle groups; first the 'predominantly containment' group rose fast, then the 'predominantly engagement' group made a comeback. The earlier consensus was yielding to an intense struggle.

#### **A chronology of Japanese views on China**

During the early 1980s, 'naïve romanticism' about China was widely evident in Japan, fueled not only by the old left but also by some enthusiasts over China's new economic reforms. In June 1983, 17 per cent of the Japanese described China as Japan's 'greatest friend', second only to 39 per cent who saw the US in that role. Altogether 72 per cent of respondents regarded China as 'friendly'.<sup>13</sup> Whereas in the 1970s, Japanese scholars had used China as a platform for ideological debate, much of it sympathetic, and newspaper coverage was not very critical except the pro-Taiwan

<sup>11</sup> All five of the national newspapers cover China extensively, including editorial views and solicitation of commentaries by experts. The weekly and monthly general affairs journals also regularly report on China, sustaining a national debate on timely topics. The major international affairs journals such as *Sekai shuho*, *Gaiko forum*, and *Kokusai mondai* offer some of the sharpest analysis. In addition, specialized journals on China such as *Toa*, are informative on economics and other areas. Large bookstores carry dozens of recent selections, some popularized and often sensationalized and others designed for the informed reader. The literature in Japanese on China is comparable in quantity to that in English and additionally much more richly conveys the mood of a shared national discussion about timely issues. Chinese publications on Japanese views of China have also improved markedly and deserve to be consulted. I have not cited them due to space constraints, but useful articles appear in journals such as *Riben xuekan* and *Ribenxue luntan*.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Morse has published diagrams of Tokyo and Washington's shakers and movers on China. He used three concentric circles and placed individuals from four types of groups – Japanese politicians, business and lobbyists, Japanese bureaucrats, and media land and think tanks – in the four quadrants. Along the circumference of the outermost circle are those who are soft on China. At the center of the innermost circle are those who are hard. In the middle circle are those who fit neither extreme. In his very brief exposition, Morse did not explain what views he is calling soft or hard or why he classifies the various people listed as he does. Here I do not consider the American circle, and I subdivide the middle circle, which deserves even more attention than the extremes. Ronald Morse, *Sankei shimbun*, 3 August 1999, p. 4

<sup>13</sup> Ryosei Kokubun, 'The Current State of Contemporary Chinese Studies in Japan: A Research Note', Tokyo: unpublished manuscript, 1984, p. 2.

*Sankei shimbun*, the new decade witnessed a shift to detailed factual coverage able to elicit a more wide-ranging positive image. In analyses of the struggle over reform, the Japanese largely took for granted that East Asian civilization would overwhelm communist revolution. The rise of China would enhance, not challenge, Japan's regional and global status. As suspicions ran high of the US recklessly pressing human rights in a manner that threatened Chinese stability and ruthlessly working to overtake Japan in their economic rivalry and competition in the burgeoning Chinese market,<sup>14</sup> the Japanese viewed China as their special project.

Japanese policy toward China in the 1970s and much of the 1980s was premised on assumptions that have not held up well in the 1990s. First, the Japanese considered China a friendly power, sharing with the US and Japan antagonism toward a powerful enemy in the Soviet Union. In a contest for hegemony in the Asia-Pacific, China was important for the balance favoring Japan's side. Yet, by 1982, China had shifted toward equidistance between the US and Soviet Union, and its strategic priorities increasingly differed from those in Japan in subsequent years. Second, China appeared as a relatively weak power. Although some Japanese were known to be somewhat disturbed by the emerging Sino-American military cooperation by the mid 1980s,<sup>15</sup> they regarded China's overall power as quite limited. Nobody anticipated the rapid rise in China's national power that has occurred, including the military buildup of late with Soviet arms imports. Third, the Japanese viewed China as a vital, if difficult part, of regionalism in Asia under Tokyo's economic leadership by: (1) assuaging the legacy of Japan's war guilt, reasoning that if even China could accept Japan others would be unlikely to raise this issue in a serious manner; and (2) building strong economic ties. With trade of more than \$13 billion in 1984, Japan was by far China's leading trade partner.<sup>16</sup> Today, the Japanese view China as a rival for regional leadership, whose dependence on Japan is declining. Fourth, despite doubts about long-term Chinese pragmatism toward economic growth and political development, the Japanese were generally encouraged by such steps as the establishment of a Japan–China Friendship Committee for the Twenty-first Century, Hu Yaobang's invitation to a delegation of 3,000 Japanese youths to visit for National Day in October 1984, and even the beginnings of exchanges of defense-related specialists and officials. Although symbols of close friendship were fading, they retained a lingering impact in the first half of the 1990s.

In the 1980s, bilateral relations had been jolted every two or three years by a symbolic question, such as the issue of one-sided Japanese textbooks or visits to the Yasukuni shrine. But change was cyclical, avoiding any decisive worsening for three basic reasons, according to Tanaka Akihiko: (1) China remained committed to an open-door policy; (2) the Japanese felt guilty about Japan's invasion of China; and

<sup>14</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 18–24 October 1993, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Masashi Nishihara, *East Asian Security and the Trilateral Countries* (New York: The Trilateral Commission, 1985), p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

(3) the structure of the international environment in East Asia favored improved bilateral relations. Indeed, an elder generation, including powerful figures such as former Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, kept managing ties behind the scenes until their deaths created a vacuum in personal networks that led to a search in the late 1990s for a new generation of middle-ranking Dietmen to establish ties with emerging leaders in China. The events of 1989 cast doubt on these factors, especially the third. Concluding that it would be difficult for Japan to continue to work actively to advance bilateral relations, Tanaka added that the Tiananmen repression had accelerated the reduction in Japanese guilt toward China.<sup>17</sup>

#### Views from 1990–4

Even after Tokyo imposed sanctions along with the West, the Japanese overwhelmingly took the position that Japan must fully engage China. In the first years of the post-Cold War era, two factors kept hopes quite high. One was a distinctive view of great powers: the delayed recognition that the Soviet threat had ended in Asia too, accompanied by over optimism that problems of regional security with China could be addressed and over pessimism that rising protectionism would harm Japanese–US relations. Preoccupied with the territorial dispute with Moscow and angered over Boris Yeltsin’s rude cancellation of a planned visit in September 1992, the Japanese were slow to acknowledge the drastically new security environment in Northeast Asia.<sup>18</sup> The other factor was high expectations for regionalism, opening up the possibility of a new priority for economic cooperation with Asia and a pivotal role between the US and China, whose relations had soured. Many expected to combine the goals of sponsoring China’s reacceptance into the global community and boosting Japan’s rise as a great power as the Soviet Union collapsed and the US gradually declined.<sup>19</sup> The Japanese claimed a new role,<sup>20</sup> coping with ambivalence to US arm-twisting with new forms of multilateralism in Asia, showing reluctance to support a regional security regime that excluded China,<sup>21</sup> and basking in closer economic ties with China, now the second largest trading partner after the US.<sup>22</sup> With China still isolated, Prime Minister Kaifu visited Beijing in August 1991, advocating a special bilateral bond as part of a new international order.<sup>23</sup>

Especially in 1992 hopes rose that relations with China would soon be on the upswing. Deng Xiaoping’s speech propelling China towards a market economy was

<sup>17</sup> Tanaka Akihiko, *Nitchu kankei 1945–1990* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1991), pp. 166–7.

<sup>18</sup> Gilbert Rozman (ed.), *Japan and Russia: The Tortuous Path to Normalization, 1949–1999* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Tanaka Akihiko, ‘Tainichi kankei’, in Okabe Tatsuo (ed.), *Chugoku soran 1992* (Tokyo, 1992), p. 120.

<sup>20</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 19–25 August 1991, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Takashi Inoguchi, ‘Japan’s Foreign Policy in East Asia’, *Current History*, December 1992, pp. 408, 410.

<sup>22</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 31 January–6 February 1994, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Asahi shimbun*, 12 August 1991, p. 1.

followed in April by Jiang Zemin's visit, in which he spoke of Japan's positive role in world peace and prosperity, suggesting that China was, more than before, putting the past aside.<sup>24</sup> When Emperor Akihito made an historic visit to China without incident, it seemed that the time was ripe for giving 'Tokyo a freer hand in pursuing future-oriented policies in Asia'.<sup>25</sup> (Deng Xiaoping was reported to have 'expressed a desire to let bygones be bygones'.)<sup>26</sup> The Japanese expected to use new guidelines on economic assistance as leverage against excessive military programs,<sup>27</sup> confident of the power of economic diplomacy.<sup>28</sup> Feeling that they understood China better because the 'Confucian concept of social order remains a persistent force in Chinese social life', some said that, unlike Americans, they were prepared to wait patiently, giving priority to avoiding political and economic chaos in China and nudging China on human rights while not 'isolating China and forcing it into confrontation with the West'.<sup>29</sup> 'Japan should not take opportunistic advantage of its neighbor no matter how dependent China may become upon its largess . . .' – 'a weak, confused China poses a greater threat than a strong China'.<sup>30</sup>

Only in 1994 do opinion polls show a sharp drop in the course of one year in giving priority to Asia (from 15.4 per cent to 10.1 per cent) accompanied by a rise in promoting economic cooperation from a global perspective (from 19.2 per cent to 24.6 per cent).<sup>31</sup> But as of October 1994, when the survey was taken, the Japanese who felt 'a sense of affinity' toward China still outnumbered those who answered negatively by 51.3 per cent to 44.2 per cent and those who considered relations between Japan and China 'sound as a whole' were 53.3 per cent as opposed to 33.8 per cent who replied in the negative. Through 1994 the Japanese were largely optimistic about China, counting on its weakness, on economic interdependence, and on a pivotal role for Tokyo between Washington and Beijing. Acknowledging the possibility of negative scenarios, experts attached greater likelihood to positive ones.

### Views from 1995–2000

The proximate causes for a sharp deterioration in images of China were widely reported. Agitated by their nuclear allergy, the Japanese reacted harshly to Chinese nuclear tests after other powers had agreed on a ban. The fiftieth anniversary of the

<sup>24</sup> Kokubun Ryosei, 'Jiang Zemin shi no honichi: tainichi seisaku henka no kizashi', *Toa*, No. 6, 1992, pp. 2–3.

<sup>25</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 24–30 August, 1992, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 14–21 December 1998, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, November 16–22, 1992, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Qingxin Ken Wang, 'Recent Japanese Economic Diplomacy in China: Political Alignment in a Changing World Order', *Asian Survey*, 33, 6, June 1993, pp. 625–41.

<sup>29</sup> Takashi Sugimoto, 'Building a New Japan-China Relationship', IIIGP Policy Paper 100E, September 1992, pp. 11 and 14.

<sup>30</sup> Tatsumi Okabe, 'Japan's Future China Policy: China Committee Report-Volume 4', *IIIGP Special Report*, October 1990, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 'Public Opinion Survey on Diplomacy (Summary)', Tokyo: Foreign Press Center, April 1995, p. 17.

end of Japan's invasion brought mutual recriminations, reopening wounds that the Japanese had hoped had healed. Then, the Taiwan issue rose to the forefront as China fired missiles and US aircraft carriers made a show of force. Seen in hindsight the events of these years proved not to be isolated incidents. They were markers on a path of deteriorating relations that only, with much effort, could be reversed. *Asahi* observer Funabashi Yoichi went so far as to say that failure in the mid 1990s of the new Asianism centered on China marked a second defeat for Japan after that by the US.<sup>32</sup>

At the root of the problem was the realization of an unexpected power balance: Japan's national power appeared much shakier after the collapse of the bubble economy and the intensive self-criticism of an outdated model of development. Suddenly China's comprehensive power loomed large: double-digit growth became a fixture, the World Bank upgraded its evaluation of China's economy based on purchasing power, and China displayed an assertive foreign policy. Many reconsidered their 'unguarded optimism' by seeking to explain why, while Tokyo is extending its internationalist approach in the post Cold War era, 'Beijing seems unable to comprehend this need for cooperation.'<sup>33</sup> Soon talk intensified that China might become a hegemonic power. Projected increases in military spending and a new hard-line stance on claims to the Senkaku (Diaoyutai) islands, were seen by some as one possible scenario of China's seizure of hegemony in Asia and a reenactment of the global power-balance game with twenty-first century weaponry.<sup>34</sup>

Despite reluctance to abandon high expectations for China's integration and Japan's leadership role through multilateral organizations such as APEC to achieve open regionalism,<sup>35</sup> analysts searched for new tools to shape Chinese behavior – a shift from all-out toward tempered engagement. On the right, this was a matter of national dignity, as Japan, which had welcomed the end of the Cold War as a chance to boost its global power, was being relegated to the sidelines. On the left, it became a test of the relevance of its remaining ideals, employing the 1991 charter for Overseas Development Assistance to reduce aid to a country that tested nuclear bombs in defiance of global opinion. Marginalized by global events of 1989–91, both used China to win a new lease on life.

An unprecedented political coalition obscured for a time the divergence across the political spectrum in responses to the rise of China. At the very time disillusionment with China was growing, prime ministers on the left led Japan. In early 1994 when optimism was still high amidst talk of a 'Sino-Japanese cooperation boom' and

<sup>32</sup> Funabashi Yoichi, 'Chugoku to no tsukiaikata o ayamaru na', *Chuo koron*, July, 1998, pp. 36–8.

<sup>33</sup> Shin'ichi Kitaoka, 'Putting Old Diplomatic Principles into New Bottles', *Japan Echo*, 21, 1, Spring 1994, pp. 66–7.

<sup>34</sup> Akihiko Tanaka, 'Hegemony, Chaos, Interdependence: Three Scenarios for China', *Japan Echo*, 21, 3, Autumn 1994, pp. 43–5.

<sup>35</sup> Okabe Tatsuo, 'Ajia taiheiyō no naka no Nihon', in Okabe Tatsuo (ed.), *Posuto reisen Ajia taiheiyō* (Tokyo: Nihon kokusai mondai kenkyūjo, 1995), pp. 1–24.



with the maturing of Sino-Japanese relations into a new age of all-around development, Hosokawa Morihiro sought Chinese cooperation in containing the threat of nuclear weapons in North Korea and appealed to China to use restraint in nuclear testing, distancing himself with China from the West by asserting that to impose western democratic values on other countries is not sensible.<sup>36</sup> On the fiftieth anniversary of the war's end, the socialist Murayama Tomiichi made the strongest statement yet on Japan's wartime excesses, but he served in a coalition with the LDP and could do nothing when the Diet and prefectural assemblies resisted apologies. He made little imprint after he left office when he called on his countrymen 'to face up to Nanjing'.<sup>37</sup> The left fell virtually silent at this critical time. Instead of being challenged to reassess their assumptions about history, the Japanese people took the cooptation of the left to mean that history no longer mattered. If the Chinese keep raising it, they must be driven by nationalism, as in the threat to use force over Taiwan.

At the low point in relations in 1996 a mood of containment arose under the impact of differences over: nuclear testing (China's final blast occurred in July and Japan's ODA suspension lasted until March 1997); Taiwan (including the meaning of Japan's April agreement with the US on security guidelines that might extend to the Taiwan straits); a territorial dispute (as some Japanese built a light house on the Sentaku Islands); and treatment of history (as many Japanese responded defensively to Chinese criticism of Prime Minister Hashimoto's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine).<sup>38</sup> China acquired the image of a strong competitor, a stubborn antagonist determined to gain at Japan's expense, and a growing security problem. It had become a rival, more than a means to Asian regionalism.

By 1996 all of Japan's assumptions of the 1980s were called into question. There was no longer a common enemy. China's military buildup backed by Soviet arms sales appeared threatening, and its economic growth rate coupled with Japan's stagnation left doubt about Japan's future leadership. Rather than easing the way to regional acceptance of Japan, China was challenging Japan's moral right and overall leadership within the region. It was growing more high-handed in using the historical card and more critical in views of Japan. The legacy endures of this erosion of trust in China's leaders and people.

As relations began to improve from the fall of 1996, the Japanese turned to analysis of great power relations in managing China. As Washington pressed Beijing for closer ties, and Tokyo began to fret about 'Japan-passing' and the reliability of US support for Japan,<sup>39</sup> many felt isolated, newly wary of North Korea too. Under

<sup>36</sup> Tanaka Akihiko, 'Tainichi kankei', in Okabe Tatsuo (ed.), *Chugoku soran 1996* (Tokyo, 1996), p. 132.

<sup>37</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 21–7 August 1995, pp. 1, 5, 6, 1–7 June 1998, p. 3; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 23 June 1995, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Tanaka Akihiko, 'Tainichi kankei', in Okabe Tatsuo (ed.), *Chugoku soran 1998* (Tokyo, 1998), pp. 138–49.

<sup>39</sup> *Yomiuri shimbun*, 17 November 1995, p. 6.

these circumstances, support rose for working with Washington to bolster security ties, for beckoning to Moscow to restart the process of normalization, and for stabilizing ties with China on a more subdued footing. Economic ties between China and both Japan and the US were expanding rapidly; few wanted to see political ties deteriorate. The damage was only contained, however; not repaired. As official rhetoric supported the integration of China through WTO and the building of a balanced, stable triangular relationship including the U.S.,<sup>40</sup> debates focused on the means available over the long run to shape (or limit) China's rise.

Observers kept returning to the challenge of quelling new threats to stability in Sino-Japanese relations, notably after Jiang Zemin's visit in 1998 to Japan degenerated into nationalist outbursts in the media of both the Japanese and Chinese. One former Japanese diplomat said 'the Japanese people were left with a feeling close to rage at Jiang's words and actions'.<sup>41</sup> While the sources of tension in relations did not change much, the context kept evolving. The great power environment shifted as Sino-US ties rose and fell, Sino-Russian ties advanced, and Japanese-Russian ties began to improve before reaching an impasse. The Asian financial crisis and the launching of the WTO, with Japan and then the US supporting China's entry altered the regional economic context. The regional political context reflected changes in Taiwan's pursuit of independence and North Korea's shift from military provocations. If Japanese analysts largely felt relieved that ties with China did not exacerbate other problems in this fast-changing climate, they also fretted that relations were too fragile for genuine cooperation.

If the Japanese in 1990–4 had been more 'romantic' than Americans about China, then from 1995 they were more 'shocked' by the prospect of a 'China threat' and more 'sober' about efforts to stabilize and restart relations. When the Clinton team worked with China on a 'strategic partnership' to quiet fears over Taiwan and to move toward a new world order in which US leadership could achieve more, the Japanese feared instability too, but also a loss of clout among the great powers. Public opinion surveys from 1997 found that over half of Japanese respondents 'do not feel friendly toward China'.<sup>42</sup> But as damage control following the Jiang visit of 1998 gave way to 'smile diplomacy', a fierce debate was percolating over what China meant for Japan and how Japan should respond. The struggle among four schools of thought was intensifying.

### **The full engagement group**

Optimists toward China start with a more positive view of the country's history and often are emphatic in urging their fellow Japanese to assuage Chinese public opinion. Aware that those who remember the war with Japan will soon be dead, they

<sup>40</sup> Takazu Kuriyama, 'The United States, Japan and China: What Kind of a Triangle?' *Japan INFO*, December/ January 1998, p. 1

<sup>41</sup> *The Japan Times International*, 16–28 February 1998, p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 2–8 November 1998, p. 20.

insist, 'Japan must continue with its effort to convey its sincere message to the Chinese people' or 'Friendly acceptance by the Chinese people' is within reach. Meanwhile, Japan can wait patiently, avoid isolating China, and try to tone down the pressure from the West that fails to understand China and deepens the sense of isolation of its leaders.<sup>43</sup> In October 1992, editorial commentary on the Emperor's visit to China ranged from optimism, that the Chinese people would now appreciate 'how different Japan today is from prewar and wartime Japan' and the 'ill feelings held by the Chinese people' would be greatly lessened, to warnings, that so long as the Japanese 'people are not prepared to continue apologizing, Japan will not become a true neighbor of Asian nations'.<sup>44</sup> Although many on the right had tried to stop the visit from taking place, the media did not talk of this being the end of Japan's need to apologize, as it would a few years later. The right placed its hopes on a transition in China; the left expected that Japan could secure equal footing with China through a shift at home in history education and consciousness.

Until the end of the 1980s a virtual taboo existed inside Japan against considering China a threat. Some warned of the danger of a revival of the history theme both in Asia and at home. Once the understanding of 1972, in which China passed up reparations and Japan offered assistance along with an admission of a degree of guilt, was breached, passions unleashed in China might be difficult to contain and even the civil calm brought by a conspiracy of silence at home could be disturbed. Others justified the taboo with the Soviet threat and China's weakness. Why play with fire when the need to do so was low? But there were additional sources of support that could be more easily transferred to a new era. One was the ideal of reentering Asia through cultural affinity as well as economic integration. In the early 1990s, as the US was isolating China and uncertain of its goals in Asia, and Asian economic dynamism drew world acclaim, conferences called for a 'Confucian renaissance' or a 'kanji cultural sphere' to capitalize on the rise of Asia and find the right consensus on Asian values.<sup>45</sup> Engaging China would promote traditional values at home and abroad and serve as a way for Japan to mediate debates between Western and Eastern values. Some expected that a stage was arriving when social linkages replaced economic ones as the basis for trust;<sup>46</sup> at last a way might be found to counter values from the West.

The left warned that Japan's 'failure so far to resolve the issue of its responsibility for past acts of war in Asia largely prevents building confidence with other Asian countries'. Without this, younger generations of Chinese, reading stories of war victims, might react even more strongly. Behind this argument are the assumptions that China harbors 'a desire for building lasting peace through disarmament', and

<sup>43</sup> Takashi Sugimoto, 'Building A New Japan-China Relationship', Tokyo: International Institute for Global Peace, Policy Paper 100E, September 1992, pp. 14, 25, 31.

<sup>44</sup> *The Japan Times*, 15 November 1992, p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> Mizoguchi Yuzo *et al.*, *Kanji bunkaken no rekishi to mirai* (Tokyo: Daishukan shoten, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> Amako Satoshi and Shu Kenei, 'Ajia no hendo no naka no "Nitchu 20 nen"', *Sekai*, November 1992, pp. 295–7.

that strengthening the Japan–US security alliance adds to military tensions rather than checking them.<sup>47</sup> As late as the fall of 1995 Nobel Prize author Oe Kenzaburo called on Japanese intellectuals to stop allowing memories of the crimes Japan committed from making them ‘feel they have no right to criticize China for its cultural policy’. He said that the refusal had carried over not only to silence about suppression of speech in China but even to government and scientists not speaking candidly on Chinese environmental destruction. Oe criticized the failure of a resolution of remorse for Japanese conduct during the Second World War to pass the Diet at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war and thus provide a basis that would enable the Japanese to criticize their neighbors and be criticized in turn.<sup>48</sup> Many did not need a resolution; criticisms of human rights in China have been spreading among Japanese intellectuals. The role of guilt as a reason for raising no doubts about engagement is declining as the post-war intellectual community departs the scene.

Others were anxious to appeal to China because they were dissatisfied with economic and political dependency on the US. Regionally, such aspirations were most visible along the Sea of Japan and Kyushu, which had been left behind by the one-sided development of the Pacific Coast facing the West.<sup>49</sup> Politically, this offered the remnants of the left an alternative to the US after their Cold War pacifism had been discredited by the victory of a strong, united West. Economically, it catered to producers who saw their best chance of competition with Western firms in the new environment of globalization through the transfer of manufacturing to China. Many who saw the need for ‘regional routes to a new world order’, ensuring Japan a role in forging that order, joined these groups.<sup>50</sup> Lacking confidence in the US, the Japanese continue to be tempted by Asia.

Widespread Japanese inclination to give China the benefit of the doubt in the first half of the 1990s had its deepest roots in great power calculations that appealed to the right even more than the left. First, the Japanese were driven by rising expectations that their country would soon gain equality with the US as a global power, but it would have to be done against a background of what LDP leader Kono Yohei in 1992 called ‘American rigidity and fear of exclusion’. Claims abounded that Japan’s new Asian policy would be independent of the US,<sup>51</sup> or even that Japan should ‘leave the US and enter Asia’.<sup>52</sup> As trade troubles with Washington loomed in the foreground and Japan’s great power clout seemed to be falling instead of rising, as seen in concessions on aid to Russia required at G-7 summits, only China was left

<sup>47</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 21–7 October 1996, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 28 August–3 September 1995, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Economic Cooperation in Northeast Asia in the Era of the Pacific Rim* (Niigata: Niigata University, Faculty of Economics, 1996).

<sup>50</sup> Ishiyama Yoshihide, ‘Regional Routes to a New World Order’, *Japan Echo*, 19, 1, Spring 1992, pp. 16–22.

<sup>51</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 6–12 July 1992, p. 8; 11–17 January 1993, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Mainichi Daily*, 30 November 1994, p. 2.

to prove Japan's global stature. Second, the Japanese did not share American exuberance about the fall of the Soviet Union. If, for the US, Russia loomed first as a target of engagement, China was the obvious target for Japan.

In the year 2000, champions of full engagement with China are fewer in number, but they still far exceed US 'shakers and movers' in that category. Ronald Morse listed in 1999 only one bureaucrat Nonaka Hiromu, then Chief Cabinet Secretary, as 'soft' on China, added a number of names of politicians – mostly from the old left, such as Doi Takako and the then lingering senior LDP leader of the 1980s, Takeshita Noboru – and, finally, a number of business leaders and media figures or think-tank writers. Some business champions of China are outspoken, preparing reports on how important a change in the Chinese development model, that will lead to increased imports and freer trade, will be for regional economic dynamism.<sup>53</sup> China's entry into the WTO sustains such reasoning, despite the feeling among many enterprises located in China that they are treated worse than American firms, feeling psychological pressure from non-economic issues.<sup>54</sup> There also remain sympathetic voices in the universities.<sup>55</sup> Above all, senior politicians and Asian experts in the bureaucracy exercise a moderating influence, but they are leaving the scene. In academia and the press it is mainly retired figures (and some Chinese working in Japan) that cling to the most benevolent views on dealing with China.

Official policy at crucial moments still pays lip service to full engagement as the continuing direction for Sino-Japanese relations. On the eve of Jiang Zemin's November 1998 visit to Japan, Anami Koreshige, the head of the Asian Department at the Japanese Foreign Ministry, made one of the strongest recent appeals for full-scale engagement. Contrary to popular views, he argued, relations have advanced quite far. Although the term 'strategic partnership' is not used, in fact 'friendship' has carried relations beyond that stage, and no security threat exists. Anami declared that Japan and China are building a new structure of relations for the twenty-first century in the context of great power summitry as various bilateral relations are improving.<sup>56</sup> Within a month this upbeat evaluation was undercut by the Jiang visit. Despite the surprising tilt toward China of Tanaka Makiko when she became Foreign minister and tried to revive her father's legacy in the spring of 2001, sympathy for unrestrained engagement of China is hard to find.

### **The predominantly engagement, potential threat group**

Through the past quarter century the mainstream in Japan has argued that China's integration into the international economy is the best means to ensure regional stability, even if China is burdened with a long history of paternalistic

<sup>53</sup> Keizai kikakucho keizai kenkyujo (ed.), *21 seiki Chugoku no shinario* (Tokyo, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> *Asahi shimbun*, 24 November 1998, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ronald Morse, *Sankei shimbun*, 3 August 1999, p. 4, and unpublished tables from this article.

<sup>56</sup> Anami Koreshige and Kojima Tomoyuki, 'Nitchu kankei 21 seiki no bunmyaku de yomitoku', *Gaiko Forum*, November 1998, pp. 28–32.

authority buttressed by decades of communist rule and needs to be weaned through economic development to become a positive force for peace and cooperation. 'Greater economic interdependence will not only serve as a restraint on expansive behavior but will increase mutual exchanges of various kinds. This will in turn promote mutual understanding . . .'<sup>57</sup> If warnings were later added that China may eventually be 'relatively freed from its economic interdependence and may begin to act in a way that will impair regional stability',<sup>58</sup> trade and investment growth largely fueled more optimism.

Even after relations were strained in 1995–96, hopes revived when Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro visited China in September 1997 to mark the 25th anniversary of the normalization of relations with the message that restraint would prevail and deepening interdependence would lead to mutual understanding. The overall tone of press coverage revealed that this remained the mainstream position, while *Kyoto shimbun* went so far as to proclaim 'Hashimoto has put relations back on track. His remaining task is to work out guidelines in ways that would strike a balance between the United States, which is deeply concerned about developments in the Taiwan Strait, and China, which is wary of the Japan–US security alliance.'<sup>59</sup> This optimism proved premature, but it has recurred.

Circumspect in balancing predictions of a hegemonistic-power scenario and a chaos and interdependence scenario for China, Tanaka Akihiko has led among academics in calling for emphasis on interdependence. This means Japan doing its best to persuade the US to change course on linking human rights to most-favored-nation status or membership in international economic organizations and avoiding a buildup of military strength in readiness for hegemonism or chaos, which would be counterproductive.<sup>60</sup> In general, experts on international relations of China opt for engagement over containment, although acknowledging the need for a mix, all the easier because China's economic growth has been mythologized and its pile of domestic problems underestimated.<sup>61</sup>

In 1997–8 supporters of closer relations turned to the security of triangular relations, including the US. Many called for a stable triangle, clearly distancing the new approach with its recognition of geopolitical realities from the disorderly handling of relations after the end of the Cold War when a simultaneous deterioration in US relations with Japan and China was seen as a major cause of the worsening of Sino-Japanese ties. As US–Japanese relations have strengthened and the US strived to improve ties with China, conditions appeared favorable for Japan and China to

<sup>57</sup> Hisahiro Kanayama, 'East Asia and Japan: Japan's Diplomatic Strategy for Seeking Common Interests', Tokyo: International Institute for Global Peace, Policy Paper 134E, September 1994, pp. 22–3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 6 October–12 October 1997, last page.

<sup>60</sup> Akihiko Tanaka, 'Hegemony, Chaos, Interdependence: Three Scenarios for China', *Japan Echo*, 21, 3, Autumn 1994, pp. 41–7.

<sup>61</sup> *Mainichi shimbun*, 11 April 1999, p. 6.

upgrade their ties. Now that Americans are confident again that they will not lose to Japan in the economic sphere and their military power continues to confer upon them a decisive leadership role, they are better able to manage great power relations, reasoned those who made the case for an upturn in Sino-Japanese relations.<sup>62</sup> By the year 2000, US leadership would be seen in a different light, shifting the argument again from coordinating with the US to balancing it.

In late 1997 and 1998 Japanese diplomacy reached a high pitch of activity to shape the regional environment for China's evolution. Inoguchi Takashi refers to this as 'Japan's Asia policy resuscitated', pointing to vigorous constructive engagement on many fronts.<sup>63</sup> At the time Clinton was making his most determined effort to upgrade relations with China, arousing concern in Japan that it would be bypassed as its own standing slid but also encouraging its own efforts to strengthen ties with China. Prime ministers Hashimoto and Obuchi conducted a string of summits, each with implications for gaining leverage with China. Meetings in Krasnoyarsk, Kawana, and Moscow were aimed not only at solving the territorial problem with Russia, but also at forging a triangle with Tokyo–Moscow–Beijing that would damp the momentum of Sino-Russian ties. While a breakthrough in ties with South Korea revealed new alarm in Japan about North Korean missiles, it also reflected an interest in balancing the Tokyo–Seoul–Beijing triangle after some signs of South Korean sympathy with Chinese warnings about Japanese nationalism and resurgent militarism. In November 1998 Obuchi went to Southeast Asia, where he sought to fan regional solidarity and support for an Asian Monetary Fund not welcomed by the US. Until the visit of Jiang Zemin to Japan later that month, it had appeared that the forces emphasizing engagement were securing the upper hand after being challenged in 1995–6.

It is not unusual for advocates of trying harder to engage China to see the root of the problem in Japan as a 'perception gap'. Suggesting that one-sided views of a China threat arise from a half-century when national defense was a taboo subject for the Japanese people, Kayahara Ikuo, a veteran of the Defense Academy, called for more defense exchanges.<sup>64</sup> While many in the Self-Defense Forces appear to play up the China threat and seek to use it to boost their own resources, this is not a unanimous position.

Ronald Morse finds the leading figures in the business community along with some of the most respected experts strongly on the side of engagement, but he recognizes great diversity among academics and journalists as well as Japanese bureaucrats. While politicians were more often negative, senior figures including top leaders opted for engagement.<sup>65</sup> Handling his summer 1999 visit to repair relations

<sup>62</sup> Tanaka Akihiko, '97 nen, Beichu wa wakai suru', *Chuo koron*, 2, 1997, pp. 52–63.

<sup>63</sup> Takashi Inoguchi, 'Introduction: Japan's Asia Policy Resuscitated?', Tokyo: unpublished manuscript, January 1999.

<sup>64</sup> Kayahara Ikuo, *Anzen hoshō kara mita Chugoku* (Tokyo: Keiso shobo, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> Ronald Morse, *Sankei shimbun*, 3 August 1999, p. 4.

with special care, Prime Minister Obuchi stayed only briefly to minimize risk, came with a positive message to offer Japan's support for China's entry into the WTO prior to US agreement, and took along top business leaders from Toyota, Toshiba, Matsushita, and Asahi Beer. Although there was talk that the China boom was over and resentment that due to bias Japanese firms were losing to European ones, such as in the bid for generators for the Three Gorges project and other high-profile undertakings, business leaders symbolized engagement.<sup>66</sup> Japanese diplomacy had learned from the US of the value of business contacts in relations with China and of summitry as a force for assisting business.

Some Japanese accepted China's about-face after the fiasco of November 1998 as recognition that Peking had learned from its mistake and would truly commit itself to better relations with Tokyo, keeping the historical issue in the background. Given China's genuine alarm at the purported US goal of world domination and Japan's need to be wary of the critical tone taken by the US toward it as well as the threat from North Korea, they decided that Japan should expect positive results from reinvigorating its ties to China.<sup>67</sup> Thus, without an emotional basis, relations were still likely to advance, and Japan would be justified in pursuing engagement. Yet, even those who were hopeful for this reason feared that pressure on Japan to meet China's needs and serve its regional goals might exceed what prudent engagement allowed. In the aftermath of the historic North–South summit of June 2000 in Korea, the Japanese felt new pressure to sponsor regional economic development without any assurance that their concerns would be addressed. Specifically, China and South Korea joined in welcoming a proposal for a Northeast Asia Development Bank, while Japanese Foreign Ministry and Finance Ministry officials responded that it would not be possible to gain the understanding of the Japanese people without progress in normalization talks between Japan and North Korea.<sup>68</sup> The same reasoning applied to a major boost in direct ties to China without a new sense of trust.

From the time of Jiang Zemin's speech on 20 May 2000 to a Japanese audience, China accelerated its courtship of Japan.<sup>69</sup> It embraced economic regionalism, turning to Singapore and South Korea to champion the cause in ways that would make its multilateral character most appealing to Japan. Zhu Rongji visited Tokyo in October, appealing to the broad public with a question-and-answer session on television and a forward-looking outlook. Not only economics, a broad range of areas figured in talks about cooperation. The response was largely positive, although some on the right warned that when Zhu returned to China he was criticized for being too soft.<sup>70</sup> By the end of 2000 the mood in Japan had swung somewhat towards largely engagement with China.

<sup>66</sup> *Asahi shimbun*, 5 July 1999, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Fujimura Kogi, 'Chosen hanto to Han, Chu, Nichi, Bei', *Ajia to Nihon*, 308, 1999, pp. 17–18.

<sup>68</sup> *Asahi shimbun*, 16 July 2000.

<sup>69</sup> *Sankei shimbun*, 25 October 2000, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Sankei shimbun*, 14 November 2000, p. 3.



Optimists seized on China's encouragement in 2000 to make the case that the Japanese needed a clearer sense of Chinese reality. With this it could understand that a transition is possible in which Taiwan relations can be managed.<sup>71</sup> One book reviewed American images of China, arguing that they have changed often and reflect ideological and other factors. Japan needs to understand these views in order to recognize where it differs and better manage relations with China.<sup>72</sup> This way of thinking is shared by many.

At least four assumptions stand in the background of this rekindling of hope. One is the deep-seated belief that one-sided dependence on the US leaves Japan without the voice of a 'normal' country that it has been desperately seeking to regain after decades as a defeated power and exposed security target of Soviet bluster and buildup. Under the Clinton administration for reasons both of perceived US neglect (Japan-passing) and Japan's own loss of confidence and diplomatic initiative, these feelings only deepened. China will keep looking tempting so long as closer ties to the US stir worries of this kind. Two is the ingrained caution of the Japanese people and much of the elite, which makes it hard for those who would take the bold step of shifting policy toward containment to succeed. This is not a country where leaders make eloquent speeches to convince the public of a need to change or where problems which flare for one or two years with another country are likely to produce an abrupt reaction. Three, the Japanese have longed for Asian regionalism for many reasons, including economic ones. Playing to this desire is smart strategy for China. Finally, but most intangibly, is the psychology of a nation groping for a national sense of direction after a decade of economic stagnation and loss of confidence in its social moorings and international voice. The Japanese want their country to be recognized and valued. China had some success with its pitch in 2000, but the impact remains quite fragile. Depending on China's behavior, the US may find that the forces building towards containment will be receptive to an alternative appeal.

### **The predominantly containment, possible engagement group**

In the aftermath of Tiananmen repression, the Japanese broke with the US in reasoning that: (1) 'It is not advisable for Japan to insist, like the United States does, on trying to remake the world in its own image;' and (2) 'a weak, confused China poses a greater threat than a strong China'.<sup>73</sup> But as the decade proceeded, there was more inclination to pressure China to remake itself and to assess the danger from a strong China more seriously. The Japanese generally saw themselves as joining the US in attaching more and more conditions to cooperation with China.

Even in the heyday of Japanese optimism early in the 1990s, the conservative academic establishment represented by Sato Seizaburo equated China with prewar

<sup>71</sup> Asai Motofumi, *Chugoku o do miru ka?* (Tokyo: Kobunken, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Ijiri Hidenori, *Amerikajin no Chugokukan* (Tokyo: Bunshun shincho, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Tatsumi Okabe, 'Japan's Future China Policy', Tokyo: International Institute for Global Peace, Special Report, October 1990, p.13.

Japan as a country bent on boosting its national power. Sato foresaw continued tension between China's economic growth and its political system, preventing China from catching Japan economically. He said that the best development for China for the time being would be not too slow to cause disorder and not too fast to cause a threat. And he warned that if China wants to block Japan's rise as a great political power it would only cause trouble and speed the militarization of Japan. Sato was prescient in predicting the downward spiral in relations, although he missed the shift in balance of power as growth rates diverged, and, in resolutely defending Japanese historical studies against Japanese leftist historians and 'misinformation in China and Korea', he showed no inclination to appeal to Chinese public opinion.<sup>74</sup> His kind of optimism based on Chinese weakness easily turned into a more pessimistic call for giving precedence to containment.

One point of view found increasingly in Japan is the idea that Chinese foreign policy is driven by emotion. To dispel the national humiliation prior to 1949, China is possessed by a nationalistic drive similar to that in Japan from the Meiji era and now promoted by a leadership determined to compensate for a lack of national unity and trust in the nation among its own citizens. Given this driving force, China may be tempted to delay economic development for a long time for the sake of 'getting even'.<sup>75</sup> This approach to China dismisses the rational basis for Chinese views of Japan. It is carried further by those who claim that the Chinese have been taught to hate the Japanese, especially in the 1990s when instead of showing Japanese television dramas and movies that drew sympathy as in the 1980s there was a turn to war stories depicting the Japanese negatively.<sup>76</sup>

Assessing the negative turn in Japanese views of China, the Japanese place the blame overwhelmingly on the Chinese side. It had changed the status quo with its military buildup and willingness to resort to force as well as with its vituperative allegations against Japan. Given its own record of human rights abuses and inclination to lead China toward regional hegemonism, the Chinese Communist Party had no right to be righteous, it is argued. Increasingly, the Japanese people are disappointed by a lack of appreciation in China for the massive overseas development assistance provided. They are reacting with a backlash against further Chinese use of the 'historical card'. Charges against Japanese nationalism seem hypocritical in the midst of rising Chinese nationalism. Finally, China's opposition to Japan's entry as a permanent member of the Security Council gives the Japanese reason to think that China is the country that most blocks their aspirations for increased global status. Even if Japan favors engagement and regional integration, China is driving Japan into a fierce competition where the two sides would be containing each other.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Seizaburo Sato, 16 November 1992.

<sup>75</sup> Tatsumi Okabe, 'Chinese Diplomacy and the International Environment', Tokyo: paper for the Symposium of the Japanese Association for Asian Political and Economic Studies, October, 1999.

<sup>76</sup> *Sankei shimbun*, 24 October 2000, p. 1.

Reasoning thus, Japanese opinion was swinging toward a largely containment orientation, by 2000, limiting the flexibility of politicians and bureaucrats.

On the war, Japanese popular culture including manga had joined in making the case that Japan had apologized enough. It was time to put the past behind. A fatigue with this issue was spreading, buttressed in the minds of many by the impression that China had long falsified accounts of how badly Japanese soldiers had behaved and now was using demands for further apologies as a tool for extracting concessions. If engagement is associated with appealing to the Chinese people and recognizing their continued anxieties about Japan's history of aggression, those who assert the 'end of history' are in fact siding with the containment school.

At the end of the 1990s other debates intersected with the debate in Japan on China. Among these were: the first intense reexamination of Japan's wars in the 1930s and 1940s known as the *senjimon* (war debate); the lively discussion of Taiwan including the popularity of President Lee Teng-Hui's autobiography; the debate on Japan's military role ranging from peacekeeping forces to the geographical reach of new guidelines for support of US troops and Theater Missile Defense development with the US; and the search for means for Japan to reemerge as a 'normal' country. Forces of containment are gaining ground through these debates without having to confront Chinese and other thinking on historical issues. In discussions of each of these issues, the main tendency was to widen the gap with thinking in China.

Another debate in 1999 focused on government legislation to grant official status to the song *Kimigayo* (the Emperor's Reign) as the national anthem and *Hinomaru* (the circle of the sun) as the national flag. Most enthusiastic were the *Sankei shimbun* and the *Yomiuri shimbun*, which saw this as vital for transforming school education from confusion over Japan's identity to clarity about the future shape of the country. Other papers such as the *Nikkei shimbun* that welcomed the change said that they did so because these symbols were not really the cause of wars, or public opinion had already registered its support. But some tried to give a twist to the new nationalism by suggesting that the Japanese would embrace the symbols with a broad mind, in the case of the local *Hokkoku shimbun* arguing that it would help to teach the young in the aftermath of the Nagano Winter Olympics to respect the national anthems of foreign teams. In contrast, the local *Hokkaido shimbun* opposed the change with the warning that these symbols bear the baggage from the last world war and evoke blood-curling emotions among the people of China as on the Korean peninsula and Southeast Asia. On the national level, *Mainichi shimbun* and *Asahi shimbun* warned against the move, *Asahi* taking the stronger posture in the name of internationalism and respect for the thoughts and beliefs of others.<sup>77</sup>

An uneasy coalition exists in Japan behind closer US ties to contain China. While some trust the US, others are fearful of the US, increasingly so as the power gap widened over the past decade. In the *Seiron* column of *Sankei shimbun*, this led

<sup>77</sup> *The Japan Times International Edition*, 1–15 April 1999, p. 20.

in the first half of the decade to calls for Japan to 'Asianize'.<sup>78</sup> As China has risen, this theme has faded, but the spirit behind it has not.

For a time the largely containment school gained ground from China's bungling of relations. The Japanese have carefully analyzed how a combination of fortuitous developments and Jiang Zemin's obstinacy led to the 'bad aftertaste' after the first visit of a Chinese head of state in November 1998.<sup>79</sup> Even Chinese sources in the year 2000 clearly acknowledged the public relations disaster that occurred. With Sino-US relations deteriorating at the same time and further damaged by the Chinese reaction to the US bombing of China's Belgrade embassy, Americans may have gained the impression that Japanese and American thinking about China had converged. Focusing on new tensions over Taiwan and China's build-up of military forces across the straits as well as on worsening treatment of the Falungong movement and human rights abuses, Republicans criticized the Clinton administration for letting the opportunity pass to beef up US ties with Japan, aimed primarily at containing China. Yet, Japan's leadership in the year 2000, especially under Mori, pushed by the strong interests of Nonaka and Kono Yohei, was more in a mood to work out deals with China, Russia, and North Korea than to get tough.

With the left in disarray, can the center withstand the rise of the right, trying to capitalize on a perceived 'China threat' to change Japan's national identity, overall foreign policy, and domestic politics? In the business community a struggle continues between internationalized big businesses with huge export successes and protectionist small and middle businesses, fearful of the WTO. On economic ties with China big business favors engagement, but compared to the US small and middle businesses have a disproportionate role and may waver on this as their economic troubles in Japan and China continue. In political circles and the bureaucracy, the shift of decision making away from Asia hands in the Foreign Ministry and other ministries means greater politicization. On the one hand, it might increase the likelihood of pandering to emotionalism on the right. On the other hand, so far the main effect has been to embolden ambitious politicians to seek credit for a breakthrough through conciliatory diplomacy rather than putting more pressure on Japan's troublesome neighbors. Given the waning of guilt feelings and the persistent tendency for the Japanese to view themselves as victims rather than victimizers,<sup>80</sup> eventually it may be harder to hold the line against containment.

The Japanese still regard their country's diplomacy as almost entirely reactive, responding to changes in US and Chinese policy rather than taking much initiative. In this perspective, China has largely dictated the terms of bilateral relations, pressing Japan in 1980 to become a military power, reversing course in 1982 to warn against Japanese militarism, then deciding that the danger from Japan becoming a political

<sup>78</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 13–19 January 1992, p. 11, 1–7 August 1994, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Tanaka Akihiko, 'Tainichi kankei', *Chugoku soran 2000* (Tokyo: Kasankai, 2000), pp. 138–44.

<sup>80</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 23–9 August 1993, p. 4; Inoguchi Takashi, 'Nitchu kankei wa sekaiteki shiya de', *Gaiko forum*, November 1992, p. 23.

and military great power exceeded that from the Soviet Union, and by 1999 insisting that a new approach was necessary to deflect Japan from cooperating with the US over Taiwan.<sup>81</sup> If China's leadership is strongly determined to emphasize the stick rather than the carrot in achieving quick results on Taiwan reunification, the likely impact is to drive Japan further towards containment. Growing US pressure in response to China's destabilizing actions would reinforce the notion that Japan is a 'victim of new geopolitics' and that it must 'anchor together' with the US in the face of 'unanticipated danger'.<sup>82</sup> But China's encouragement of a larger international and regional role for Japan in a multipolar context could sustain the momentum of 2000 and leave the US overreaching. This may produce a balance that allows Tokyo to use containment, while keeping engagement.

### The full containment group

Through the first half of the 1990s some conservative politicians and academics anticipated that the rise of Asian values would continue, exposing the lack of universality in Western values and the moribund state of communist values. In this reasoning, Japan is the true representative of Asia. 'It fought wars to liberate Asian nations from Western colonialism', which 'owe Japan for their postwar independence'.<sup>83</sup> Although China has stood vehemently against this historical interpretation, its communist leadership discredits its voice. Japan can become an independent power, gain support in Asia, and stand up to China as that country is forced to change.

The roots of the containment approach were nurtured over 40 years in what *The Japan Times* called 'a school of political conservatism whose fundamental philosophy little differs from the prewar nationalism and the die hard sense of superiority over other Asian people which, regrettably, has been apt to grow stronger in keeping with this nation's economic development'. When the Emperor admitted during his visit to China that Japan 'inflicted great sufferings on the people of China. I deeply deplore this', this paper asked why did it take more than four decades and as long as 20 years from the normalization of bilateral relations 'before it became possible for the Emperor to refer to our national self-reproach in such moderate wording'.<sup>84</sup> This was an appeal to treat the visit not as the final word on the history issue, but as a beginning in reducing China's suspicions of Japan's true intentions. Instead, nationalists seized on a perceived China threat to press their overall agenda more vigorously over the 1990s. Many in the LDP had fought to block the visit of the Emperor. Only after more than a year of discussion of such matters as international

<sup>81</sup> Takebo Tadae, Oota Masatoshi, Hiramatsu Shigeo, *Nihon gaiko no saitenken* (Tokyo: Jiji tsushinsha, 2000), pp. 112–16.

<sup>82</sup> Kent E. Calder, 'The New Face of Northeast Asia', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001, pp. 106–22.

<sup>83</sup> *The Japan Times Weekly International Edition*, 30 September–6 October 1996, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> *The Japan Time Weekly International Edition*, 9–15 November 1992, p. 9.

etiquette – the head of state of the loser must visit first and a negative reaction would follow in China if repeated invitations were rejected – did the visit take place.<sup>85</sup> Yet, the right wing in Japan was poised to treat this visit as the end of an era, demanding an end to ‘guilt’ politics and a new readiness to confront China. In the academic community Nakajima Mineo emerged as the leading critic of the China threat. Apart from praising Taiwan in its struggle with the PRC and condemning the ‘China threat’, Nakajima takes a negative view on China’s economic development prospects and the Chinese public’s trust in its leadership. In addition, he bewails the kowtowing of Japanese prime ministers in Beijing and the inequality in relations that allows China to keep criticizing Japan’s domestic matters, such as visits to Yasukuni Shrine and textbooks. Nakajima further attacks the self-censorship that persists in the Japanese media, including coverage of the Jiang Zemin visit and Japan’s weak policy toward China, which he sees as a continuation of the positive coverage of the Cultural Revolution in the *Asahi shimbun*. His calls for containing China are loud and frequent.<sup>86</sup> Other academic voices of containment were much more audible in 1999 than a few years earlier, although in 2000 there was a calming effect.

It became common for Japanese opinion shapers to criticize the Foreign Ministry and the old guard for having long been too ‘soft’ on China. Under Hashimoto in 1996–8 and subsequent prime ministers, management of bilateral ties shifted noticeably to the political arena with a large ‘Taiwan lobby’ and a more energized public opinion striving to play a larger role. Instead of cautious analyses by China experts, a new threat literature appeared, reminiscent of the popular writings on the Soviet threat in the 1980s. China’s identity in the minds of the Japanese changed as books on how do the Chinese and Japanese people differ despite a common civilization faded before books on the growing threat of the Chinese state and the clash of dissimilar cultures.<sup>87</sup>

The critics of China gained an outspoken spokesman when Ishihara Shintaro won the election for mayor of Tokyo in the early spring of 1999. During the campaign Ishihara had repeatedly referred to China as Shina with overtones of wartime imperialism rather than as Chugoku (using the characters for ‘middle kingdom’ or Zhongguo as the Chinese write when referring to their homeland). (Prime Minister Mori also used the term Shina in public statements twice in his first ten months in office.) When reminded that Beijing is a sister city of Tokyo, Ishihara asserted that cultural and business exchanges with it do not interest him, adding ‘I do not like or approve of a nation under a communist dictatorship.’<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Kaneko Hidetoshi, ‘Tenno hochu no butai ura’, *Ajia jiho*, July 1992, pp. 2–3.

<sup>86</sup> Nakajima Mineo, ‘Kyosan Chugoku’ hokai no yocho’, *Voice*, October 1999, pp. 62–71; ‘Chugoku kenkoku gojunen no sokatsu to sono shorai o yomu’, *Ajia jiho*, 349, September 1999, pp. 4–47.

<sup>87</sup> *Nihon to Chugoku ‘Doko ga chigau ka’ jiten* (Tokyo: Nihon jitsugyo chubansha, 1989); Inagaki Takeshi and Kaji Nobuyuki, *Nihon to Chugoku eien no wakai: ibo bunka no chototsu* (Tokyo: Bungei shunju, 1999).

<sup>88</sup> *The Japan Times International Edition*, 16–30 April 1999, pp. 1, 6.

Ishihara has continued to keep a high profile. Well-known for his nationalist views for asserting Japan's opposition to the US as well as China, he has made China the target of his criticisms as mayor of Tokyo and has visited Taipei to the consternation of Beijing. Increasingly, similar views were being heard from others. There were calls for the international community to become more confrontational with China and for Japan to be more supportive of what is seen as a tougher US posture. For many who share this thinking, this appeal also means wariness that the US might not be hard enough on China and a need for Japan to take actions on its own. This means, as the first target, making ODA more conditional on Chinese behavior.<sup>89</sup> Since the cutback in ODA under discussion in 2000 was across-the-board and linked to Japan's own economic troubles, the government was able to present it to China as non-punitive, while satisfying those who were eager to teach Beijing a lesson.

In the center as well as on the right, suspicions in 2000 that China's pursuit of Japan was just for tactical reasons were common. Its real goal was to weaken the alliance with the US as it prepared to increase its threats to use force toward Taiwan. Although cooperation with China had expanded, the level of trust remained quite low. This made it easier for the most nationalist voices to continue to be heard after China had worked hard to assuage Japanese concerns.

Leading the opposition to the government-led positive response to China's 'smile diplomacy', *Sankei shimbun* and the journals *Shokun* and *Bungei shunju* warned about weakness in the Japanese government in standing for national interests and the danger of falling for Chinese tactics. For *Sankei*, textbooks constituted one battleground. As a textbook commission met to advise on the future of history coverage for Japanese schoolchildren, the conservative paper carried a series of articles on Chinese interference in Japan's internal affairs with the assistance of the Foreign Ministry and its retired officials.<sup>90</sup> Even if China were conciliatory on economic issues, the right wing worried that Japanese leaders would keep appeasing it on historical and other questions. The result would be no strong revival of Japanese nationalism, needed for a national identity capable of eliciting a spiritual revival and vindicating a 'proud' view of Japanese history.

Containment of China in Japan has a different meaning than in the US. It is not limited to ensuring that China refrain from force in pursuit of the unification of Taiwan and restrain its arms buildup and exports in a manner consistent with regional stability. In addition, it often extends to three other elements. One, it is a defense of the Japanese right wing on views of the wars and occupations in Asia. In the year 2000 when a conference in Osaka considered the 'rape of Nanjing' and the Chinese responded with alarm, defenders alleged that, although it had been necessary to express regrets about the war, the honor of the Japanese people and its ancestors

<sup>89</sup> Keijiro Tanaka, 'Quo Vadis? China's Socialism and Market Economy', *IIPS News*, Spring 1999, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Sankei shimbun*, 13, 16, 30 October 2000, 22 November 2000, 8 December 2000.

requires the truth to be told at last that Japanese soldiers were not disproportionately guilty of atrocities.<sup>91</sup> Two, it is an attack on ‘leftist intellectuals’ and media inside Japan for the worldview that has made them too hard on their own country and too soft on China. Not content with the collapse of the left opposition in the 1990s, critics would seize the opportunity to excoriate the limits and ‘emotionalism’ that they had left behind. With delight they greeted the news that at the end of the 1990s polls showed more Japanese were not friendly to China than were friendly – a sign of a return to ‘realism’.<sup>92</sup> They tell a story of the Japanese people at last overcoming ‘allergies’, ‘taboos’, and ‘illusions’ as they start to look at the world differently. Three, the containment school in Japan has its own foreign policy agenda, beginning with the elimination of ODA to China.<sup>93</sup> Asserting that China’s economy remains poor and fragile and that Japan’s assistance enables China to divert funds toward weapons, those who would contain China see an end to ODA as the starting point for setting Japan’s relations with China on a new track.

Already in the second half of 2000, alarmist voices were issuing forceful warnings about ‘soft’ leaders prepared to make deals that sacrificed Japan’s national interests. Dissatisfaction mounted with the highly visible push for improved relations by Nonaka Hiromu, whose hand could be seen in conciliatory policies to Russia and North Korea as well as China, and Foreign Minister Kono Yohei.<sup>94</sup> When Nonaka traveled to China for the twentieth anniversary of economic cooperation in October 2000, just before the Zhu visit to Japan, he gave a boost to the image that China has really changed by expressing gratitude to Japan.<sup>95</sup> With public opinion wary of such claims and strong divisions within the LDP alarmed by the new diplomacy, the political right saw an opportunity to move decisively towards containment and simultaneously their ideal of nationalism. First they had to warn against dreams of regionalism over the next five or more years, allowing others such as South Korea’s Kim Dae-jung to lead the way.<sup>96</sup> As argued in the *Sankei* series of articles reexamining Japan and China, showing that while they seemed similar they were very different, China was scoring a great success with its anti-Japanese policy when Japanese enterprises kept investing as before, tourists kept visiting China, and the government continued to provide ODA.<sup>97</sup> The obvious conclusion is that only a much tougher response can hope to make an impression.

Even before the Bush administration took office voices in Japan embraced its goals. Nishihara Masashi, who had been warning of the security threat from China

<sup>91</sup> Toyota Aritsune, *Ii kagen ni shiro Chugoku* (Tokyo: Shodensha, 2000), pp. 172–91.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204–12.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Seiji joho kapuseru’, *Sentaku*, November 2000, pp. 48–9.

<sup>95</sup> James J. Pryzstup, ‘The Zhu Visit and After . . . Efforts to Steady the Course’, *Pacific Forum CSIS: Comparative Connections*, 2, 4, January 2001.

<sup>96</sup> Arai Hirokazu, ‘Toajia ni okeru Nichibeichuro kankei’, *Shin kokusaku*, October 15, 2000, pp. 10–14.

<sup>97</sup> *Sankei shimbun*, 30 October 2000, p. 1.



for several years, called for a stronger alliance with the US. He said that Japan needed to balance China.<sup>98</sup> Increased Chinese naval activity in the disputed waters of the China Sea added to the image of a struggle ahead, including over seabed resources.<sup>99</sup> In the face of what many security analysts and defense officials saw as an increasingly threatening environment, the decision to strengthen military ties to the US drew support. Popular books carried this argument further, insisting that only a tough Japanese response over a long time could withstand China's arrogance and plans for 'Great China Regionalism'.<sup>100</sup>

### Lessons for managing the choice before Japan

We can discern in writings on Sino-Japanese relations and global affairs three distinct explanations of the changing course of Japanese thinking about China, each with its own implications for policy choices ahead. First, sources in Japan and, to a large extent, in the US too treat Japan as a victim of Chinese initiatives: (1) damping Japanese optimism about relations in 1990–4 with a campaign against Japan having a moral right to become a great political power, (2) frightening the Japanese, whose strong attachment to regional stability and nuclear allergy were challenged through provocative declarations, nuclear testing, and missile rattling; and (3) creating a mood of hostility inside China by enflaming nationalism focused on Japan's historical transgressions. Taking a cavalier attitude toward Japanese opinion, China bears primary responsibility for the downturn in its image. If Chinese leaders had been more patient on nationalist issues, including on Taiwan, the Japanese people would be more positive in their views.

Is this pattern something beyond Japanese influence? Some seem to think so; yielding to the temptation to single out hostile and promising leaders inside China with excessive expectations that personal biography is the key. Reports in Japan suggest that Jiang Zemin bears special responsibility for China's negativity, based on the killing of his stepfather by Japanese soldiers which made him hostile. Yet, even he is credited with some progress in recognizing that postwar Japan has followed the correct path of 'peaceful development'.<sup>101</sup> Other sources have latched onto Zhu Rongji as more supportive,<sup>102</sup> or place trust in improvements after the older generation leave the scene, since the Japanese find it easier to work with a rising cohort of provincial technocrats, many in Southeast China.

Although China's tone toward Japan shifted in 1999–2000, it is widely assumed that more is needed to repair the image. This could include economic steps, such as a joint project to build the high-speed railway system being planned along China's east

<sup>98</sup> *The Japan Times*, 30 November 2000.

<sup>99</sup> Teruya Kenkichi, 'Chugoku ga nerai Higashishinakai no kaitei shigen', *Foresight*, October 2000, pp. 80–3.

<sup>100</sup> Koo Bunyu, *Tsukeagaru no Chugokujin urutaeru na Nihonjin* (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 2000).

<sup>101</sup> Kokubun Ryosei, 'Shuno gaiko to Chugoku', *Kokusai mondai*, January 1999, p. 15.

<sup>102</sup> 'Chugoku keizai kaikaku no sutoronguman Zhu Rongji', *Sekai*, January 1998, pp. 155–65.

coast. Above all, it means more patience on Taiwan and foreign policy if China expects to keep Japan from tilting towards containment. Since the Japanese overwhelmingly agree that the initiative is in China's hands, they place the burden on China to make stronger efforts. Analysts take satisfaction from China's change of course in 1999–2000, indicating that China's worries about Japanese military cooperation with the US, Japan's ability to use the 'economic card', and negative public opinion towards China all played a role.<sup>103</sup> This justifies keeping the pressure on China by balancing containment with engagement.

A second explanation for Japan's images centers on the US. The Japanese tend to view their own uncertainty and lack of vision as, in part, a consequence of inadequate American leadership. 'Forced to ride uneasily in US unipolarity', they have 'had to swallow some bitter pills more often than during the Cold War period', says Inoguchi Takashi.<sup>104</sup> They fault the Clinton administration for inconsistency, self-righteousness, at times placing commercial and ideological considerations over security, and for rebuffing Japanese efforts at economic regionalism. For some, US unilateralism was most dangerous when there was a danger of being dragged into a war with China in 1996. For others, it was when Bill Clinton visited China in 1998 and tried to sweep away problems with China, at one fell swoop, without coordination. They assert that the US must be clearer about its priorities and do more to find common ground. But now that the US seems ready to do so, it is not clear that Japan's different calculus of interests can be overcome. A forceful Bush administration could again leave the Japanese feeling pressure and wondering if their nation's interests may be sacrificed to a US global strategy.

It is still unclear how close is the fit between Japanese and US interests in dealing with China. East Asia poses a special environment with many characteristics of the Cold War still present. On the one hand, we find the divisions on the Korean peninsula and between the PRC and Taiwan still threatening to produce arms races and war. On the other, we observe a renewed relationship between China and Russia hostile to US power. Meanwhile, there are strong wartime memories of Japan, glaring vacuums of power, such as in the Russian Far East, and resistant dictators quelling new social forces and standing in the way of economic growth. It is not surprising that Americans and Japanese, despite many common values, differ in some assessments of these conditions.

The Japanese and Americans had come to see China more similarly in the year 2000 than in 1990 or 1995, but the differences did not narrow enough to ensure long-term coordination. On the left we can still discern the presence of the idealists who stress peace over power politics in advocating full engagement; although their impact has fallen most sharply over the decade, they retain a larger voice than many

<sup>103</sup> Ina Hikiyoshi, 'Taichugoku Kitachosen gaiko wa kakuarubeshi', *Foresight*, October 2000, pp. 58–61.

<sup>104</sup> Takashi Inoguchi, 'Japan's Foreign Policy under US Unipolarity: Coping with Uncertainty and Swallowing Some Bitterness', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 6, 2 (December 1998), pp. 3, 9.

assume. On the right we can recognize the rising tide of nationalists who justify much of the war record and distrust the US. They are tempted to use alarm over China in ways that few in the US have considered. The mainstream position of international diplomacy in Japan is to resist the temptation to support any steps toward Taiwan's independence, to recognize the need for US policies that keep a sufficient balance between China and Japan while engaging China, and to avoid being provoked by overreactions in Beijing.<sup>105</sup> But even those who recognize these needs acknowledge that Japanese diplomacy is at a crossroads. The challenge comes not from those who would tilt toward engagement, but from the forces for containment.

While it is probably justified for the Japanese to shift some of the responsibility for confusion over China policy to the US, Japan's own contradictory worldview in the 1990s may deserve even more blame. In 1990–3 the Japanese largely misjudged the new world order, overestimating their country's power versus both the US and China, and underestimating the challenge of formulating a realistic diplomatic strategy on the basis of existing political assumptions and interests. While centrists and experts attempted to draw the debate toward a mature understanding of the geopolitical balance and of the worldviews of other great powers, Japanese attitudes were increasingly shaped by what some call 'emotionalism'. In place of China experts and with support from some in those ranks, popularizers seized the China theme to shape public opinion. Rising insecurity about Japan's place in the world, as doubts on Japan's economic model mounted and fears of isolation spread, led to frustration. In the first period, when doubts on the economy were few but worries about the US were already growing, Japanese emotionalism led to excessive hopes for Sino-Japanese cultural affinities and regional economic integration based on China's weakness and need for Japan. In the middle of the decade as ties to China plummeted, the shift to a containment mentality occurred abruptly with little reflection on great power relations and the psychology of the Chinese people. And recent underestimations of China have fueled a new set of unrealistic prognoses about treating China the way the US under Ronald Reagan treated the 'evil empire' of the Soviet Union. From idealistic ways of building a bridge to China, some Japanese have turned to petulant calls to punish the Chinese for ingratitude, pressuring them to yield.

Behind this volatility lies a third explanation for Japanese perceptions – instability of national identity in the 1990s. Analysts refer to this as the 'lost decade', and criticisms of a lack of urgency about domestic reform, narrow-mindedness on foreign relations, and a lack of 'internationalist' thinking abound inside and outside Japan. In 1991 the Japanese underestimated the future of the US, overestimated their own country's prospects, and did not take China's future seriously. One poll showed a drop from over 40 per cent in previous years of those expecting the US to be the

<sup>105</sup> 'Nihon gaiko Taiwan Lee Teng-Hui soto no shosokan', *Sekai shuho*, 31 August 1999, p. 28–9.

number one economic power in the world in the next century to just 29 per cent, while the figure for Japan jumped from 39 per cent in 1990 to 53 per cent in 1991. In 1992–3 the Japanese continued (44 per cent) to overestimate their future. From 1991 to 1994 China's rating shot up, rising from 1 to 5, 14, and then 25 per cent – equaling the suddenly shrunken figure for Japan.<sup>106</sup> Excess volatility in the views of the US and China is symptomatic of a loss of perspective, making the Japanese prone to oscillations over whether China will soon be very powerful or is really quite weak.

The Japanese oversensitivity to the US, combined with feelings of isolation and helplessness, interferes with reasoning that can lead to sound diplomacy. Their alternating temptations to turn to China to prove something to a triumphant American public and to turn to the US to teach the arrogant Chinese a lesson are both shortsighted. Clearly the Japanese need reassurance that China, for a long time to come, will remain far behind, that the US is not inclined to change direction, and that evolving Sino-US ties will, as anticipated a decade ago, work in Japan's favor. A large part of the problem is Japanese consciousness, and to address it, Akihiko Tanaka argues, Japan must make domestic economic reforms its first diplomatic priority.<sup>107</sup> Only after it sets its own economy on a path of predictable growth and becomes secure in a wide range of reforms and their ability to stem the stagnation will Japan be able to approach China from a position of strength. It is unlikely that the Japanese can find contentment by following in the shadow of the US, as in the handling of the Soviet Union. Tokyo needs space to develop separate ties with China, to seek satisfaction in its own contributions, not only softening the rough edges of a rivalry between Beijing and Washington but also finding its own way in taking responsibility.

Should Americans feel satisfied that the US–Japan security alliance is stronger under new defense guidelines and that increased Japanese concern about China makes Japan a closer ally in the face of a potential threat to regional peace from Chinese belligerence toward Taiwan or Sino-Russian arms cooperation? Of course, but with an eye to the future they should also be concerned about the lack of Japanese leverage in engaging China and helping to integrate China into regional and global communities. Americans should not welcome a repetition of the atmosphere of the Cold War years when Japan was the most vehement opponent of the Soviet Union. This would not be positive for China, where negative public opinion towards Japan fuels suspicions of the outside world, and for Japan, where fears of China could lead to increased nationalism.

Sober voices warn that Japan must not demonize China. Japan must avoid saying that China is a threat while doing its utmost to develop a framework in which ties to the US are primary, and a framework is created to elicit China to play by

<sup>106</sup> *The New York Times*, 30 December 1994, p. A7.

<sup>107</sup> Tanaka Akihiko, 'Shin seiken wa Jiang Zemin o do mukaeru no ka?' *Chuo koron*, September 1998, pp. 60–9.

international rules.<sup>108</sup> It behooves specialists and the media to do a better job of informing the Japanese people about China. They must address misconceptions such as that the Chinese government keeps the history issue alive when it could easily be forgotten by the people or that the Taiwan question is essentially a contemporary matter of democracy and human rights rather than an historic result of Japan's aggression toward China. Japan needs to be better prepared for mature relations with China. Its networks offering links to China are weakening.<sup>109</sup> Lacking area studies centers, its academic community is short on a new generation of China experts, making the debate prone to extreme views rather than careful assessments of relations somewhere between engagement and containment.

US pressure for containment may have a contradictory effect even on the right. In 1992–3 there were misplaced hopes of economic integration through regionalism with a vertical dimension favoring Japan. In this way the right underestimated China. In 1997–8 there were excessive expectations for great power bilateralism and Japan's capacity for limited containment of China through its management of relations with the US, the Soviet Union, and other countries of Asia. This outlook failed to grasp the evolving pattern of relations among the powers and Japan's weak hand. Long accustomed to using US pressure for a stronger military and an enhanced role in containment, the right may now welcome a new wave of 'strong diplomacy' as the best means available, especially since the US and the Japanese are bound to insist that the new ties are strictly equal in nature. But without serious provocations from China it is doubtful that a major shift towards containment can be accomplished without excessive and unsustainable dependence on the US. After finding that their country had little diplomatic leverage through the 1990s, Japanese sources suggest that their country is most eager for maneuver room. A state between containment and engagement, showing some receptivity to US pressure if it really gives Japan an equal role and some to China's appeal if it really addresses Japanese concerns, best suits this way of thinking. But the US if it comes across as too strong and China if it does not smile enough could miscalculate in trying to steer this Japanese search for a sustainable balance.

<sup>108</sup> Funabashi Yoichi, 'Chugoku to no tsukiaikata o ayamaru na', pp. 44–5.

<sup>109</sup> *Mainichi shimbun*, 20 July 1998, p. 8.