



A New Agenda for Japan and China by Sheila A. Smith

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This week, China's president and Japan's prime minister announced a new agenda for China-Japan relations, ending the worst era of antagonism in their two countries' relations since the end of World War II. In the first state visit by a Chinese leader to Japan in a decade, Hu Jintao and Japanese counterpart Fukuda Yasuo put aside difficult years of deep confrontation between their two countries. Promising to promote "mutually strategic interests," they committed to annual state visits and to a new agenda of cooperation on issues such as global climate change and promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula.

This new China-Japan relationship was put to the test not days after Hu left Tokyo, when China suffered its devastating earthquake May 12. Fukuda immediately sent his condolences to the Chinese people, and ordered the formation of a task force on disaster relief assistance in case Beijing asked for its help. On May 13, Foreign Minister Komura announced 500 million yen in emergency aid (roughly \$5 million), and two days later, the Chinese government announced it would welcome a Japanese disaster relief team into Sichuan.

When Hu visited Tokyo it was clear that the Japanese public has warmed to the task of emphasizing common interests. Japanese sensitivities toward China have been running high for some time. Jiang Zemin's trip to Tokyo in 1998, during which he publicly castigated Japan's political leaders on their country's wartime history, was perhaps the worst state visit in Japanese public memory.

This deterioration was accelerated when former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro insisted on visiting Japan's controversial Yasukuni Shrine, inflaming Chinese anger. Anti-Japanese demonstrations in China in 2004 and 2005, in turn, outraged Japanese as they felt the Chinese government could have acted to stop the violence and property damage that resulted.

The focus now is on replanting seeds of friendship in the next generation. The Japanese Emperor entertained Hu at the Imperial Palace, and the two spoke of the need for greater friendships among the youth of China and Japan. Hu announced that China would offer a new panda couple to replace the tremendously popular Ling Ling, who died recently at Tokyo's Ueno zoo. Hu also visited Horyuji and Toshoji temples in the ancient city of Nara, a site that reflects deep cultural ties between China and Japan. In his carefully scripted tour, he quietly paid homage to the sources of common heritage and friendship that bind the Chinese and Japanese people.

Much diplomatic energy has been expended to reverse the downward spiral of animosity between Asia's two largest nations. Since Koizumi left office in September 2006, two Japanese prime ministers have visited China. Abe Shinzo took the first step toward ending the era of deep antagonism by making Beijing his first overseas state visit. Once Abe "broke the ice," China's Premier Wen Jiabao "melted" it with a stunningly successful visit last spring to Tokyo. The outgoing Wen was a great hit in Tokyo, charming the public and even Japan's more skeptical legislators with his optimism and sophisticated appeal for developing a new future-oriented relationship with Japan. Despite the abrupt leadership change in Tokyo, and the domestic political turmoil that followed, Fukuda followed suit with a December visit to Beijing.

The thorn of 20th-century history has been put aside in the diplomatic agenda, although the statement issued by Hu and Fukuda in Tokyo did note that the two countries would base their "new phase of bilateral relations by squarely facing history." Missing are Chinese calls for further apology or atonement. Instead, China acknowledged Japan's commitment to peace in the 60 plus years since the end of World War II.

Fukuda sought to reassure Hu Jintao that Japan "fully understands" Beijing's position on Taiwan, reasserting the commitment to a one China policy. Much attention was focused on whether Fukuda would insist on the inclusion of a statement on Tibet, but there was no such direct reference in the joint statement. Hu and Fukuda did agree to cooperate on pursuing basic and universal values acknowledged by the international community, a vague enough statement to avoid direct criticism of Beijing but suggestive enough to accommodate sentiment in Japan that backs a more assertive stance in support of democratic values.

Where the two countries stopped short of a deal was on the question of joint development of gas fields in the East China Sea. A final agreement was hoped for, but proved elusive. For many in Japan, this is a test of China's ability to compromise on sensitive issues of sovereignty and energy claims. Officials remain positive, and Fukuda told reporters that "a solution is in sight."

Perhaps the greatest policy accomplishment was a basic accord on climate change. The joint declaration included cooperation on an international framework to fight global warming, and China agreed that Japan's sector-specific approach was "important." But more to the point, Japan and China also announced a new bilateral collaborative project that embraces new carbon dioxide capture and storage (CSS) technology as the best means of curbing China's increased carbon dioxide emissions. This initiative will bring together public and private interests at China's largest oil field, the Daqing, in Heilongjiang province. It could start as early as

2009, and is expected to cost more than 20 billion yen (\$200 million).

Japan and China have committed to making each other a diplomatic priority. This will be welcome in capitals throughout Northeast Asia. Policy makers in Washington will also be relieved that the intense antagonism between the two largest countries of Asia has abated. The longer term adjustment to China's rise will be harder to accommodate in Tokyo, as it will be in Washington.

Japanese and Chinese leaders need to persuade their publics that their future destinies can be shared. Public sensitivities remain just below the surface, and even this much-anticipated summit was rattled by the concerns about food security when Japanese fell ill after consuming "gyoza" dumplings imported from China. After the Hu-Fukuda summit, conservatives were quick to argue that Fukuda was too soft on Hu, and more nationalistic media continued to refer to their government's tendency to engage in "kowtow" diplomacy with Beijing.

The United States will need to tread carefully here. Our role in supporting and encouraging an improvement in the Sino-Japanese relationship remains important. As we look forward, we should be looking for ways to join in partnership with Tokyo to engage China in a shared agenda for problem solving. That agenda is both regional and global, and we must work with China on trade, food and energy security, and peace on the Korean Peninsula.

We can and should take our cue from Tokyo and Beijing as they work to define the parameters of that agenda. As important, Washington can signal to the Japanese people that we are committed to working with Japan to build a shared future with its neighbors in the Asia Pacific.

But today, perhaps we should put aside the high politics of regional reconciliation, and, like Prime Minister Fukuda, express our condolences to the Chinese people, and offer our assistance. It is a simple act, a demonstration of commitment to community regardless of politics, and it holds much promise for the future of Northeast Asia.