

## **Japan's Approach toward Value-oriented Diplomacy**

Ikuko TOGO

On November 30, 2006, Japan's then Foreign Minister Taro Aso made an epochal speech entitled "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons." Aso insisted that Japan as a developed democratic nation has responsibilities, that "there is 'value-oriented diplomacy,' which involves placing emphasis on 'universal values' such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy as we advance our diplomatic endeavors," and "there are the successfully budding democracies that line the outer rim of the Eurasian continent, forming an arc. Here Japan wants to design an 'arc of freedom and prosperity.' Indeed, I believe that we must create just such an arc."<sup>1</sup>

The Diplomatic Bluebook 2007 explains that "this Arc would start from Northern Europe and traverse the Baltic states, Central and Southeastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent, then cross Southeast Asia finally to reach Northeast Asia. Here, a region of stability and plenty with its basis in universal values – the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity – would take shape, and indeed it is just such a region that this initiative seeks to create."<sup>2</sup>

Aso's speech was one opportunity to express Japan's approach to value-oriented

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs. "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons," (seminar, Japan Institute of International Affairs, Tokyo, Japan, 30 November 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Bluebook 2007 (Tokyo, Japan: MOFA, 2007), 2.

diplomacy; however, it is not a totally new approach but rather a comprehensive expression of Japanese policies that Japan has cultivated for a long time.

## Road to Value-Oriented Diplomacy

### *Organizational Development in Human Rights Diplomacy*

Japan has made great efforts to develop its own human rights first as a young democracy, and then began to work on promoting human rights in the international community. Since it joined the UN, Japan has focused on establishing Japan's human rights diplomacy at the UN. Takagi briefly summarized this effort: "Japan's approach to human rights issues in the UN has reflected the need to consider both the Western political identity and the Asian geo-cultural identity from the very early stage. Japan approached this problem by taking a moderate position and opposing radical measures proposed by either side."<sup>3</sup>

Japan's focus on the UN in the field of human rights can be seen by examining the organizational changes at MOFA. After Japan ratified the Human Rights Covenants in 1980 and began participating in the UN Human Rights Commission, MOFA established the Human Rights and Refugee Division within its UN Bureau. The new division's work centered on the Human Rights Covenants and human rights activities at the UN, mainly those concerning

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<sup>3</sup> Seichiro Takagi, "Human Rights in Japanese Foreign Policy: Japan's Policy Towards China after Tiananmen," in *Human Rights and International Relations in Asia Pacific Region*, ed. James T. H. Tang (London: Pinter, 1995), 97-111.

domestic human rights.

It was principally because of international changes such as the end of the Cold War and the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 that Japan began to take account of other nations' human rights abuses. In August 1993, the Foreign Policy Bureau was established and the Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division was moved to this bureau from the UN Bureau. In 1999, the Multilateral Cooperation Department was established under the Foreign Policy Bureau, and the Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division was moved to this department together with the UN Administration Division and the Global Environment Division.

In August 2004, another reorganization at MOFA was prompted by domestic politics. The Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division was moved from the Foreign Policy Bureau to the minister's Secretariat. In December 2005, MOFA appointed Ms. Fumiko Saiga as Ambassador in charge of human rights, aiming to "strive to resolve human rights issues including the North Korea abduction issue and others in the international community, through attending conferences organized by the UN and other organizations, and government-level dialogues on human rights-related issues."<sup>4</sup> In August 2006, the Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division was returned to the Foreign Policy Bureau upon the establishment of a Director-General for Global Issues. The Director-General for Global

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Appointment of Ms. Fumiko as Japan's Ambassador in charge of Human Rights", <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2005/12/1206-2.html>>.

Issues oversees the Global Issues Cooperation Division (in charge of human security and global issues), the Humanitarian Assistance Division, and the Global Environment Division.

In Japan, humanitarian assistance and aid for democratization has been built into ODA, and thus these policies are separated from human rights.

The Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division has not played an important role in Japanese diplomacy in contrast to its counterparts in Western nations<sup>5</sup>. It was only a few years ago that this division began to have a significant role in Japanese diplomacy, mainly because of the UN's mainstreaming of human rights. However, the Policy Planning Division in the Foreign Policy Bureau has now begun to collaborate with the Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division on formulating strategies and specific policies for value-oriented diplomacy.

### *Implementation of Japan's Approach for Promoting Human Rights and Democracy*

Akiko Yamanaka, vice minister for foreign affairs, briefly explained Japan's approach to human rights.

“In the promotion of human rights, Japan attaches importance to striking a balance

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<sup>5</sup> The most typical example is Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Bureau (DRL) in U.S. Department of State. DRL has original regional sections and big number of staffs within bureau, with its own Assistant Secretary. On the other hand, Japan's Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division has still only small number of staffs and limited budget, and does not have regional sections within the division. UN related human rights policies account for the greater part of the division's routine work.

both on the ‘principle’ level and on the ‘implementation’ level. First, at the principle level, Japan endeavors to achieve the promotion of human rights as a universal value and at the same time takes into account the intrinsic situations of each country, such as their history and culture. Next, at the implementation level, importance is attached to the ‘dialogue and cooperation’ approach, but a more effective approach will become necessary when this approach does not function, notably for grave violations of human rights. Finally, while in order to balance those two levels, Japan deepens mutual understanding through discussions on the one hand, it will implement concrete cooperation policies on the other. Japan will promote this kind of balanced approach.”<sup>6</sup>

Tetsuya Kimura, director of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division, categorized Japan’s approach to promoting human rights and democracy as having two aspects – flexibility and encouragement. Kimura emphasizes that problems related to human rights and democracy are too delicate and difficult to solve in a short time, so we must be patient but strong in order to overcome various obstacles through dialogue. As specific policies, he named 1) raising awareness of human rights, including political freedom and social rights, and protecting socially vulnerable people, 2) empowering civil society through both top-down and bottom-up efforts, including support for NGO activities, 3) supporting

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<sup>6</sup> Akiko Yamanaka, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, (Statement, The First High-Level Segment of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, Switzerland, June 19, 2006).

human rights and democracy in peace building efforts through a long-term commitment to the nation building process, and 4) strengthening Japan's activities in multilateral fora, e.g., positive engagement in United Nation Democracy Fund (UNDEF) activities.<sup>7</sup>

Japan has also responded to the mainstreaming of human rights within the UN and contributed actively to the UN's human rights institutions. Japan is an important member of the new Human Rights Council. Japan made a US\$10 million contribution to the UNDEF in February 2007 and serves as a member of the Advisory Board. Human rights dialogues have become an important and frequently used instrument in Japan's approach. Indeed, Japan has held human rights dialogues with more than 10 countries, including Cambodia, Indonesia, China, Iran, and Uzbekistan. Human rights issues are a very delicate topic, so Japan never criticizes one-sidedly but instead talks and exchanges opinions on situations, with cases ranging from the general level to the personal level.<sup>8</sup> Through human rights dialogue, Japan can obtain information from countries with which Western nations are not in contact. This kind of information is very useful to multilateral activities in the UN.<sup>9</sup>

The instruments of Japan's human rights and democracy diplomacy are at present very limited. Nevertheless the number of aid packages to build foundations for democracy has risen vis-à-vis previous ODA, which was aimed mainly at economic development. We

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<sup>7</sup> According to MOFA, these wording of Japanese human rights and democracy policies in this speech are not official terms but Kimura's personal expression. Speech by Tetsuya Kimura at Symposium "Japan's Foreign Policy for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy: Challenges and Prospects", February 1st, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Principal Deputy Director, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division, 4 February 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Principal Deputy Director, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division (speech, UN Forum, 1 February 2006).

can trace this historical development of ODA through the past decade. After the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 and its own experiences during the Gulf War, Japan began to reconsider the role of ODA from the point of view of international contribution toward democracy and human rights. In April 1991, Japan announced its first ODA Charter and set forth 'Four Principles,' including concern for human rights in the recipient countries. The recipient countries are to be examined in terms of 1) their military expenditures, 2) their development and production of weapons of mass destruction, 3) their arms trade, and 4) their efforts to promote democracy and a market economy and to ensure basic human rights and freedom. The Japanese government always uses the official rhetoric of concern for human rights. However, critics have noted that Japan rarely speaks out about serious human rights abuses in strategically important countries such as China and that some cases of ODA implementation are inconsistent with the principles of the ODA Charter.

In 2003, Japan revised the ODA Charter "with the aim of enhancing the strategic value, flexibility, transparency, and efficiency of ODA," seeking to reshape Japan's ODA mandate and enhance human security.<sup>10</sup> The new 'Four Principles' were given more clear-cut wording – for example, "full attention should be paid to efforts for democratization, market-oriented economies, human rights and freedoms in recipient countries" – and the new principle of concern for environmental conservation and development was added.

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<sup>10</sup> Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Economic Co-operation Bureau, "Japan's Official Development Assistance Charter," Tokyo: Japan, 29 August 2003.

Japan's policy tools for human rights and democracy are still limited and less mature than those of Western nations. However, Japan has begun to develop its own approach to democracy-oriented foreign assistance.

#### Japan's Approach in Asia: Examples

##### *DPRK: Dilemma with Security Interests*

There are serious human rights abuses in the DPRK; however, for Japan at present, the most serious human rights abuse is the abduction of Japanese nationals by the DPRK. Japan has made great efforts to pass resolutions in the UN concerning the human rights situation, specifically abductions, in the DPRK. Three resolutions (2003, 2004, 2005) have been adopted by the Commission on Human Rights and three by the UN General Assembly (2005, 2006, 2007). Since 2006, the abduction issue has been added to the resolutions sending strong messages from the international community to the DPRK. Based on the 2003 resolution, Professor Muntarhorn was appointed UN special rapporteur on North Korea. Professor Muntarhorn visited Japan three times (2005, 2006, 2008) to exchange opinions on the human rights situation in the DPRK, including the abduction issue. However, the DPRK has not yet responded to repeated requests for dialogue with Muntarhorn.

In June 2006, Japan passed the North Korean Human Rights Act, mainly targeting the government on the abduction issue<sup>11</sup>. The United States also passed a North Korean Human Rights Act in 2004<sup>12</sup>. Although both acts call for the DPRK to improve its human rights situation, their purposes and policies are quite different. The main purpose of the Japanese legislation is to resolve the abduction issue by taking mainly a negative approach toward the DPRK. Other than “assistance and protection” provided to North Korean refugees, it does not include positive measures to promote human rights conditions such as humanitarian assistance towards ordinary North Korean citizens. On the other hand, the U.S. act provides a comprehensive and positive approach to policy tools. The United States provides humanitarian assistance to North Koreans inside North Korea, grants to private, non-profit organizations to promote human rights and democracy, and humanitarian and legal assistance to North Korean refugees.

Japan established “North Korean Human Rights Violations Awareness Week” based on the North Korean Human Rights Act. However, this still focuses on the abduction issue. Critics claim that Japan’s ambassador in charge for human rights has focused solely on the abduction issue, and that Japanese officials rarely mention the gross human rights abuses against North Koreans. However, Ambassador Saiga has enthusiastically attended various international conferences on North Korean human rights coordinated by NGOs and she

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<sup>11</sup> This title is a commonly used name. See detail Japan L.96 (2006), amendment L.106 (2007).

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Congress. House. North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004. 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 2004. H.R.4011.

speaks out with great concern on the human rights situation in the DPRK without hesitation.

She has discussed this situation and exchanged opinions with Ambassador Lefkowitz, the U.S. special envoy for North Korean Human Rights, and Professor Muntarbhorn.

Diplomacy toward North Korea has many complicated facets, including imminent nuclear weapons development, and security issues on the Korean Peninsula. On the other hand, both security interests and resolution of the abduction issue are important for Japan. The most serious fear for Japan is that the abduction issues have been overshadowed by other issues. Japan patiently continues to try to negotiate with the DPRK about the abduction issue through both bilateral and multinational fora.

#### China: Interdependence and Historical Perception

The Tiananmen Incident (June 4, 1989) raised awareness among the Japanese public as a whole of gross human rights violations in China. However, the Japanese government's reaction was somewhat weak compared with those of Western governments. On 20 June, Japan decided to freeze new economic assistance projects. However, Prime Minister Sosuke Uno did not support sanctions and expressed concern over the isolation of China. Since Japan was the biggest provider of ODA to China, Japan wanted to avoid further sanctions that would deteriorate economic interdependence. Another reason for Japan's moderate reaction is

the historical perception of Japanese war crimes during the Sino-Japanese War.

On the other hand, Japan began to share Western values of human rights and democracy, complicating the process of normalizing relations with China. In early 1991 Japanese political leaders visited China, and in August Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu finally announced a resumption of ODA for fiscal year 1991, not to be limited to humanitarian items. This political decision was inconsistent with the ODA Charter established in April 1991.<sup>13</sup> Japan has been criticized for being mostly silent on human rights abuses in China, but this could well be a misunderstanding.

Japan held human rights dialogues with China in 1997, 1998, and 2000. Although the content of these dialogues was not made public, Japan has expressed its views on individual cases. At present, the dialogues have been suspended primarily because of scheduling difficulties. Japan also became a co-sponsor of numerous resolutions concerning China's human rights situation at the UN Human Rights Commission. On the other hand, China has criticized past Japanese war crimes and human rights abuses by the Japanese army. However, Japan clearly separates such historical issues from the debate on current human rights issues.

In sum, Japan's position is that the two countries are important partners with many national interests, and Japan has sought to quietly persuade China to improve its human rights situation without causing China to lose face.

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<sup>13</sup> For detail analysis, see: Seichiro Takagi, "Human Rights in Japanese Foreign Policy: Japan's Policy Towards China after Tiananmen," in *Human Rights and International Relations in Asia Pacific Region*, ed. James T. H. Tang (London: Pinter, 1995), 97-111.

## Burma/Myanmar: Special Attachment and the Sun Policy

On February 9, 2008, Myanmar's military junta announced that it will hold elections in 2010, and that a national referendum to approve a new constitution would be held in May 2008.

This was the first time that the military government set dates for its "road map to democracy." However, the international community saw this action as simply an effort to escape sharp international criticism, and considered it unlikely that the military junta would fully implement the democratic process, which turned out to be the case. Ganesan concluded, "Japan's relations with Myanmar are characterized by a measure of sentimental attachment to the country, important economic interests, and a primarily aid- and grant-driven foreign policy. Whereas Japan does not have political and strategic considerations the way that China and India do, it is interested in how much leverage the other two countries will eventually have in Myanmar."<sup>14</sup>

Japan's basic perception toward Myanmar is that Myanmar is a pro-Japan nation, and many people in both nations have sentimental attachments to each other. Japan has provided ODA to Myanmar in place of war reparations since 1968. From the latter half of the 1970s, Myanmar changed its position and actively welcomed ODA to overcome economic

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<sup>14</sup> N. Ganesan, "Japan's Place in Myanmar's Bilateral Relations," in *Panorama: Insights into Southeast Asian and European Affairs* (Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2005), 35-44.

obstacles. Japan became the country's top ODA donor and, by 1988, Japan was providing 80 percent of Myanmar's total bilateral aid. At the same time, many Japanese companies have extended their operations to Myanmar.<sup>15</sup>

### *Emergence of Myanmar's Military Junta and Japan's ODA*

After the 1988 crackdown on nationwide demonstrations, Japan immediately suspended all ODA; however, in February 1989 Japan recognized the military junta, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)<sup>16</sup>. In February 1994, Japan resumed ODA (limited to humanitarian assistance<sup>17</sup>) despite the military junta's continued refusal to accept the election results and release Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and major members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) from jail. In June 1994, a Japanese business mission visited Myanmar and restarted economic activities in expectation of the full-scale resumption of ODA. At the end of the same year, the Japanese government sounded out the military junta about the resumption of repair work to the Yangon International Airport. In March 1995, the Japanese cabinet decided to provide a grant worth 1.2 billion yen to promote

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<sup>15</sup> For further analysis on Japan's ODA to Burma, see: Kei Nemoto, "Between Democracy and Economic Development: Japan's Policy towards Burma/Myanmar," in N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing ed. Myanmar: state, society and ethnicity (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), 96-108.

<sup>16</sup> In 1997, the military junta changed its name to State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

<sup>17</sup> Japan provided medicine and ambulances as small grant aid to 3 organizations including Burma Red Cross.

food production, just after the military junta released 31 political detainees. At that time, the United States condemned the Japanese policy as sending the wrong message, and the United States tried to convince Japan not to resume ODA. Even some members of the ruling LDP claimed that such assistance would be against the ODA charter. When the military junta suddenly released Suu Kyi without any conditions in July 1995, the Japanese government deemed this a positive effect of ASEAN's and Japan's "constructive engagement" policy. In October 1995, the Japanese government announced that there were no more obstacles to full-scale resumption of ODA and decided to resume ODA gradually, including an aid grant worth 1.6 billion yen for the establishment of a nursing college in Yangon.

In March 1998, Japan released a loan of 2.5 billion yen for improvements to the Rangoon/Yangon International Airport. This decision sparked intense criticism both internationally and domestically, but MOFA explained that it was an emergency measure to assure safety and that it was not a new yen loan project but an existing one. Junichi Ihara, director of the First Southeast Asia Division responded, "The most effective measure to realize progress in Myanmar's democratization and human rights situation is to strongly urge them to make progress on democratization and human rights and at the same time to cooperate by offering minimal yen loans such as this one. However, we do not want this to be misinterpreted as an expression of satisfaction with current conditions in Myanmar."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Answer at the meeting with 6 representatives of NGOs, "Report of the Action on March 13 Against the Resumption of ODA to Burma, 13 March 1998, Available from: <http://www.burmainfo.org/oda/demo1.html>.

In December 2002, the Japanese government announced that Japan would give Myanmar debt relief amounting to 150 billion yen in accordance with the decision of the G7 to help Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC)s. The international community, including Western nations and many NGOs, condemned this debt relief as financial aid to the military junta from Japan, and insisted that Myanmar did not satisfy the required eligibility conditions.

In May 2003, however, the military junta again placed Suu Kyi under house arrest, following which the Japanese government asserted in the ODA White Paper that “regarding economic cooperation, Japan has in principle suspended new projects in light of the situation in Myanmar after May 2003. However, given the worsening living environment in the country, highly urgent humanitarian projects are being implemented after careful and individual examination, while carefully monitoring the political situation in Myanmar.”<sup>19</sup> In the end, it is true that Japan has remained the largest aid donor to Myanmar on a bilateral basis.

### *The Role and Perception of Politicians and Key Players in the Sun Policy*

Japanese policy toward Myanmar has been criticized by Western nations as the Japanese government continuing to send the wrong messages and helping the military junta gain

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19 Sentences quoted from: Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Japan’s Official Development Assistance White Paper 2006”, (Tokyo: MOFA, 2006). Available from: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2006/html/honpen/hp202040300.htm>

legitimacy. To the Japanese government, Japan has simply implemented quiet diplomacy, because many Japanese politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen believe that this approach is effective in promoting democratization in Myanmar. There exists a complicated background to formulating Japanese policies towards Myanmar. There are many Japanese who like the people and the country as traditional friends sharing spiritual and cultural values, but this does not mean that they welcome or support the military junta out of hand.

There are three main aspects of Japanese political culture explaining why the Japanese government promptly recognized the military junta in February 1989: MOFA, certain politicians, and business circles. When moving toward normalization, the MOFA spokesman explained that SLORC enjoyed effective control over most of the country, and that it had broken no international laws or treaties. Furthermore, normalization did not necessarily mean that Japan supported the new administration; official recognition of SLORC would enable Japan to open a channel of communication through which it could encourage the junta to democratize the government and liberalize the economy.<sup>20</sup>

There has been a powerful lobby in the Japanese Diet, especially in the ruling LDP, tied to war veterans who had close personal ties with the military junta. About 60 members of the Diet, including important right-wing politicians in the ruling LDP, organized the Japan-Burma Friendships Parliamentarian League (now called the Japan-Myanmar Friendships

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20 Donald M. Seekins, "The North Wind and the Sun: Japan's Response to the political crisis in Burma, 1988-1996", Online Burma/Myanmar Library, Available From: <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/NorthWind&Sun.htm>.

Parliamentarian League). It was said that this league, strongly supported by war veterans and key business figures, played an important role in the normalization of relations and the resumption of ODA. These politicians put a high priority on ensuring Burma remained a pro-Japan nation, rather than on protecting human rights. Indeed, the present secretary general of the Japan-Myanmar Friendships Parliamentarian League, Shingo Nishimura, an ultra-nationalist member of the Lower House, is also the secretary general of the Parliamentarian League for solving the North Korean abductions issue (Rachi Giren). Japanese right-wing politicians say no to everything about Kim Jong Il's North Korea, but are generous to Myanmar's military junta.

On the other hand, some politicians are sensitive about human rights and democratization in Burma. In 1995, the Japanese Parliamentarian League Supporting Democratization in Myanmar (Minshuka Giren) was formed by a supra-partisan policy cooperation group in the Diet seeking to promote democracy and respect for universal human rights in Myanmar. The first chairman was Yoshiro Hayashi (retired in 2003), former minister of finance from the LDP, and the two vice chairmen were Takako Doi, former head of the Social Democratic Party, and Yukio Hatoyama, secretary general of the Democratic Party. The League has released public statements criticizing the military junta's oppression and demanding the release of Suu Kyi. The League has also collaborated with the International Network of Political Leaders Promoting Democracy in Burma (PD Burma) and

the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC). However, the League does not have significant influence on government policies.

The Japanese business sector also played an important role in maintaining contact with the upper echelons of the military junta. For example, in 1997, *Nippon Keidanren*, the Japanese confederation of business and industry, opened an office in Yangon for the purpose of promoting economic relations with Myanmar as a strong lobby group. Pro-Myanmar people, including several ambassadors to Myanmar and people from the business sector established the Myanmar Economic & Management Institute (MEMI) in 1996 to promote cultural and economic exchange and provide inside information on Myanmar.<sup>21</sup>

As an extreme example, Yoichi Yamaguchi, former ambassador to Myanmar (1995-1998), insists that the analysis of Suu Kyi as good and the military junta as evil is merely a stereotype, and that Suu Kyi is not a politician but rather a puppet under the influence of foreign countries that the country's people mostly dislike.<sup>22</sup> Yamaguchi's assertion sparked strong public criticism, but he continues to aggressively present his opinion. MOFA staff members have cautioned that Yamaguchi's statements are personal opinions and not reflective of MOFA's official view. While acknowledging that Suu Kyi is regarded in Western nations as a 'superstar' for human rights, Japan wants to maintain friendly relations with Myanmar. This being said, Japan is always ready to speak out on necessary occasions, such as on the

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<sup>21</sup> Myanmar Economic and Management Institute. Available From: <http://www.memi.gr.jp/>

<sup>22</sup> Yoichi Yamaguchi, *Real Image of Myanmar (Myanmar no jitsuzo)*, (Tokyo:Keisosha, 1999).

death of the Japanese video journalist Kenji Nagai in September 2007.<sup>23</sup>

The United States and European nations strongly protested against the actions of the military junta at the time of Nagai's death, but the reaction of Japan was somewhat different. The Japanese government sent Deputy Foreign Minister Yabunaka to Myanmar for talks and a full investigation into the fatal shooting of Nagai, but the comments and actions of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda remained weak and cautious, though he did call the incident a matter for deep regret. Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura said that the government was considering recalling its ambassador and reducing or suspending technical assistance to Myanmar. However, no steps have been taken except for the suspension of technician training assistance.

When asked by a Japanese reporter shortly after Nagai's death about the Japanese government's stance on the human rights abuses of Myanmar's military junta, Machimura answered, "Myanmar has been criticized one-sidedly at international conferences. I think that it was too harsh. Although the ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting held in Kyoto in May 2005 was a meeting of ASEAN, Asian, and European nations, some nations treated Myanmar coldly as if to say 'What right does Myanmar have to sit here? Get out of here.' These attitudes were too hard, so I stood up for Myanmar; at the same time I advised Myanmar: 'You should give serious thought to why it is subjected to so much criticism. Democracy,

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Principal Deputy Director, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Division, 4 February 2008.

human rights, and freedom are now global standards. Be more circumspect, or you might find yourself the loser. There is no way you will be accepted.’ In this way, I repeatedly and strongly lectured Myanmar’s foreign minister. In this sense, it is inaccurate to suggest that the Japanese government is indifferent and says nothing to Myanmar. Such analyses are far from the truth.”<sup>24</sup>

The reshuffling of Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt in October 2004 was a serious blow to Western nations. Khin Nyunt had been regarded as a moderate and the only contact man within the military junta able to negotiate and cooperate with foreign nations, ethnic minorities, and democratization groups. Khin Nyunt had been positive toward dialogue with Suu Kyi, who has been under continual house arrest since 2003. Japan and other nations have found it difficult to negotiate with the military junta because of Khin Nyunt’s removal and they worry that this will slow down progress on the roadmap for democratization. Indeed, before the reshuffle, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi met with Khin Nyunt in December 2003 to persuade him to seek an early resolution to Suu Kyi’s confinement and other humanitarian issues and to request that Myanmar work to create circumstances that would facilitate Japan’s support for democratization.<sup>25</sup>

### *Japan’s Quiet Diplomacy and its Future*

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<sup>24</sup> Press conference, (28 September 2007). Sanke Shimbun, (September 29, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Mainichi, (12 December 2003).

The typical interpretation of the Myanmar case is that the Japanese government approach to human rights and democracy diplomacy is not to criticize the concerned nation one-sidedly, but to make room for them to step up by protecting them while at the same time persuading them to accept universal values. Whether the concerned nation will respond positively and make progress to resolve the situation is quite a different matter.

After all, there is no expectation that Japan will dramatically change its policies towards Myanmar in the near future because there has been unanimity in Japan. The adoption of quiet diplomacy by the Japanese government is regarded as a convenient excuse to maintain the status quo of Japanese policies toward Myanmar. This situation is not good for Japan in promoting the new concept of value-oriented diplomacy. How Japan can demonstrate seriousness in promoting its new value-oriented diplomacy depends on Japanese attitudes toward Myanmar. However, the policy options that Japan can take toward Myanmar will be increasingly limited as interdependence grows between Myanmar and emerging neighbors such as China and India.

## Conclusion

The 2007 Diplomatic Bluebook insists “Japan will work to create this Arc of Freedom and

Prosperity by facilitating the attainment of universal values. It will do so without forcing these values on any nation or people, and it will do so without seeking regime changes.

Instead, Japan will pursue this goal maintaining a balance between political stability and economic prosperity and always giving full regard to each country's unique culture, history, and level of development.”<sup>26</sup>

To promote human rights and democracy effectively, Japan cannot help addressing individual cases on their own merits in consideration of the conditions in each country. Maintaining consistency while balancing other important interests is important for Japan, as it is for all nations; this dilemma is inevitable in human rights and democracy diplomacy. However, we must do what we can to achieve substantial progress and improvement in both human rights and democracy without asserting anything one-sidedly.

From the standard of Western nations, it can be said that Japan's words do not agree with its deeds. The perception of human rights in Japan is still immature compared with that in Western nations, and it is far from satisfying outside requirements. It is true that the Japanese political system from politicians to bureaucrats is not flexible compared with Western nations such as the United States. The Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Bureau (DRL) of the U.S. Department of State employs experts from outside of the government and there is great mobility in recruiting between the private sector and government. In contrast,

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<sup>26</sup> Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Bluebook 2007 (Tokyo, Japan: MOFA, 2007), 2.

the Japanese bureaucratic system is quite different and lacks flexibility in personnel affairs.

Japanese bureaucrats require opinions from outside experts, but do not recruit experts to their own organizations. In this sense, there are many obstacles to Japan developing dramatically new policies in its value-oriented diplomacy. The important thing is determining what Japan can do and focusing on practical goals within its limited capacity and options.

Japan is an Asian nation and also a developed non-Western democracy. It is essential that Japan contributes to human rights and democracy in the international community and demonstrates an original value-oriented diplomacy.