

OPINION



By Mineo Nakajima

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Japan's establishment of diplomatic relations with China. The visit to China by the Emperor of Japan is approaching. Yet even as we focus on the Emperor's trip, I get the feeling that we are losing sight of where he is going: the imminence that is China seems diminished to a shadow.

Now that we are near enough to touch China, why should it seem so removed? After all, a look back over the last 20 years shows that Japan and China have indeed become closer in many aspects of bilateral relations, and China certainly plays a greater part in the daily life of Japanese people than it did two decades ago. If I may use an example from my own life to illustrate the point, I should like to mention the graduate seminar that I teach, is packed with Chinese exchange students. In fact, far more of my students come from China than Japan.

By the same token, I am a student of China. Yet even a

researcher such as myself, devoted to understanding that nation, would be hard pressed to answer: Does China's presence today feel more neighborly than it did before relations were normalized 20 years ago? Sometimes I feel that the new China is more baffling than the old.

That is why our embrace of China feels like hugging an apparition. There is much talk of the need for cooperation in bilateral economic matters and for aid to develop China's coastal economic sphere. All of this, however, ignores the fact that China has taken some incomprehensible turns. Perhaps it is wiser after all for us to take stock of this increasingly enigmatic behemoth from a distance.

Of course, not everything about China is inscrutable. The major political changes that stand to come about in the post-Deng Xiaoping era, for example, are hardly unimaginable. There can be no retreat from China's present course of economic reform and openness, which relentlessly chips away at the Com-

munist Party dictatorship from within and outside. Utilitarian values and rampant money worship among the populace further stimulate a sense of crisis among those at the helm of Beijing. This, in turn, prods China's already harried political establishment into turning the screws on the new middle class. Bureaucrats themselves now compete for wealth and favor such that corruption ripples through officialdom in a chain reaction. That China's leadership might do itself in with what it ostensibly condemns is ironic, even paradoxical, but not unfathomable.

Outside China, torrents of freedom have merged with the tide of history to overwhelm communism. A plethora of values coexists. It is a rather safe bet that in the face of all this, China's security forces will be unable to maintain the nation's system of government into the 21st century by violently suppressing the will and silencing the voice of the Chinese people.

Predicting the future of China's government is rela-

tively easy, but divining the recent motives behind its foreign policy is not. On one hand, the Chinese fervently courted Japan's Emperor in the hopes that an Imperial visit—a diplomatic coup—might ensue. At the same time, they dramatically increased defense outlays every year, ignoring huge budget deficits in a drive to fill Asia's post-Cold War military vacuum. These moves mirror in the international arena the contradictory nature of domestic politics that Tiananmen wrought.

While we still regard China in the narrow context of friendly bilateral relations, Western nations—particularly the United States—are shifting their China policies. The decision by President George Bush (certainly no China basher) to sell F-16 fighters to Taiwan clearly exemplifies the sober reconsideration of China. And Bill Clinton, like his fellow Democrats, has gone much further in venting his abhorrence of the Chinese leadership, referring in his acceptance speech to "outlaws from Baghdad to Beijing."

Considered in this light, "unabashedly friendly" relations with China—the key-one of Japanese diplomacy—will not only try Japanese-American relations, but will present Japan numerous challenges in its dealings with the entire international community in general. If the world were composed of China and Japan alone, an unabashedly friendly relationship might be meaningful, but today's world is becoming progressively pluralistic.

Issues such as democracy, human rights and environmental protection can now by no means be considered the domestic concerns of any given nation. Rather, their pursuit is what Stanley Hoffmann defines as "a duty, which transcends national borders." I believe that the crucial consideration in future Sino-Japanese relations will be that both sides comprehend the Harvard University scholar's words down to the bone.

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The writer is a professor of international relations at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.