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China's leaders help foster public anti-Japan sentiment

By MINEO NAKAJIMA

At a recent Asian Cup soccer match between Japan and China in Beijing, the Japanese team faced loud booing from Chinese spectators. It was shocking that a sporting event was disturbed by politics and ideologies, but the trouble was inevitable, given the atmosphere inherent in recent Japan-China relations. China was clearly responsible for fostering the atmosphere. Although Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine — where war criminals are enshrined with the nation's war dead — irritates Chinese government officials, the problem is nothing new and has continued since before Koizumi took office.



In recent months, the Japanese government cannot be said to have made any moves that could be considered harmful to bilateral relations. On the contrary, Tokyo is doing its best to enhance cooperation with Beijing.

Meanwhile, China appears to be stepping up aggressive moves toward Japan. It has unilaterally begun exploiting undersea oil fields near the Japan-China midway line in the East China Sea. It refuses to acknowledge the existence of the midway line and has turned a deaf ear to Japanese protests.

This summer China has conducted large-scale army, navy and air force drills on the island of Dongshan in the Taiwan Strait, off the Chinese mainland, all the while recognizing that security in the strait is vital to Japan. China has al-

so threatened to use force against Taiwan in connection with the latter's plans to promote democracy and peace.

Such behavior by China tends to encourage an exclusive nationalism and patriotism. The Chinese government's ambitions to join the ranks of the big powers, combined with its traditional "Big China" doctrine, have helped foster anti-Japanese sentiment through an emotional consensus among the public.

Following the latest incident in Chongqing, the Chinese government has urged the public to control their outbursts, as it did last year after crude jokes by Japanese students in Xian were publicized, touching off anti-Japanese demonstrations. However, as long as Beijing continues expansionist policies on the ground, at sea and in space, its call for restraint will serve only to encourage more radical anti-Japanese views on the Internet and in e-mailed newsletters.

Chinese intellectuals and diplomats are touting slogans such as "moving with an eye on the world" and "peaceful rise," but I doubt that they represent China's firmly established policies.

China's combative position may be ascribed to the military leadership of the conservative former president, Jiang Zemin, now chairman of the Central Military Commission. Recently he was shown prominently in a photograph of Chinese military officials.

However, the reformist leadership under President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao is taking an extremely aggressive stance regarding Taiwanese moves toward independence and Hong Kong's quest for more democracy. I feel

that their influence is fostering growing nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiment among Chinese youths.

During my recent visit to Beijing, the first in three years, I made comparative studies of the widely publicized developing district and the old section I was familiar with. The visit did not change my views of Beijing.

To be sure, downtown Beijing has dramatically changed; it is like a combination of Tokyo's trendy Roppongi and Odaiba districts. Resorts in other areas have been rebuilt into huge facilities attracting a large number of foreign travelers despite high entrance fees.

But in the old district downtown, along back streets and in underground passageways near Tiananmen Square, I found the same old poverty and filthiness that was beyond description. A visit to a district 30 km to the west, which is home to Capital Steel Co. and a number of national enterprises, made me wonder where China's economic development is happening. Few tourists visit the area.

In wide areas of China, cheap structures are being torn down and rebuilt over and over. The whole nation is like a huge construction site. The gross national product may be growing, but on the whole the nation is undergoing distorted economic development.

People are frustrated by environmental disruption, exhaustion of resources and a widening gap between rich and poor. Anti-Japanese sentiment is a perfect excuse for venting public frustration.

Mineo Nakajima is president of Akita International University. This article was translated from the Sankai Shimbun's "Seiron" column of Aug. 5.

