

Dealing with Beijing: Beyond the “Diplomacy of Friendship”

Nakajima Mineo

The plan to have Emperor Akihito visit China this autumn is about to receive official approval. The debate over the trip offers a worthy subject of research, not least because it has laid bare the decision-making process in Japanese foreign policy.

It seems as if virtually the whole nation has been participating in the debate. Within the administration there has been a complicated process of coordination involving the wishes of the top leaders and input from diplomats and other officials. On the political scene, meanwhile, some of the opposition parties have come out against the trip, and there have been differences of opinion even within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The press is now swinging gradually toward approval of the trip, but the *Sankei Shimbun* remains opposed. Influential intellectuals have been arguing over the pros and cons, and political lobbies have also gotten into the act, some of them holding protest meetings and airing their views in newspaper ads.

Of even greater import is the diplomatic significance of the trip, which will mark the first time in history that a Japanese emperor has gone to China. The trip presents Japan with an important option in foreign policy, and the question is whether now is a good time for putting that option to use. The nation has given a divided response, and the split in

opinion perhaps runs even deeper than the fissure between those who supported or opposed the recently enacted United Nations Peace-keeping Operations Cooperation Law, which authorizes the dispatch of Japanese troops to participate in U.N. missions. It had appeared that the Japanese were at last nearing a consensus on their country's roles and responsibilities in the international community. But when confronted with the question of whether their emperor should make a goodwill visit to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the normalization of relations between Japan and China, the public was unable to reach a consensus.

Over the last several months, even while the political world was intent on the peace-keeping operations issue, the proposed visit has been fairly thoroughly discussed. Various reasons for favoring it, opposing it, or urging hesitance have been offered for examination. For the most part I have stayed out of this debate. Although I did agree to write an opinion piece for the *Mainichi Shimbun* on July 9, I rejected other requests for my views. This was because I was loath to contribute to an argument that I feared could lead to a sharp split in public opinion. But now that the trip has in effect been decided on, I feel that it is appropriate to offer some thoughts in a constructive vein on our country's relations with China.

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The arguments of the opponents

Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi and the people around him have been handling the trip question

cautiously. While basically in favor, they have been trying to clear the way by gradually winning over the opponents, especially those within the ruling party. Minister for Foreign Affairs Watanabe Michio and the diplomats under him have been more enthusiastic. Watanabe's commitment to the trip dates from early January, when he made a visit to China and spoke positively about Beijing's invitation of the emperor. Among the Japanese in general, however, resistance to the visit is still fairly strong.

Several arguments have been brought forward by those who oppose the imperial trip or who say that the timing is premature. One is that the Chinese political climate is too unfriendly toward Japan. The two countries, along with Taiwan, have yet to resolve the territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands, and Beijing is critical of some of Tokyo's policies, such as the decision to dispatch troops on peace-keeping missions. Another is that the Chinese political situation, with its battle between reformers and conservatives, is too unpredictable. Most of the opponents also agree that at a time when major Western nations are taking a tough stance toward China because of its suppression of the democracy movement on Tiananmen Square, a visit from Japan's emperor might send the wrong signals.

Opposition to the use of the emperor in politics is another common refrain. Among the most vocal opponents are quite a few staunch supporters of the monarchy. These rightists and others feel loyal to or fond of the imperial family, but they do not want to see the emperor get embroiled in politics. Other opponents are leftist critics of the monarchy. Among intellectuals who, despite the restrictions placed on the emperor by the present Constitution, remain critical of the imperial institution, opposition to the trip is a widespread sentiment. Though these two groups start out from diametrically opposed standpoints, they end up in a similar position. A case in point is the stance of Suenami Yasushi of *Akahata*, the Japanese Communist Party's newspaper. In an article he wrote half a year ago, he came out against the trip on the grounds that it amounted to political exploitation of the emperor by the Chinese authorities and Japan's Liberal Democratic government.* Here we can see one example of a rather rare phenomenon in the Japanese political scene since World War II: an agreement on

*Suenami Yasushi, "Tennō hō-Chū keikaku o tou" (Questioning the Plan to Have the Emperor Visit China), *Zen'ei*, February 1992.

an important issue between the far right and the far left.

Most people, it seems to me, are neither flatly against the imperial visit nor totally in favor of it. Though somewhat wary, many will endorse it if the conditions are right. Let me next address the reasons for their hesitation.

Standing in awe of China

The government expects the emperor's visit to further strengthen Japan's ties with China and contribute to peace and stability in Asia. Along with the politicians in the Japan-China Parliamentary League of Friendship and the intellectuals who are enthusiastic about the trip, the government's leaders emphasize that by visiting China the emperor can make a symbolic gesture of the friendly feelings of the Japanese for the Chinese. Playing up this lofty outlook, they scoff at the notion that anyone wants to use the emperor for narrow political purposes.

I have no basic complaint with this way of portraying the visit, but I would caution that there seems to be something of a gap between the government's diplomatic stance toward China and the feelings of the general public. Needless to say, much of the negative reaction to the idea of an imperial trip stems from the present nature of China's internal and external policies, most notably its retention of a dictatorship by the Chinese Communist Party. But on a deeper level I think the reluctance of the public to endorse the trip wholeheartedly is rooted in people's unease about the "diplomacy of friendship" that Tokyo has consistently pursued in its dealings with Beijing ever since bilateral ties were normalized in 1972. My feelings on this point are, I must admit, partly a result of differences between my own outlook and that of the diplomats who have been in charge of Tokyo's Chinese policy. As a student of Chinese affairs, I have been frankly upset on a number of occasions by the options selected by the government for dealing with China.

I once wrote a book characterizing the diplomacy of friendship as the diplomacy of a country overawed by China. Japan's diplomats may not actually feel subservient to China, but the options that the government has selected leave the impression that Tokyo is under Beijing's thumb. Time and again the diplomats have paid more attention than necessary to Chinese conditions and requests, placing top priority on the diplomacy of friendship in order to avoid upsetting Beijing. This stance, I would sug-

gest, is one that many Japanese find displeasing and irritating.

Here a brief review of the events of the last two decades is in order. When Japan knocked on China's door in 1972, the dust from the Cultural Revolution was still settling. Only a year before that Lin Biao had died while apparently trying to flee the country, destabilizing the political situation. Soon thereafter the regime of Mao Zedong began to crumble, and Deng Xiaoping, who was rehabilitated in 1973, started nudging the country toward a new course of internal reform and external openness. In 1975 the reformists, with support from Zhou Enlai, initiated the "four modernizations" in agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology, but many Chinese fiercely resisted the change in course. Zhou passed away in January 1976; Mao died in September, leaving the reins of power in the hands of a group led by Hua Guofeng, and the "Gang of Four" was ousted in October, finalizing the transition.

Deng's visit to Japan in the latter part of 1978 provided an occasion for celebration. The bilateral economic ties were then showing promise, since the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China had just been signed. We should note, though, that this treaty included a so-called hegemony clause. It stated that neither Japan nor China would seek hegemony for itself, but its real target was the ambitions of the Soviet Union. Here we can see one example of Tokyo's willingness to accommodate Chinese demands, whether or not the endorsement of Beijing's Soviet policy was good for Japan. Not long after Deng returned home, moreover, China launched a military attack on Vietnam and called loudly for sanctions against Hanoi. This hegemonistic behavior by a country that proclaimed it was not seeking hegemony did not go down well with the Japanese.

The rocky road of the 1980s

Japan-China relations continued down a rocky road in the 1980s. Following a dispute at the start of the decade over China's cancellation of contracts for the Baoshan steelworks and other projects supported by Japanese aid, an argument erupted in the summer of 1982 over the content of Japanese textbooks. At issue was the claim that Tokyo was watering down passages on Japanese history by, for example, asking that Japan's incursion into China be labeled an "advance." The Japanese media, which had yet to end its love affair with the Mao-

ism of the Cultural Revolution, compounded the problem by handling it with a pro-Chinese slant. Beijing demanded that the textbooks be rewritten, demonstrating evident eagerness to meddle in a domestic Japanese affair. Eventually Miyazawa Ki-ichi, who was then chief cabinet secretary, announced that consideration would be given to neighboring countries when textbooks were prepared, and the incident faded from view.

The next major flap occurred in the summer of 1985, when China protested a visit by Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro to Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, dedicated to the war dead. Among those enshrined there are some class A war criminals, and this made Nakasone's visit objectionable to the Chinese. Later, in a meeting at the United Nations with Premier Zhao Ziyang, Nakasone managed to calm the ruffled Chinese feelings.

The way history is presented in schools again became controversial in the summer of 1986, when *Shinpen Nihonshi*, a new textbook by a right-wing group, came out. The government ordered considerable rewriting before it would approve the book's use, but Minister of Education Fujio Masayuki added fuel to the fire with a series of inflammatory remarks. Admittedly the tone of his rhetoric was discordant, but it gave voice to views held by some people who do not go along with the generally accepted version of modern Japanese history. His entry into the fray was motivated by the belief that China should not be allowed to interfere in a domestic educational question, but ultimately he was sacked to give the government a scapegoat. During a visit to China that autumn, Nakasone indirectly expressed his regret for Fujio's remarks in a meeting with General Secretary Hu Yaobang, but the Chinese remained miffed even after this political settlement of the issue.

The next year a squabble over real estate broke out. In February the Osaka High Court ruled that Kōkaryō, a dormitory in Kyoto that has housed Chinese students since prewar times, was the property not of China but of Taiwan. The Chinese were offended by this adverse decision from a Japanese court. Their feeling was that the citizens of both countries should be comporting themselves in conformity with the 1972 joint communiqué, the 1978 Peace and Friendship Treaty, and the "four principles" of friendship, equality and reciprocity, mutual trust, and long-term stability. They were unable to appreciate that while the Japanese government is bound by the treaties it signs, the Japanese people remain free to say and do what

they please. Even such a person as Hu, who was later to support the Chinese democracy movement, seems not to have fully appreciated the ethos of a people whose Constitution protects their basic freedoms and rights.

In August 1988 Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru went calling on China, and he took along the largest yet in a series of aid packages. By then Tokyo's "diplomacy of atonement" coupled with generous donations of economic assistance had become a recurring motif, but the only result was to encourage the Chinese to become yet more highhanded toward Japan. Such was the setting in which the Tiananmen incident occurred on June 4, 1989, causing the bilateral relations to cool off once again. (The crushing of the democracy movement had tragic consequences in China itself, but it had positive repercussions elsewhere. Most notably, it helped to detonate the time bomb that toppled the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.)

To this day the countries of the West are insisting that China not be given cordial treatment until it has improved its human rights record. When Premier Li Peng visited Washington not long ago, even President George Bush, who is wont to take China's side, refused to shake hands with him. Ignoring this stance of the West, Tokyo in the summer of 1991 sent Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki to China, and this led to a return visit from General Secretary Jiang Zemin. But when Jiang arrived last April, he brought with him nothing of interest as far as the public was concerned. In fact, he rubbed many people's feelings the wrong way by making a courtesy call on former Prime Minister Tanaka and by inviting him to Beijing.*

As we look over this two-decade record, we can understand why the Japanese are not receptive to calls for friendly feelings toward China. After the long series of bitter experiences, most Japanese cannot find much warmth in their hearts. It has not been pleasant for them to hear the constant drumbeat from China warning unrealistically of Japanese militarism. It may be fair to say that China's policy toward Japan is provoking a backlash.

Rebuilding the Great Wall of China

In late January and early February the aging Deng Xiaoping went on an inspection tour of China's

*These days Tanaka is remembered within Japan more for his underhanded wheeling and dealing than for his part in restoring Japan-China relations.—Ed.

southern coastal region, which has made the most progress toward reform and openness. On that occasion, in addition to proclaiming that reform and openness should be China's national goal, he also stressed China's continuing need for the "four cardinal principles" of adherence to the socialist way, to Communist Party leadership, to the people's democratic dictatorship, and to Marxism-Leninism and Maoist thought.

Given that China continues to cling tenaciously to the principles of an orthodox communist ideology, why should it want the emperor to come for a visit, involving it in "imperial diplomacy"? Given that the war between Japan and China turned Emperor Akihito's father into an object of censure, why should Beijing be pressing for the visit so strongly? After the Communists took over, they permitted no books about the Japanese monarchy until 1986, when a work about the Shōwa emperor by Kawahara Toshiaki (*Tennō Hirohito no Shōwa shi*, 1983) appeared in translation. And when it came out, the Chinese publishers took the unusual step of adding an explanation to the effect that the text was to be read critically. This warning read in part, "Making use of loyalty to the emperor, Japan's militarists claimed that the war of aggression they had started was a holy war, thereby spurring the Japanese into battle, and they went on to cause enormous damage to China and to other Asia-Pacific countries and peoples." Could it be that China's leaders have now fundamentally altered their view of the imperial institution now that Emperor Akihito has succeeded to the throne?

Perhaps the Chinese are thinking that by extracting a word of apology from the emperor, they can close the account on the troubled bilateral relations of the past in a manner favoring China's position. But if this is their expectation, they have completely misread Japan, failing to consider what "imperial diplomacy" can and cannot accomplish under the present Constitution.

On another level, it seems to me that the Chinese probably view the imperial visit as something that can contribute significantly to their pursuit of a new global strategy, particularly in the context of the chill in Sino-American relations. The decisive American victory in the war in the Persian Gulf dealt China an unnerving shock, and when shortly thereafter the Soviet Communist Party disbanded, leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Chinese became far more wary of the United States. In the bipolar structure of the cold war, China had sometimes wielded a casting vote, but today many

Chinese have begun to sense that a unipolar American hegemony is in the making.

Communism has now been discarded not just in the former Soviet empire but also in Mongolia, right on China's doorstep. Obviously this signifies a victory for liberalism and democracy, but China's rulers have closed their eyes to this fact and are still insisting that communism will win in the end. The authorities in Beijing view the collapse of the Soviet Union as being a result of the defeat of the Soviet economy by the American economy. They reckon they can avoid the Soviets' fate by reforming their own economy, making it more open to the world, and thereby giving it extra strength. While watching the United States nervously, they are hoping to rebuild the psychological and ideological foundations of the Great Wall of China in a bid to avert a peaceful toppling of their administrative setup.

The Americans, for their part, are maintaining their post-Tiananmen frostiness toward Beijing. And as I see it, the rift is likely to persist for quite some time. Unlike in the past, when friendship with Beijing served as a deterrent to the Soviet threat, there is no longer a need for Washington to play a "China card." The Chinese have also been made uneasy by this loss of leverage.

China is aware that it cannot match the United States' military clout, especially in the field of high-tech weapons. But it does have some latitude for expanding its military influence. It can supply weapons to customers in the third world and elsewhere, and within the Asia-Pacific region in particular it can make a show of its naval might. Recently Beijing has been employing gunboat diplomacy in the South China Sea and the waters around the Senkaku Islands, indicating that it intends to use its navy to counter American dominance.

Domestically, then, the Chinese government will be steadfastly rejecting democracy even as it encourages reform and openness; externally, meanwhile, it will be exporting weapons and beefing up its military position even as it claims to be contributing to global peace. These two sets of policies, one for internal purposes and the other for the outside world, constitute the two faces of the global strategy Beijing hopes to pursue.

Within this setting, China's stance toward Japan has been shifting. Beijing is watching with evident interest the escalation of economic friction between Tokyo and Washington, and while proclaiming that it has no intention of speaking out on other countries' affairs, much less trying to influence or inter-

vene in them, it is hoping that Japan-U.S. relations will deteriorate further, blunting the American drive toward a unipolar world. This hope can be seen in the series of recent statements by Chinese officials to the effect that they will not stand in the way of Japan's emergence as a political superpower. What they actually mean is that they will accept Japan's rise as a political counterweight to the United States in terms of their own strategy.

In effect China is extending a variety of invitations to Japan. It is saying that as long as Japan refrains from becoming a military superpower, it will welcome a larger measure of Japanese influence in Asian forums and on the world stage. By luring Japan into accepting its offerings, China hopes to put limits on American influence. The repeated Chinese requests for an imperial visit should be viewed in this context. Such a visit will also represent a huge coup for the Chinese authorities at a time when their country is internationally isolated and plagued by political infighting.

In this light, the Japanese need to give sober thought to the question of whether the inducements Beijing is offering will be good for their country. Taking into account China's global strategy and its stance toward the United States, and with the general Western attitude toward China also in mind, my own view is that Tokyo should reject the Chinese blandishments and maintain a certain distance from Beijing. This sort of stance is in keeping with Japan's position of responsibility in Asia, and it is all the more necessary in that the relationship between Japan and China is inherently such a close one. If Tokyo does not behave in such a fashion, it will demonstrate that it is no more sensitive than the Chinese are to such universal values as human rights, democracy, and freedom. More than that, the world may get the impression that Japan is tilting toward China only because of the short-term gains it seeks from the Chinese market. Japan may come across as an economic superpower that is guided by the logic of economics alone. In this respect as well, the choice Tokyo makes will have great significance.

An ambassador to all of Asia

As should be evident by now, my view is that neither the political and social situation in China nor the international environment facing Japan is truly well suited for an imperial trip. Still, as long as it is handled purely as a goodwill visit, I have no reason to oppose it.

What I do find disturbing, though, is the fact that the national debate on the trip has not moved beyond the conventional framework of Japan-China relations. At a time when the aftereffects of Tiananmen are still lingering, the world media is likely to make a big play of this unprecedented visit. The question then will be whether the visit is seen overseas as a sign of excessive coziness between the two East Asian nations. My fear is that people in other countries will only become distrustful of Japan, sensing that it is pursuing some sort of Asian ideology hand in hand with China. At issue here is Japan's choice between an Asianism it can share with China and the globalism it can promote together with other free-world countries.

Japan is, of course, a member of the Asian community, but the nation-building path it selected after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 was to move it away from Asia and toward the West. After World War II the Japanese embraced the values of democracy, and they have been developing their country in line with those values ever since. There is simply no way this nation can make an abrupt about-face and march off in the Asian direction, especially since less than half a century has elapsed since it raised aloft the notorious banner of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and rode roughshod over its neighbors.

With this in mind, the government must make one thing absolutely clear to the world before the trip begins, namely, that Japan is firmly committed to the protection of human rights and all the other universal values of globalism. At the same time, Japan must demonstrate its commitment to an open Asia. One way to do this would be to have the emperor and empress, who since their accession have visited only three Southeast Asian countries, travel widely throughout Asia. The goal of Japanese diplomacy should be the fostering of a setting in which the imperial couple, acting both as symbols of Japan and as individuals, feel free to make goodwill visits to other Asian countries whenever circumstances are appropriate.

In a newspaper commentary not long ago, Miura Shumon made this remark: "Provided the emperor and empress are invited as a sign of determination to treat what is past as past and move forward into the future, I would very much like to see them go even to China and Vietnam."* This is my view as well, and I would add South Korea, North Korea

*Miura Shumon, "Seiji o kaihi, yūkō e no shiten e" (For a Trip That Will Avoid Politics and Serve as the Starting Point of Friendship), *Sankei Shimbun*, April 15, 1992.

(after diplomatic relations have been established), and Hong Kong to the list. In any event, Japan must avoid giving the impression that China is being given special treatment. That would only encourage the Chinese to regard the visit as a payment of homage in the game of "tributary diplomacy," an odious Chinese tradition that has gone on for 3,000 years.

If visits like these come to be accepted as a show of friendship transcending the worldly plane of state politics and diplomacy, Taiwan might be the next country to add to the list. To be sure, the two decades of normal Japan-China relations have also been two decades of ruptured ties between Tokyo and Taipei. But because many Taiwanese have unusually strong feelings of fondness for Japan and its imperial family, a visit purely for goodwill purposes would no doubt be appreciated if it could be handled outside the framework of politics and diplomacy, as in the case of economic and cultural exchange. More than that, Japan's diplomats should be seeking to build a relationship with Taiwan in which important personages can move freely between the two countries without worrying about what Beijing's reaction will be. Since China is itself promoting reform and openness, Japan should be encouraging it to support open and active regional exchange among all Asian countries. Though Taiwan is not charted on the diplomatic map, the flows of trade and people between it and Japan far exceed those between China and Japan. As long as Tokyo treats the fact of Taiwan's existence as a fiction, pretending not to see that it has matured politically and socially as well as economically, Japan's Asian policy will not truly flower.

The time has come for Japan to overcome its diplomatic preoccupation with Sino-Japanese friendship. Looking reality squarely in the face, the Japanese government should devote itself to the promotion of liberalization throughout Asia. It should set its sights on breaking through the thick political walls still standing in this part of the world, dealing fairly and frankly with China and all other countries. If this stance is adopted, I am confident that the public will give its blessing to the imperial visit. (Courtesy of Chūō Kōron Sha)

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