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China, Japan: 15 years on

by MINEO NAKAJIMA

September 29th marked the 15th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Japan and the People's Republic of China. This would normally be an occasion for celebration, but just now an awkward disharmony defines the relation between the two countries.

The variety of mutual irritants at work suggests that the divide between China and Japan is deep and long-term. But looking back over the past 15 years, it is also possible to argue that the potential for the development of successful ties between the two countries was flawed from the beginning, indeed in the very way relations between Tokyo and Beijing were normalized a decade and a half ago.

In other words, there are a number of still unresolved issues directly resultant from what I thought at the time was an unwise exercise in the "diplomacy of haste," a phenomenon no doubt inspired by an urgent desire on both sides to achieve a political breakthrough.

One of these problems is the continued existence of the Taiwan regime, and its importance as an object of Japanese diplomacy. The Kokaryo dormitory problem is the direct consequence of how Japan hedged its bets on the Taiwan question.

Another significant problem is the issue of Japanese wartime reparations. Rather than disappearing, the issue is getting worse. In fact, Mr. Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leader, used the term "reparations" for only the first time during the recent visit of Komeito Chairman Junya Yano to China. True, the word was employed in the phrase, "At the time we restored ties with Japan, we did not demand reparations," but the implication is clear: Beijing remains deeply dissatisfied over the state of the reparations question.

Given this situation, is it really wise for Japan to leave the matter where it stands? For their part, the Chinese tend to view contemporary Japan as a hyper example of what the French call the *nouveau riche*: people who are convinced that money can solve all problems.

But on the other hand, it is also quite clear that China will have to raise between \$20 billion to \$40 billion if it is to

meet the goals of its seventh five-year plan. Where are these urgently needed funds to be found?

I am fond of an insight contained in the notion that Japan and China are really brothers with different mothers, that is, they share an intimacy tempered by a certain apartness. Sometimes money can put things wrong between half-brothers.

But a solution by money is better than no solution at all, especially in the case of a problem that would otherwise fester. Perhaps Japan and China are fated to this type of relationship.

With these considerations as backdrop, I think that it is time for Japan to make a massive financial contribution, in the form of reparations but certainly involving long-term condition-free grants-in-aid, to China. A figure of about \$50 billion would in my judgment be appropriate.

If asked why this amount, part of the answer would include the fact that the Chinese themselves repeatedly put forward the claim that the war cost them 10 million lives and \$50 billion. (With some reason these claims have recently included references to more than 20 million dead and wounded as well as \$100 billion in damages.)

The period of payment should extend over, say, 10 to 20 years. As an issue in Japanese public policy, we in any case need to reduce our enormous reserves of foreign currency.

Of course the figure of \$50 billion must be put in context. At this year's Venice Summit, for example, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone pledged to spend ¥6 trillion (\$43 billion) on stimulating domestic economic demand, \$20 billion on developmental aid for the Third World (as part of a plan to recycle Japan's trade surplus) and a further \$500 million on free grants-in-aid to the world's poorest countries.

Where such sums are involved, \$50 billion for China is not an unthinkable figure.

If the delicate issue of reparations were to form part of this aid package then obviously frank discussions with the Chinese would be essential. The invasion of China by Japan is fact. It is history.

At the same time, it is true that not only is war a great evil but that Japan itself paid a terrible price in World War II as well. I want to ease both Japan's guilty conscience and the Chinese sense of victimization which feeds on it. I seek a way to make the Chinese realize that in

all of this there is something only they can do for us. In exchange, we would pledge our best efforts on the economic front.

Healthy relations between the two countries will not develop from the situation in which attempts are made only to take occasion to imprint a sense of the need to atone for our mistakes in China on younger Japanese, those generations of children and grandchildren who have no experience, direct or indirect, of Japan's war with China. This alone is not an effective way of really making up for the unhappy history that binds our two nations.

From the standpoint of the need for our time to settle accounts with those with whom we fought one of the great conflicts of the century, there is no way the issue of Japanese reparations for China can be avoided.

Legally, of course, Japan was at war with the Republic of China. And furthermore the peace treaty between Taiwan and Japan included no provision for Japanese reparations. But this lack of legal provision offers this country no escape from its responsibilities in this area.

As a result Tokyo should make payments not only to China but to Taiwan as well. It is even conceivable that if the circumstances demanded it, this country might invite representatives of China and Taiwan to conference talks at the same table. This kind of grand vision should inspire the effort.

Whether this scale of Japanese financial assistance would result in improved Chinese economic performance is totally a Chinese affair. But if present trends continue, the fear is that China alone will not share in the economic advance of East Asia. For this reason if for no other, Japan has a bold contribution to make to China's future.

It is time for a straight and openhanded approach to the problem. This is in any case the 50th anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. In the spirit of frankness, now is the time for Japan and China to grasp the opportunity that the present gives our two countries to grope for a better bilateral relationship by learning lessons from the past 15 years.

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