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Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Premier Wen Jiabao

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Editor's Note

Premier Wen Jiabao's recent tour of Japan, the first by a Chinese premier in nearly seven years, reflects a warming trend in the relationship between China and Japan. Given the economic and security implications that this about-face carries for the Asia-Pacific region, *China Brief* is pleased to present a special issue analyzing the evolution of this critical relationship.

We begin this issue with insightful assessments of the relationship from two seasoned observers. Ambassador Peter Sato, who formerly served as Japan's ambassador to China, analyzes the developments that have occurred in the relationship between the two countries over the past several months. The framework that was constructed during Prime Minister Abe's October 2006 visit to Beijing, Ambassador Sato notes, has allowed for Tokyo and Beijing to once again cooperate as regional partners on a wide variety of shared concerns and issues. Dr. Jin Xide, deputy director of the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), looks back to the months leading up to Abe's "ice breaking" visit, examining the political and economic considerations that drove officials in both countries to place a priority on repairing relations when it became apparent that Koizumi would be stepping down. Like Ambassador Sato, Dr. Jin is equally optimistic that so long as Abe avoids making controversial statements or visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, opportunities abound for the continued progress of Sino-Japanese relations.

Yet, as Christopher Griffin of the American Enterprise Institute reminds us, not all is as it seems in the relationship between Tokyo and Beijing. Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine certainly served to inflame relations between the two

countries, though China is also partly to blame for the deterioration in bilateral ties. Eager to secure its legitimacy by capitalizing upon the ultra-nationalist sentiments that erupted following Koizumi's repeated visits to the shrine, Beijing has utilized anti-Japanese propaganda as a means of rallying public support around the government. And so long as territorial disputes, security concerns and differences over historical accounts remain, the relationship will be treacherously difficult to navigate. Wrapping up the issue, Camilla Soerensen of the University of Copenhagen offers an assessment from the perspective of another actor whose concerns and actions in the region are oft-neglected: the EU. Despite its enormous economic relationship with both China and Japan, Soerensen argues, Brussels still lacks a single coherent strategy that provides a consistent position on the myriad sensitive issues plaguing the Sino-Japanese relationship.

After reading through this issue, we trust that you will come away with a far more comprehensive understanding of the Sino-Japanese relationship. We would also like to thank Dr. Wenran Jiang at the University of Alberta for his assistance in coordinating this issue. As always, we welcome your thoughts and comments.

Joseph Lin
Associate Editor

In a Fortnight

By Joseph E. Lin

CHINESE MEDIA REPORTS ON JUDGE'S SUSPICIOUS DEATH FROM "SUDDEN ADULT DEATH SYNDROME"

News of the suspicious death of a local judge while being detained on corruption charges has found its way into the coverage of Xinhua, China's official news agency. Li Chaoyang, a judge with the Pingle County Court in China's southwestern Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, was arrested in late March on corruption charges and was being held at the detention center of Xing'an. On the morning of April 2, detention center authorities claimed to have found Li unconscious in his cell and sent him to a hospital where he later died (Xinhua, April 30). Following his death, investigators from the Guilin municipal law enforcement section concluded that Li had died from "Sudden Adult Death Syndrome" that had been prompted by his "unstable state of mind, and abnormal sleeping and eating habits."

When family members arrived to pick up his body, however, they found a wide gash across his lip, missing and chipped teeth and several bruises on his face, neck and back (Southern Metropolis Daily, April 26). Suspecting that Li had died from being tortured at the detention facility, they called for an additional autopsy and a renewed investigation into his death. Investigators and detention center officials insisted, however, that Li sustained the injuries when he tripped and fell during an attempt to escape from the detention facility. The family members' suspicions of torture were first covered by Chinese bloggers, whose postings were then picked by "China Court" (*Zhongguo Fayuan Wang*), an online service (www.chinacourt.org). Pictures of Li's battered body also appeared on various Chinese blogs and websites, though at the time of publication, it appeared that a number of these pictures have been removed. While the torture of prisoners in China's detention centers is a fact that has been well-documented by international human rights groups, such as Amnesty International, what is particularly notable about this case is the publicity it has received from the state-controlled press. It seems that soon after Chinese bloggers began to circulate the story, the Chinese press quickly released its own article in an attempt to moderate the coverage of Li's death and to quash rumors of state-sanctioned torture that might damage the legitimacy of the Chinese government (*China Brief*, April 18).

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The View from Tokyo: Melting Ice and Building Bridges

By Peter Y. Sato

Relations between China and Japan have not always been cordial during the 35 years of normalized relations between the two countries. Tokyo followed Washington's lead and established diplomatic relations with China in 1972, although it continued to view Beijing apprehensively throughout much of the Cold War. Even with the adoption of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1978, the Sino-Japanese relationship remained limited primarily to the realm of trade. While bilateral ties would eventually warm in later years, during the recent administration of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Tokyo's relations with China sank to historic depths. Koizumi's insistence upon continuing his annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine as well as the anti-Japanese demonstrations in major Chinese cities resulted in relations between the two countries that were

“economically warm” but “politically freezing.” When it became clear that Koizumi would be finishing his term late last year, however, Chinese and Japanese leaders began signaling to one another that the transition in leadership offered an opportunity for both countries to repair the damaged relationship.

Both Chinese and Japanese officials agreed that given the mutual economic interests of both countries, any further deterioration of political relations would also have severe economic repercussions. Already, the anti-Japanese demonstrations had resulted in the destruction of Japanese storefronts and property and were having an adverse effect upon Japanese businesses interested in entering into the Chinese market. Thus, when Shinzo Abe was elected in September, it was decided that his first trip abroad as prime minister would be to China in order to “break the ice” between the two countries. This successful initiative was reciprocated by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao’s official visit to Japan on April 11-13—the first by a Chinese premier in over six and a half years—to further “melt the ice.”

THE GOVERNING FRAMEWORKS

The China-Japan Joint Press Statement of October 8, 2006, which was agreed upon by the leaders of the two governments during Abe’s visit to Beijing, now provides the fundamental framework for the bilateral relationship. In the statement, both leaders indicated a strong commitment to improving the Japan-China relationship by building “a mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests” [1]. This strategic agreement has now become the guideline for policymakers in both countries as political considerations have become coupled with economic concerns to serve as “the two wheels” of the relationship. The statement also affirmed that mutual respect for each other’s governance remained an important foundation in building future-oriented relations. Japan “positively appreciated” China’s peaceful development, while China recognized that Japan’s post-war policies have followed the path of a peaceful country for more than six decades. This was the first official document in which the Chinese leadership made a reference to “post-war Japan,” a clear indication of Beijing’s support for Abe, the first Japanese prime minister to be born after World War II.

Wen’s visit to Japan additionally strengthened the relationship through further agreements to cooperate on a wide range of issues, as noted in the Japan-China Joint Press Statement on April 11 [2]. Particularly notable was the joint statement that pledged to enhance cooperation in dealing with China’s environmental challenges. Both leaders agreed that combating global warming was of vital importance and agreed to jointly tackle China’s water

pollution problems and assist China in adopting a recycling-based economy with a pollution control management system. As part of this cooperation, Japan would transfer environmentally friendly technology to China as well as offer direct investments in this field. It is likely that Tokyo will also offer Beijing assistance in the form of official development aid (ODA) in the near future.

UNDERLYING TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Reflecting the ever-increasing economic relationship between the two countries, recent statistics published by the Japanese government revealed that China has become Japan’s largest trading partner, surpassing the United States (*China Daily*, April 25). In 2006, overall trade between the two countries amounted to \$211.3 billion and Japan’s foreign direct investments (FDI) in China reached \$4.6 billion, bringing the total FDI since the normalization of relations to \$58 billion (*China Daily*, April 11). Complementing the advances in the economic dimension of the relationship has been the growing number of visitors to each country. The total number of Chinese and Japanese visitors reached 4.7 million last year, and there are now 671 flights between Japan and China each week. In 2005, some 110,000 Chinese students studied in Japan, while 20,000 Japanese students studied in China [3].

In spite of these encouraging developments, a number of challenges in Sino-Japanese relations remain to be overcome, most notable of which are the Chinese and Japanese publics’ attitudes toward one another. According to a joint survey conducted in 2005 by the *Asahi Shimbun* and the Institute of Sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), only 9.9 percent of the Japanese public held favorable views of China, 27.6 held unfavorable views and 59.8 percent remained undecided [4]. These sentiments were reflected even more starkly by the Chinese public. In a separate survey conducted by both *Asahi* and CASS in 2005, only 7.8 percent of the Chinese public held favorable views of Japan, while 64.1 percent held unfavorable views of Japan [5].

Given that much of this animosity stems from Chinese complaints over “historical issues,” both leaders pledged last October to “face past history squarely” and support joint historical research projects by Japanese and Chinese scholars; since then, these scholars have met with each other on two separate occasions. Mutual public (mis)perceptions of one another also contribute to these unfavorable attitudes. Exchange programs at all levels of society will assist in ameliorating the public sentiments of each country. For example, the “Japan-China Exchange Year of Culture and Sports 2007” that was launched late last year will “introduce an image of a new Japan and the

Japanese to the Chinese people of the new generation” [6]. By targeting the younger generation in these exchanges, Chinese and Japanese leaders will be able to deepen their public’s mutual understandings of one another for generations to come.

The Japanese public, on the other hand, is increasingly concerned with China’s activities that affect regional stability and security and are closely observing the actions that Beijing is undertaking to defuse the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. The Japanese are equally worried about China’s growing military capacity, and Tokyo has called for the Chinese military to display increased transparency in its policies. Added transparency and the constant exchange of military and defense officials would certainly help avoid any misunderstandings or accidental military confrontations, especially given the ongoing territorial disputes between the two countries over the East China Sea.

The successful visits by the respective prime ministers have helped to set the tone of the relationship between the two countries. In order to ensure continued improvement of relations, however, it is necessary that Tokyo and Beijing conduct themselves according to the established frameworks that were agreed upon through painstaking “strategic dialogues.” Additional visits at both the ministerial and summit level, such as Abe’s visit to China later this year as well as Chinese President Hu Jintao’s visit to Japan next year, are likewise necessary for the expansion of the bilateral relationship. While the two joint statements have demonstrated that Japan and China are capable of finding common ground with one another, political resolve and prowess will be needed in order to sustain the spirit of cooperation.

Ambassador Peter Yoshiyasu Sato served as the Japanese Ambassador to Beijing from 1995 to 1998. He is currently the vice president of Japan-China Friendship Association and serves as an advisor to the Tokyo Electric Power Company and Shiseido Co.

NOTES

1. Full text of the China-Japan Joint Press Statement of October 8, 2006 is available online at: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/joint0610.html>.
2. Full text of Japan-China Joint Press Statement on April 11, 2007 available online at: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/pv0704/joint.html>.
3. Official Pamphlet prepared jointly by Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Committee of Japan-China Exchange Year for Culture and Sports, available online at: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/jccs2007>

4. Polling questions and data from the joint Asahi Shimbun-CASS survey available online at: <http://www.mansfieldfdn.org/polls/poll-05-4.htm>.

5. Polling questions and data from the joint Asahi Shimbun-CASS survey available online at: <http://www.mansfieldfdn.org/polls/poll-05-3.htm>.

6. Full text of the Decision on the Chairman of the Executive Committee, etc. of “The Japan-China Exchange Year of Culture and Sports 2007” is available online at: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2006/12/1211.html>.

Confluence of Considerations: Sino-Japanese Relations from Beijing’s Perspective

By Jin Xide

Relations between Beijing and Tokyo during the tenure of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi were marked by increasingly dichotomous trends. Economic relations between the two countries witnessed spectacular growth during the period, with the Japanese economy becoming more and more dependent on the Chinese market. Political relations between Tokyo and Beijing, however, took a precipitous turn primarily due to Koizumi’s repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates Japan’s war dead, including 14 World War II class-A war criminals.

REPAIRING RELATIONS WITH CHINA

Eventually, the deteriorating bilateral political relations took a toll on the economic relationship between the two countries. While overall trade increased, both Japan’s exports and imports grew at slower pace in 2005, 8.9 percent and 15.7 percent, respectively, down from 29.0 percent and 25.3 percent in 2004 [1].

Japanese companies that maintained investments in China faced an unfavorable management environment due to the increasing anti-Japanese sentiments among the Chinese citizenry. The poor relations between the two countries also affected the ability of Japanese firms to obtain contracts on the many large-scale construction projects in China, such as the Three Gorges Dam, the express railway between Beijing and Shanghai and the nuclear power plants that are now being constructed. As a result of the negative impact that Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni had upon the economic relationship, many Japanese business leaders as well as trade associations demanded that both Koizumi and especially the incoming prime minister halt visits to the shrine and begin repairing relations with China.

The concern stemming from the business communities also spilled over into the public arena, with Japan's top political leaders, including several former prime ministers, criticizing Koizumi's visits. Even the conservative-leaning *Yomiuri Shimbun* and its owner Tsuneo Watanabe criticized Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, June 4, 2005). Of the five largest newspapers in Japan, only the *Sankei Shimbun* continues to support such visits.

The Japanese public likewise began to oppose the prime minister's visits to Yasukuni. According to a public opinion poll conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun* on Koizumi's August 15, 2006 visit to the shrine, 49 percent of the public supported his visit to the shrine on the anniversary commemorating the end of World War II, while 37 percent were opposed to his visit [2]. Yet, when asked whether the succeeding prime minister should continue these visits, only 31 percent of the respondents felt that he should continue the visits, while 47 percent of the public stated that the next prime minister should stop visiting the shrine.

When Abe became Prime Minister in September 2006, he faced a critical decision as to whether to reverse Koizumi's practice of visiting to the Yasukuni Shrine. Unlike Koizumi, however, who enjoyed strong support within his party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), as well as with the public, Abe's position as Prime Minister remains precarious. Aware that the security of his position is largely dependent upon the LDP's strong showing at the Upper House elections in July 2007, he has chosen to adopt a safer route by supporting the thawing of relations with China, a policy that enjoys widespread support. Moreover, given that Abe has yet to reveal a domestic agenda capable of rallying public or party support, he remains relegated to consolidating his position based upon his foreign policy.

CHINA'S IMPETUS FOR THAWING RELATIONS

As Tokyo was determining how best to repair relations with China, Beijing was also searching for an opportunity to break the deadlock in bilateral relations that had lasted for over half a decade. Beijing was faced with the task of addressing the anti-Japanese sentiment of the Chinese public, while also emphasizing the importance of relations between China and Japan to its people. When the Japanese leadership transition occurred in September 2006, Beijing viewed the change as an opportunity to alter the course of Sino-Japanese relations and began discussing the possibility of welcoming the new prime minister to visit China.

Beijing's calculus for restoring relations with Japan was primarily centered upon economic considerations. The Chinese leadership was aware that China's continued

economic development depended upon both Japanese investments as well as stable relations with the regional powers. China also sought to avoid any escalation of tension over the territorial disputes in the East China Sea and to encourage the process of regional cooperation with Japan.

NEGOTIATING CONSIDERATIONS

When it became clear that Koizumi would be stepping down in the fall of 2006, Beijing began to explore the possibility of repairing relations under the next prime minister. Beijing's precondition for any visiting Japanese prime minister, however, was that the Japanese leader agree to not visit the Yasukuni Shrine [3]. As it became certain that Abe would be replacing Koizumi, Chinese and Japanese officials initiated a series of strategic dialogues in late September 2006, the details of which are unknown, in order to "remove the political obstacle" and pave the way for Abe's visit (*China Daily*, September 22, 2006). Abe likewise sought to repair relations with China and indicated, even before his election, that he hoped to visit China as his first trip abroad as prime minister. To ensure that his trip would be prefaced by optimism, days before his visit to Beijing, he also repeated former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's 1995 apology for Japan's wartime aggressions in the past (Xinhua, October 7, 2006).

In addition to opening the door for subsequent visits between Chinese and Japanese leaders, Abe's "ice-breaking" visit also had a "mind-changing effect" upon the opinions that the Chinese and Japanese publics had of one another. Moreover, Abe's visit had a "negotiation promoting effect" in which the visit served to make subsequent bilateral dialogues and negotiations more promising, as evidenced by the China-Japan Joint Press Statement of October 8, 2006 [4].

Since then, additional meetings have been held between Abe and the Chinese leadership. Abe met with Chinese President Hu Jintao at the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference in Vietnam and with Prime Minister Wen during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations 10+3 trilateral leaders' meeting in the Philippines (*China Daily*, November 18, 2006; Xinhua, January 15). It was at their meeting in the Philippines that Abe invited Wen to visit Japan.

WEN'S "ICE MELTING" VISIT

Prior to Wen's visit to Japan, however, two challenges emerged that would shape the agenda of the discussions. In the months leading up to the meeting, Japan engaged in a series of unfriendly moves against China. During Abe's

visit to Europe in January, he actively lobbied the EU to maintain its arms embargo against China (*EU Business*, January 10). Abe also called for a strategic dialogue to take place among the “common value” countries in the Asia-Pacific—Japan, Australia, India and the United States—in order to develop a quadrilateral strategic “Common Value Alliance” (*People’s Daily*, April 21). Just one month prior, Japan signed a “Joint Declaration for Strategic Cooperation”—a move that served as a step toward realizing such a “Common Value Alliance” [5]. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso advanced this notion by suggesting that an “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” be formed in the Asia-Pacific, which Chinese strategists interpreted as rhetoric calling for the containment of China [6]. Compounding upon these events was Abe’s denial that the Japanese government ever coerced the “comfort women” during World War II (*People’s Daily*, March 16).

The other challenge was the difficulty of arriving at a compromise between Tokyo and Beijing over the joint statement prior to the meeting. Chinese negotiators sought to obtain concessions from Japan over the key issues of Yasukuni and Taiwan. Regarding the latter, Beijing wanted an unambiguous declaration from Tokyo stating that it does not support Taiwan’s independence nor would it ever intervene in the Taiwan Strait, regardless of the circumstances. Japanese negotiators, on the other hand, were concerned with making a breakthrough on the territorial disputes in the East China Sea as well as obtaining China’s support regarding Japan’s position in the abductee issue with North Korea. They also hoped that China would assist Japan in becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Given the sensitive and contentious nature of these issues, the negotiations, despite having begun weeks before, were not finalized until right before the meeting between the two leaders.

In spite of these difficulties, Wen’s visit was a success on three important aspects. First, Wen’s visit paved the way for the regularization of mutual visits between Chinese and Japanese leaders. If all goes as planned, Abe is likely to visit China again within the year, and President Hu will also visit Japan in the near future. Second, Wen’s visit helped to improve Japanese public opinion on China. Speaking before the Japanese Diet, Wen’s carefully crafted speech accounted for the sentiments of both the Japanese and Chinese people and was interrupted 11 times by applause from the Diet members. During his 52-hour visit, Wen also attended 49 events, many of which involved meetings with the Japanese citizenry. Lastly, both sides were able to arrive at a consensus on establishing a framework for “Mutually Beneficial Relations Based on Common Strategic Interests,” which was published in the Japan-China Joint Press Statement [7].

A LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE ON CHINA-JAPAN RELATIONS

If Abe is able to secure his position as prime minister following Japan’s Upper House elections in July and continues his hitherto policy on China, relations between Tokyo and Beijing are likely only to advance. Mutual exchanges in all fields would continue to increase as public opinion in each country further improves, with the overall relationship becoming warmer and warmer. Any reversal on Abe’s policy, however, including a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, would almost certainly cause the current progress to grind to a halt.

In the 2,000 years of relations between China and Japan, the comprehensive national strength of each country relative to the other has tended to follow two models, “strong [country]-weak [country]” and “weak-strong.” At the turn of the century, however, bilateral relations have entered into a new “strong-strong” model. Given their status as great powers, both countries have the opportunity and capacity to cooperate with one another and achieve a win-win result. China is committed to improving and stabilizing its relations with Japan for both its own interests as well as those of the international community. Yet, unless Japan reciprocates China’s policies and actions, Chinese leaders will have limited room to make concessions with Japan.

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NOTES

1. “Japan’s Trade with China Sets Seventh Straight Record in 2005,” press release by Japan External Trade Organization, available online at: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/news/releases/20060222457-news>.
2. Asahi Shimbun’s polling questions and figures are available online at: <http://www.mansfieldfdn.org/polls/poll-06-6.htm>.
3. It should be noted that while Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe tactfully pledged to deal with the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in an “appropriate” manner, he did so without explicitly promising to stop all future visits.
4. Full text of the China-Japan Joint Press Statement of October 8, 2006 is available online at: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/joint0610.html>.
5. Full text of the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation available online at: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/australia/joint0703.html>.
6. Full text of the speech is available online at: <http://www>.

mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html.

7. Full text of Japan-China Joint Press Statement on April 11, 2007 available online at: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/pv0704/joint.html>.

* * *

Ice Charades: Japan and China Skate Around the Obstacles

By Christopher Griffin

China's and Japan's diplomats can never be criticized for failing to come up with a variety of buzzwords to describe the evolution of their countries' bilateral relations: "hot economics, cold politics," moving from a "comprehensive policy dialogue" to a "strategic dialogue," and building a "mutually beneficial strategic relationship." So, it should be no surprise that much of the reportage on Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's April 11-13 trip to Tokyo focused on his declaration that the focus would be on "ice melting," on the heels of Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's "ice breaking" visit to Beijing in October 2006.

Yet, in the context of Japan and China's perennially troubled relationship, "ice melting" means very little. The two sides have only begun to move beyond the glacial disputes that prevented high-level diplomatic exchanges in recent years. These efforts to restart the relationship, however, reveal several major trends in bilateral ties, as the two sides try to come to terms with recent diplomatic and political developments that have left China holding the stronger hand in East Asia.

MAGNANIMOUS IN VICTORY?

Perhaps the most important trend in contemporary bilateral Sino-Japanese relations is that after a period in which China prominently criticized Japan's military resurgence, resisted Tokyo's efforts to inject the "abductee" issue into the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program and criticized Japan for failing to appropriately deal with the nation's wartime history of aggression against China, Beijing has made significant strides on each of these issues. Emboldened by recent accomplishments, Wen's trip was primarily designed to consolidate gains in these fields while minimizing potential repercussions in Tokyo.

The February 13 six-party agreement on initial actions regarding North Korea's nuclear program was perhaps the greatest of China's accomplishments in recent months, and one that simultaneously propelled Beijing to a new height as an "honest broker" in East Asia, while undercutting Tokyo's diplomatic and security posture in the region.

Under the agreement, the six parties have placed ever-greater reliance on Pyongyang's willingness to voluntarily dismantle its nuclear weapons program in exchange for energy and humanitarian aid, without immediately addressing such questions as North Korea's highly-enriched uranium program or extant atomic weapons. These terms meet Beijing's goal of preserving Pyongyang as an internationally subsidized buffer against American power on the Korean Peninsula, but leave Japan squared off against a hostile regime that recently tested ballistic missiles capable of striking Tokyo.

While Japan may be frustrated by having to accept Pyongyang's terms for the prolongation of the six-party talks, it has been placed in an especially difficult position by the February 13 agreement's relegation of the abductee issue to a bilateral working group, the success or failure of which will have no bearing on other portions of the talks. This issue, which concerns more than a dozen Japanese citizens who were kidnapped by North Korean intelligence in the 1970s and 1980s, has captivated the Japanese public and assumed primacy in Japan's policy toward Pyongyang. Abe has pledged that Japan will not provide energy assistance to North Korea unless its concerns regarding the abductee problem are resolved; but this hard-line position leaves Tokyo alone at the talks. Japan has bet all of its leverage on resolving a single issue, marginalizing it at the broader six-party negotiations on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

In contrast, Premier Wen demonstrated Beijing's confidence in the six-party talks during his meeting with Abe, where they adopted a joint statement calling on the six parties to fully implement the February 13 agreement. In this statement, Beijing expressed its "understanding and sympathy" toward Japan's concerns on the abductee issue and indicated that it "would like to provide the necessary cooperation" to help promote Japanese-North Korean relations ("China-Japan Joint Press Statement," April 11, 2006). Immediately after the statement was released, however, a high-ranking Chinese diplomat emphasized that Beijing believes "the abduction issue is supposed to be a matter to be resolved bilaterally," implying that the ball remains solely in Tokyo's court (*Daily Yomiuri*, April 13).

Thus, no matter how much Japan hopes for a Chinese contribution toward the resolution of the abductee issue, Tokyo appears to be abandoned in resolving this topic. And so long as the issue remains unresolved, Japan will remain a relatively ineffectual actor at future iterations of the six-party talks, an outcome that places its security and diplomacy in jeopardy, and one that the Wen-Abe meeting did little to address.

WHISTLING PAST THE HISTORY ISSUE

Perhaps the most important development of Premier Wen's visit to Tokyo is that he has continued to stamp out the nationalistic fires that singed bilateral relations in the five years of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's tenure. During that period, Beijing refused to hold summit level meetings in protest against Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, which commemorates Japan's war dead. This chill was deep enough that Wen's visit is the first by a Chinese premier in almost seven years.

As official Sino-Japanese ties stagnated, a range of incidents—anti-Japanese riots in August 2004 and April 2005, the publishing of a revisionist Japanese junior high school text book and repeated incursions by Chinese “research ships” and a submarine into Japan's territorial waters—all presented new hazards for a relationship without leadership. Incoming Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Beijing in October 2006 and pledge to deal with the Yasukuni matter in an “appropriate” (albeit cleverly unspecified) manner broke through the ice that had trapped Sino-Japanese relations, presenting a modest victory for China and allowing both sides to back down from a mutually harmful spat over a symbolic question.

Nevertheless, the joint effort to sideline the history issue has not addressed fundamental differences or underlying tensions on the matter. For example, although the dispute over Yasukuni has focused on the fourteen “Class A” war criminals enshrined there, the heart of the matter cuts straight to the nearly 2.5 million Japanese soldiers who died between the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War and the close of the Pacific war in 1945. The Chinese public considers any veneration of these soldiers as honoring the instruments of criminal aggression. As Premier Wen explained to a group of reporters before visiting Tokyo, “both countries experienced a half-century of misery when Japanese militarists launched a war of aggression against China” (*People's Daily*, April 17). No mainstream history textbook in Japan would ascribe to Wen's description of a continuous, five-decade long militarist plot—a basic difference in views that guarantees that Yasukuni will remain one of many problems well into the future.

Moreover, while the Chinese seethe at a view of history that most Japanese cannot imagine, many in Japan see the more recent outbursts of violence against Japanese nationals and property in China as a greater problem. In a think tank article assessing Premier Wen's visit, the Japan Forum on International Relations' Kenichi Ito observes that “the scars left by the violent anti-Japanese demonstrations across China two years ago remain,” and that the Japanese public finds it “difficult to maintain normal, friendly relations

with a country...whose government does not apologize for, compensate for and punish the destructive behavior of demonstrators” (Association of Japanese Institute of Strategic Studies, April 23). It seems that each side may acknowledge the importance of historical offences and disputes without the foci ever converging.

But perhaps the greatest risk underlying these very divergent views of history is the fact that the Chinese government both spins-up and spins-down nationalist sentiment, generally manipulating the truth to promote its immediate political ends. After the torrent of anti-Japanese propaganda that accompanied the April 2005 riots, for example, Beijing has struggled to prevent anger over Prime Minister Abe's recent comments on the “comfort women” question from derailing Wen's trip.

Since Abe suggested in early March that Japan's military did not coerce comfort women during the Pacific War, the Chinese press and officials have continuously worked to deflate the story. One remarkable outcome of this effort was the stark contrast between the *China Daily's* March 26 headline, “Abe Apologizes for WW2 Sex Slaves,” and the *New York Times's* treatment of the same speech: “Japan Again Denies Role in Sex Slavery.” Indicating that the Chinese public may have limited patience for manipulated media, online comments on a *China Daily* article titled “Abe Apologizes for Wartime Sex Slavery” pointed out: “Abe didn't reverse himself. The only ones reporting this ‘reversal’ are Chinese newspapers” (*China Daily*, March 13). As this popular mistrust of China's state-controlled media accumulates, the incentives for China's citizenry to take national pride into their own hands and protest both the Communist Party and Japan grow as well.

In short, the history issue continues to lurk behind the façade of improved Sino-Japanese ties. And while the leadership in Zhongnanhai has grown accustomed to both mobilizing and curtailing anti-Japanese sentiment, the proliferation of media outlets that lie beyond the state's immediate control promises to make this an increasingly unwieldy tool. If China and Japan do not resolve some of their longstanding disputes soon, they may indeed propel the two countries in the direction of an escalating confrontation, edged on by the anti-Japanese sentiment that Beijing has so long fostered.

DANGEROUS UNDERCURRENTS

While the Wen-Abe meeting was partially intending to maximize the perception of positive developments in bilateral relations, it is also necessary for Beijing to minimize the downside risk of blowback as Japan may reevaluate its diplomatic strategy in response to recent setbacks and

growing perceived threats in the region.

If the February 13 agreement on North Korea represents Beijing's most recent triumph, it is also its greatest risk vis-à-vis Tokyo. Japan has long pointed to the threat posed by North Korea's missile and nuclear weapons programs as a justification for upgrading its missile defense capabilities and alliance with the United States. If Japan's nuclear "debate" following the October 2006 North Korean nuclear test can be treated as symptomatic of declining confidence in the U.S. security guarantee, then China may fear the possibility of an increasingly remilitarized and eventually nuclear-armed Japan. Maintaining Japan's simultaneous commitment to and marginalization within the six-party talks may be an optimal goal, but is also a difficult one to sustain.

The history issue is also an increasingly thorny one for Beijing. In addition to unwieldy nationalist sentiment at home, China also has to deal with Japanese leaders who may increasingly respond to falling approval rates by sounding off nationalist rhetoric, as Abe has in part done on the comfort women question. As convenient as it is for Beijing to have anti-Japanese crusades at the times of its choosing, they are inconvenient when they arise unexpectedly.

Territorial disputes in the East China Sea pose a final area where the bilateral relationship threatens to spin out of control. Simultaneously observing and raising tensions on the issue, the *People's Daily*, the Communist Party's official mouthpiece, has previously warned: "If the Japanese government is bent on having its own way, and insists on exploiting oil and natural gas in China's exclusive economic zone, then it is not impossible for the outbreak of skirmishes" (*People's Daily*, July 27, 2005). Although both Japanese and Chinese diplomats have attempted to minimize the severity of the disagreement over the East China Sea for the purposes of the Wen visit, no breakthrough was announced beyond acknowledging that future consultations on the topic may be conducted at a higher level as appropriate in an effort to make the contested maritime region a "Sea of Peace, Cooperation and Friendship."

This all brings Tokyo and Beijing back to a point that no amount of positive talk and diplomatic jargon can dispel: the two sides have very different views on a wide range of topics that are of vital importance. Managing these differences will require tremendous effort and some confidence that each can compromise without being taken advantage of for narrow domestic political reasons by the other. Wen's trip to Tokyo may indeed be the first move toward the "ice melting" around these issues, but each side has yet a long distance to go.

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The EU's Approach toward Relations with Tokyo and Beijing

By Camilla T. N. Soerensen

Of the handful of official statements on Sino-Japanese relations released by the EU in recent years, nearly all have displayed a pattern of vagueness and neutrality, as evidenced by EU Secretary General Javier Solana's comments on Prime Minister's Shinzo Abe's "ice breaking" visits to Beijing and Seoul in October 2006. The EU, Solana stated, would "...welcome warmly the visit by the new Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Beijing and Seoul on Sunday and Monday. All three countries are important partners for the EU, and I am pleased to be able to congratulate all three leaders on delivering this very positive development for the region" [1]. Yet, such generic statements—in sharp contrast to the EU's statements on other international issues of import—do not reflect a lack of interest in the dynamics of the bilateral relationship between Beijing and Tokyo. Quite the contrary, the EU has a declared ambition of being a global security actor that is committed to the maintenance of stability and promotion of economic growth across the entire East Asian region [2]. Moreover, given their immense economic interests in the region, European states would face severe costs if a conflict in the region arose.

What accounts for this sparsity of statements from Brussels, therefore, stems more from its unfamiliarity with the nuances of the bilateral relationship between China and Japan, than from strategic disinterest. The EU, long concerned with the economic prosperity and interdependence among the regional states, has only recently become cognizant of the critical implications that China's rise has for the political and security situation in East Asia and specifically for Japan's domestic and security considerations. Until now, the EU's strategy in the region has been to strengthen its bilateral relations with the East Asian states as well as increase its regional economic presence. While the EU has been successful on both counts, it has yet to adopt a coherent and comprehensive strategy that addresses Japan's concerns and actively encourages regional security and stability.

THE EU AND EAST ASIAN SECURITY

The EU utilizes a broad approach toward regional and global security based upon its 2003 *European Security*

Strategy [3]. The goals are to preserve peace and security in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter, to promote a rule-based international system and regional integration, as well as the development and consolidation of democracy and common policies to meet global challenges, such as energy, environment and health. Based upon these objectives, a strong focus in the EU on the development of the political and security situation in East Asia should be expected. Aside from the EU's statements in support of the six-party talks and repeated calls on both China and Taiwan not to jeopardize the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, the EU is only minimally involved in security issues in East Asia. The awareness of the critical implications that China's development has on the political and security situation in East Asia, specifically on Japan's domestic and security policy as well as on the U.S.-Japan alliance, is only beginning to grow in Brussels. An important factor here is the historically strong security role that the United States has played in East Asia. The EU has not been perceived by the regional countries or the United States as a security actor in the region, and the EU has conveniently relied on the United States to maintain stability in the region.

THE EU'S "STRATEGIC RELATIONS" WITH CHINA AND JAPAN

Concern in Europe over "China's Rise" has developed differently from the concerns in East Asia and in the United States. The European debate has focused first and foremost on the economic dimension of China's development and the opportunities available for European businesses [4]. Only recently have the political and security aspects of China's development been creating strong concerns, and it is actually China's intensified activities and growing influence in other regions—ones in which the EU plays a strong role, such as Africa—that are primarily causing these strong concerns (*EU Business*, February 15) [5]. While the EU has had a strategic partnership with China since 2003, the relationship is still driven principally by economic interests with other dimensions of the partnership underdeveloped or nonexistent [6]. Even the newly-established EU-China dialogue on strategic issues has not led to in-depth discussions on Asian security issues. Within certain circles of the EU, there is a growing acknowledgement that it needs to develop a security perspective on China. There are no clear ideas, however, on what this should contain, partly because of the EU's general uncertainty about its security role in East Asia and especially how close it should coordinate its policy with that of the United States and Japan.

The EU's relationship with Japan is broader, more mature and much less of a source of contention among member states than is its relationship with China. Economic interests certainly play a strong role, but the EU emphasizes that

its relationship with Japan is underpinned by shared core values and principles such as democracy, rule of law and protection of human rights. As Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU's commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy, recently argued, "A long-established democracy, Japan is a natural strategic partner for Europe" [7]. Yet, it is also unclear what dimensions the partnership includes. At the 2006 summit, the EU and Japan agreed to enhance their strategic dialogue on security in East Asia and adopt a forum for in-depth strategic discussions in order to better understand mutual concerns and promote regional stability and cooperation [8].

In recent years, the EU's focus on strengthening its economic and political relations with both China and Japan has succeeded; China and Japan are increasingly dealing with the EU as single economic and political actor. This, however, also means that both Tokyo and Beijing expect the EU to reciprocally act in such a manner, adopting consistent policies on all issues. This will prove to be ever more challenging as Brussels is forced to adopt stances on issues related to disputes and tensions in Sino-Japanese political and security relations, such as the embargo on arms sales to China (*EU Business*, April 19).

ARMS EMBARGO CONTROVERSY

The 2003-2005 controversy over lifting the EU's embargo on arms sales to China illustrates the lack of awareness on the part of the EU to the political and security implications of "China's rise" in East Asia, i.e. the growing expectations from the regional states and the United States for the EU to act as one political actor. At the European Council summit in Rome in November 2003, the EU declared its intention to "work towards lifting of the weapons embargo" that has been in place since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Proponents of abolishing the arms embargo argued that China had made some improvements on human rights and lifting the embargo was necessary to establish a "strategic partnership" with China. It soon became clear, however, that the agreement in the EU was only to begin discussions, rather than immediately lift the embargo. Even as the European states debated the issue during the following year, China incessantly demanded that progress be made toward the lifting of the arms embargo at the same time as Tokyo and Washington were demanding that the embargo remain. China's passing of the Anti-Secession Law in March 2005, however, gave the EU an opportunity to back down, and it was agreed to delay the decision to lift the embargo. Although the arms embargo remains in place and there are no indications that it will be lifted in the near future, the issue continues to be high on the agenda for both EU-China meetings and EU-Japan meetings. Japanese leaders consistently express strong concerns about lifting

the embargo, arguing that it will jeopardize stability in East Asia.

It is interesting to note that the EU's conditions for lifting of the embargo have now broadened to include increased transparency in China's military modernization (*EU Business*, April 19). This subtle development reveals how the EU is paying additional attention to the complex dynamics of East Asian politics and security and is more aware of the concerns in the region. Yet, it also indicates how difficult it is for the EU to develop a strategy that insures the EU's credibility as a political and security actor in the region that acts independently of the United States. The issue is further complicated by the high pressure that China has placed on the EU, arguing that Brussels ought to lift the embargo in order to prove that it accepts China as an equal partner on the international stage (*People's Daily*, December 19, 2006).

PROMOTING A SINO-JAPANESE DIALOGUE

The EU is far from being a strong security actor in East Asia, but it possesses significant "soft power" derived from its own successful example of regional economic and political integration as well as its positive experience with overcoming competitive nationalisms and promoting reconciliation. The EU, with its strong relations with China, Japan and the United States, is in an advantageous position to promote Sino-Japanese political and security dialogue. To play such a role, however, the EU needs a coherent and comprehensive strategy that encompasses more than simply the sum of the single bilateral strategies it has adopted toward Japan and China. Relying upon its current approach only places the EU in a difficult situation (e.g. adopting a position on the arms embargo controversy) where it is forced to confront irreconcilable expectations or demands from both Tokyo and Beijing. As the EU's leaders increasingly realize, they will need to adopt a more coherent and comprehensive strategy toward Sino-Japanese relations that builds upon its strong bilateral relations with each country.

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NOTES

1. Comment from Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), October 10, 2006, available online at: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/declarations/91273.pdf)

[declarations/91273.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/declarations/91273.pdf).

2. "EU-Asia: European Commission Adopts New Strategy for Enhanced Partnership," Brussels, September 4, 2001, available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/asia/news/ip01_1238_en.htm.

3. "A Secure Europe in a Better World," European Security Strategy, Brussels, December 2003, available online at: <http://ue.eu.int/ue-doc/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

4. The focus on domestic politics, especially human rights in China, however, also plays a strong role in the debate, and especially the EU Parliament strongly criticizes China and wants to make trade relations contingent upon human rights reform in China – cf. "EU Parliament Attacks China over human rights" *EU Business*, April 26, available online at: <http://www.eubusiness.com/Institutions/china-human-rights.44>.

5. Marcin Zaborowski, "Developing a European Security Perspective on China," *EU Institute for Security Studies*, Paris, March 3, 2006, available online at: <http://www.iss.europa.eu/activ/content/rep06-06.pdf>.

6. Quite interestingly, at the latest EU-China summit in Helsinki in September 2006, the relationship was said to be 'maturing into a comprehensive strategic partnership'—cf. "Joint Statement of the Ninth EU-China Summit", Helsinki, September 9, 2006, available online at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/er/90951.pdf.

7. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, "New Visions for EU-Japan Relations," speech at the opening of Joint-EU-Japan Symposium, Brussels, April 6, 2006, available online at: http://www.deljpn.ec.europa.eu/home/speech_en_SPEECH%2005/2006.php.

8. "15th Japan-EU Summit Joint Press Statement," Tokyo, Japan, April 24, 2006, available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/japan/sum04_06/jps.pdf.