



Japan-China Relations:
Gyoza, Beans, and Aircraft Carriers

James J. Przystup
Institute for National Strategic Studies
National Defense University

In early December, the Japanese Foreign Ministry released its annual survey of public opinion on Japan's international relations, which revealed that over 70 percent of the public considered relations with China to be in poor shape. The survey likewise revealed a record high, 66.6 percent of the Japanese public, as feeling no affinity toward China. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defense reported increasing PLA naval activities in the waters around Japan, including the incursion of research ships into Japanese territorial waters in the Senkaku Islands chain. There were also reports that China would begin the construction of two aircraft carriers in 2009. Japanese and Chinese leaders met in Beijing in October and in Japan in December, but beyond commitments of best efforts, failed to make any demonstrable progress on food safety and sovereignty issues.

Public opinion

On Dec. 6, the Japanese Foreign Ministry released the results of its annual public poll on Japan's international relations. The survey, conducted in October, yielded 1,826 valid replies out of the 3,000 individuals polled. Of the valid respondents, 71.9 percent did not believe that relations with China were "good" – an all time high, up from 68.0 percent in 2007. Only 23.7 percent thought relations "good," down from 26.4 percent in 2007. The percentage of those feeling friendship toward China stood at 31.8 percent – an all-time low, down from 34.0 percent in 2007. The percentage of those feeling no affinity for China increased to 66.6 percent, another record high, up from 63.5 percent in 2007.

Foreign Ministry sources attributed the downturn to recent food poisoning cases involving contaminated frozen *gyoza* and beans imported from China. Indicative of Japan's continuing concern with food safety, Prime Minister Aso Taro raised the issue with Prime Minister Wen Jiabao at the trilateral summit in Dazaifu, Japan.

Security: food safety

The long-running controversy over contaminated Chinese *gyoza* imported into Japan continued into the last quarter of the year. On Oct. 1, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura Takeo met China's Ambassador to Japan Cui Tiankai to discuss the issue. Kawamura asked for cooperation to resolve the issue and Cui, making clear his concerns with food safety, reiterated previous commitments to cooperate. Amid reports from China on the presence of melamine in milk and

other food products, Japan's Ministry of Agriculture on Oct. 6 announced that it had ordered farm cooperatives and other commercial organizations to tighten inspection of animal feed and pet food imported from China.

Less than a week later, on Oct. 12, a Japanese housewife in the Tokyo suburb of Hachioji fell ill after eating frozen green beans imported from China. A similar incident followed in the city of Kashiwa, where two people experienced numbness of the tongue when eating frozen beans from the same lot number. And on Oct. 18, *Kyodo* reported a two-year old Japanese boy living in Shandong Province had developed kidney stones as a result of being fed melamine-contaminated milk since birth.

The Hachioji Health Department reported that tests had revealed the presence of 6,900 parts per million of the insecticide dichlorvos in the beans, 34,500 times the government standard for imported beans. The beans were processed by the Yanhai Beihai Foodstuff Company in Shandong Province and imported by Tokyo-based Nichrei Foods. *Kyodo* reported that Yanhai had previously been the source of tainted bean imports in 2002.

On the evening of Oct. 14, the Foreign Ministry contacted the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo to ask for China's cooperation in resolving the issue and made a similar request through the Japanese Embassy in Beijing. The Foreign Ministry asked for information on plant management and food production processes. Addressing the Hachioji incident at an evening press conference on Oct. 15, Prime Minister Aso indicated his intention to call on China to prevent future problems and, at the same time, to strengthen Japan's food import inspection procedures.

In the wake of the incidents, the Japanese government put out a consumer warning and asked distributors to suspend sales of the beans until it could ascertain the cause of the reported distress. Meanwhile, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police opened an investigation into possible food tampering and, on Oct. 17, reported the discovery of a 1 millimeter hole in the bean packaging involved in the Hachioji incident.

Officials from the Japanese Embassy in Beijing visited the Yanhai plant on Oct. 17, inspected the processing facilities, and were provided with a copy of operating records. Plant officials said that the records suggested the possibility of deliberate criminal activity as the source of the contamination. As in the *gyoza* incident, Beijing ascribed the cause to criminal activity rather than the lack of safety procedures involved in food processing.

In Tokyo, during an early December symposium on the safety of food products imported from China, a representative of China's Import-Export Food Safety Bureau told reporters that China had strengthened its food inspection system and will continue to do so and suggested that contamination was the result of criminal activity. China's former Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, also in attendance at the conference, said that in the event of criminal activity the two countries should cooperate to arrest the perpetrators so that both Chinese and Japanese people not suffer physical harm.

Aso, Hu, and Wen at the ASEM Meeting

On Oct. 24, on the occasion of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Beijing, Prime Minister Aso met separately with President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen at the Great Hall of the People.

In the meeting with Hu, the two leaders agreed to cooperate in addressing the global financial crisis and to maintain the dollar-centered international financial system. They also agreed to reopen the hotline between the two governments, which was initially set up in October 2000 during the visit of Premier Zhu Rongji to Japan and fell into disuse during the Koizumi government, and to work to build the mutually beneficial strategic partnership. Raising the issue of the still unresolved *gyoza* incident, Aso asked for China's cooperation in preventing future incidents. Aso also asked for China's cooperation in the Six-Party Talks and in resolving Japan's abductee issue with North Korea.

In the meeting with Wen, the leaders signed a Japan-China Consular agreement aimed at improving protection for the citizens of both countries and exchanged documents ratifying the Japan-China Treaty on Cooperation on Criminal Matters, which allows police officials to exchange information on criminal cases directly without going through diplomatic channels. Aso also raised the food safety issues, noting that the Japanese people are "distrustful of the safety of Chinese food products."

Following the morning meetings, Aso delivered a speech at a ceremony marking the 30th anniversary of the Japan-China Treaty of Peace and Amity. Aso told his audience that "the essence of Japan-China bilateral relations is that our two countries are mutually indispensable to each other." Aso agreed with the position previously articulated by President Hu that acting in harmony benefits both countries, while rivalry undermines common interests. Nevertheless, Aso argued that the two countries "should not constrain ourselves in the name of friendship," but that "sound competition and active cooperation will constitute a true mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests." Two days later, during an interview with *China Central Television*, Aso reaffirmed his government's support of the 1995 Murayama Statement and his commitment to reflect on the past, while building a future orientated relationship.

Security: PLA naval activities

On Oct. 21, Japan's Ministry of Defense reported that, on Oct. 19, an Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) aircraft had identified four Chinese warships in international waters in the Sea of Japan off Aomori Prefecture. The Ministry of Defense noted that this was the first time Chinese warships had been identified in the Tsugaru Strait. A member of the Joint Staff Office told the *Nikkei Shimbun* that the PLA Navy, including submarines, had recently increased its activities "in waters around the continent to the Pacific Ocean."

On the morning of Dec. 8, a patrol boat belonging to the Japanese 11th Regional Coast Guard headquarters identified two Chinese maritime survey ships operating 6 kilometers southeast of Uotsuri Island in Japan's Senkaku Islands chain. Despite warnings from the Coast Guard vessel, the Chinese ships, the *Haijin 46* and the *Haijin 51* remained in Japanese territorial waters for approximately nine hours before departing.

Reacting to Coast Guard reports, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Yabunaka Mitoji protested the incursion to Ambassador Cui and demanded that the ships leave Japanese territorial waters, while Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Saiki Akitaka, who was in Beijing, called on Vice Minister Wu Dawei to lodge a protest. That evening, Prime Minister Aso, pointing out the incident “was clearly an intrusion into Japanese territorial waters,” told reporters that he found it “extremely regrettable.”

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Liu Jianchao told a press conference that the actions “could not be considered provocative because China had carried out normal patrol activities in sovereign Chinese territorial waters.”

With the trilateral Japan-China-South Korea summit less than a week off, a high-ranking Japanese government official told the *Nikkei Shimbun* that he found the incident “incomprehensible.” Another source close to Japan-China relations told the *Nikkei* that “discontent was simmering in China” over the agreement on the East China Sea reached in June. Foreign Minister Nakasone Hirofumi told reporters that Prime Minister Aso would “raise the issue in a proper manner” during his bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Wen at the trilateral summit in Dazaifu, Fukuoka.

In Dazaifu, on Dec. 13, Aso told Wen that the incident was “extremely regrettable” – one that did not have a positive effect on the bilateral relationship. After reasserting historic Chinese claims of sovereignty over the area, Wen said that he “wanted to resolve the issue appropriately through dialogue in a manner that would not affect the good relations between the two countries.” Aso countered that historically and in terms of international law no doubt could be entertained about Japanese sovereignty over the Senkakus. He went on to say that he wanted to handle the matter in a way that would not give rise to another such incident. Aso also made clear his interest in taking up and implementing at an early date the June agreement on joint development in the East China Sea. Wen however, thought outstanding differences should continue to be addressed at the working level.

Early in December, Hong Kong sources reported China’s Defense Ministry spokesperson Huang Xueping as saying that China was giving serious consideration to the construction of aircraft carriers. On December 30, the *Asahi Shimbun* reported that China would begin the construction of two 50,000-60,000-ton aircraft carriers in 2009 with a completion date of 2015. Kayahara Ikuo, a former analyst at Japan’s National Institute for Defense Studies and currently a professor at Takushoku University, told the *Asahi* that “this is the first step of a strategy for China to become a seafaring power swinging into the Western Pacific.” In its story, the *Asahi* observed that “China’s flattop deployment will enhance its naval power projection” and “will likely affect the military balance in East Asia.”

History: Yasukuni

On Oct. 7, during an appearance before the Lower House Budget Committee, Prime Minister Aso, when asked if he would visit the Yasukuni Shrine during the autumn festival, replied that he “would not answer whether he would or would not go.” Aso went on to observe that “the current

situation is such that the state is prohibited from respecting with highest honors those who sacrificed themselves for the country.” This resulted from “the decision to leave honoring the war dead to one religious corporation,” a condition that he felt was “wrong. As for the possibility of the Shrine voluntarily dissolving itself as a religious corporation and being transformed into a special state corporation, an issue he had previously raised, Aso replied that he had no intention of pushing his private views, that he wanted to reach a conclusion only after a wide-ranging debate, and that any decision to do so would require the ultimate approval of the War Bereaved Families Association.

On Oct. 17, the occasion of the autumn festival, a supra-party delegation of 48 Diet members paid homage at the shrine. The number represented a fall from the 62 who visited the shrine in 2007 and no members of the Aso Cabinet joined the group.

History: Tamogami

On Oct. 31, Minister of Defense, Hamada Yasukazu announced the dismissal of ASDF Chief of Staff Tamogami Toshio following the publication of his contest award-winning essay, “Was Japan an Aggressor Nation?” Later, he told a press conference that Tamogami’s views were “significantly different from the government’s current position on Japan’s wartime history.”

In the essay, Tamogami denied that Japan was an “aggressor nation,” asserted that the advance into China was based on treaties and agreements with local warlords, and argued that Japan was a “victim” drawn into the war with China by acts of terrorism and provocations committed by China’s Nationalist (KMT) government, which was being manipulated by the Comintern to draw Japan into China’s civil war and thus advance a victory by the Chinese Communist forces. Likewise, Tamogami alleged that Japan’s entry into the Pacific War was the result of being “ensnared in a trap very carefully laid by the United States.” Looking at the state of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces, Tamogami found them “hedged around with restrictions,” which prevented Japan from being able “to establish a system to protect itself on its own.”

Prime Minister Aso, reacting to the publication of the essay, labeled Tamogami’s action “not appropriate, given his position.” Tamogami replied that “it is necessary to revise the view that Japan did wrong during the war, if it wishes to prosper as a nation in the 21st century.”

On Nov. 1, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a comment noting the action taken by the Aso government. A fuller response followed on Nov. 3, when the Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yu Jiang said that Japan’s war of aggression was “an undeniable fact” and that China was “shocked and indignant over the Japanese senior military officer’s overt denial of history and attempt to glorify aggression.” Yu noted the actions taken by Tokyo and urged both countries to “work together to safeguard our bilateral relations.” Tamogami was retired on Nov. 3.

Summoned by the Upper House Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Tamogami testified as an unsworn witness on Nov. 11. He described the positions set out in his controversial essay as “not inaccurate” and defended his right to express his thoughts freely. He asserted that the war apology issued by Prime Minister Murayama in 1995 was a “tool to suppress free speech.” Previously, when Prime Minister Aso was questioned about his government’s position with

regard to the Murayama Statement, he said that “the statement you just mentioned and the Koizumi statement present the government’s view on the last major war. My Cabinet will follow that view.”

In response to questioning by the Democratic Party of Japan’s (DPJ) Asao Kenichiro, Tamogami said that as a result of the differences expressed with regard to government policy, he thought it “quite natural” to be dismissed “from the viewpoint of civilian control.” Nevertheless, he maintained that his essay was not wrong and that he thought it “necessary for Japan to move in the right direction.”

Prime Minister Aso appeared before the committee on Nov. 13. Addressing concerns over civilian control over the SDF, Aso told the lawmakers that “Civilian control worked perfectly,” citing the fact that Tamogami had been dismissed “right away.” He also made clear that he considered Tamogami’s decision to air his views in public to be “extremely inappropriate.”

Prospect: With domestic politics essentially gridlocked and the Aso government fighting for survival, significant progress in Japan-China relations should not be expected during the first quarter of the 2009.

Chronology of Japan-China Relations September-December 2008

Oct. 1, 2008: Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura Takeo meets Chinese Ambassador to Japan Cui Tiankai to ask China’s cooperation to resolve food safety issues.

Oct. 2, 2008: Prime Minister Aso Taro, during Diet interpolation, reaffirms his government’s support for 1995 Murayama Statement.

Oct. 2, 2008: Defense Ministry dismisses ASDF colonel for allegedly leaking information of a Chinese submarine accident in South China Sea to *Yomiuri Shimbun*.

Oct. 6, 2008: Osaka Municipal Government reports detection of melamine in chocolates imported from China.

Oct. 7, 2008: Prime Minister Aso refuses to reply to questions regarding his intention to visit Yasukuni Shrine during autumn festival.

October 6, 2008: Japan’s Ministry of Agriculture orders tightened inspection regime for pet food product imports from China.

Oct. 10, 2008: Japan’s International Exchange Foundation hosts party celebrating establishment of the Japan Cultural Center in Beijing.

Oct. 12, 2008: Japanese housewife in Tokyo suburb of Hachioji becomes ill after eating beans imported from China.

Oct. 14, 2008: Japanese Foreign Ministry requests China's cooperation in addressing the contaminated beans issue.

Oct. 17, 2008: 48-member Diet delegation visits Yasukuni Shrine, but no members of Aso Cabinet participate.

Oct. 17, 2008: Japan's Ministry of Defense reports the sighting of a Chinese frigate in international waters off Nagasaki Prefecture.

Oct. 17, 2008: Tokyo Metropolitan Police report finding 1 millimeter hole in imported bean package that sickened the Hachioji housewife.

Oct. 17, 2008: Japanese Embassy officials visit Chinese bean processing plant.

Oct. 21, 2008: Japanese Defense Ministry reports ASDF identified four Chinese warships in international waters off Aomori Prefecture on Oct. 19.

Oct. 22, 2008: PLA delegation visits Hiroshima and Atomic Bomb Museum.

Oct. 24, 2008: PM Aso meets President Hu and Premier Wen in Beijing during Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) summit. Afterward, he delivers speech marking 30th anniversary of Japan-China Treaty of Peace and Amity.

Oct. 26, 2008: PM Aso, during interview on *China Central Television*, reaffirms government's support for 1995 Murayama Statement.

Oct. 27, 2008: Toyota Motors announces plan to build new factory in Changchun, Jilin Province.

Oct. 29, 2008: Osaka Prefectural Governor Hashimoto attends Nanking symposium on the environment.

Oct. 31, 2008: ASDF Chief of Staff Gen. Tamogami is dismissed following publication of his award winning essay "Was Japan an Aggressor Nation?"

Oct. 31, 2008: Japan announces intention to claim rights to continental shelf in the Pacific Ocean beyond current EEZ.

Nov. 1, 2008: China's Foreign Ministry takes note of Tamogami firing.

Nov. 3, 2008: China's Foreign Ministry expresses shock and indignation over Tamogami's views of history.

Nov. 3, 2008: Gen. Tamogami is retired.

Nov. 7, 2008: Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Saiki Akitaka meets Vice Minister Wu Dawei in Beijing to discuss verification protocols for Six-Party Talks.

Nov. 11, 2008: Gen. Tamogami appears before Upper House Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

Nov. 11, 2008: Taiwan's legislature adopts resolution seeking apology and compensation from Japan for Taiwanese women forced into wartime sexual slavery.

Nov. 12, 2008: Kanagawa Prefectural Police announce plans to question citizen suspected of brokering organ transplants for Japanese in China in violation of Japan's organ transplant law.

Nov. 13, 2008: PM Aso, appearing before Upper House Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, asserts civilian control over SDF is effectively functioning and labels Tamogami's essay extremely inappropriate.

Nov. 19, 2008: Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reports PLA will begin construction of aircraft carrier.

Nov. 20, 2008: Japan's Itochu Corp. announces plans to take 20 percent share in Chinese market-leading food processor Ting Hsin Group.

Nov. 21, 2008: Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura announces Dec. 13 as the date for Japan-China-South Korea summit in Fukuoka.

Nov. 22, 2008: PM Aso meets with President Hu on sidelines of APEC meeting in Lima, Peru. The 20 minute meeting focuses on global economic crisis.

Dec. 1, 2008: Japan cultural exhibition opens in Nanjing.

Dec. 3, 2008: PM Aso meets former Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing at the prime minister's official residence.

Dec. 5, 2008: Agreement is reached in talks in Taipei on compensation for June accident between Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force ship and Taiwan fishing boat near Senkaku Islands.

Dec. 6, 2008: Foreign Ministry releases its public opinion poll on Japan's foreign relations with results that point to downward trend in Japan for relations with China.

Dec. 8, 2008: ASDF aircraft identify two Chinese maritime research ships operating in Senkaku Islands. The Foreign Ministry issues a protest.

Dec. 10, 2008: Visiting Nationalist Party (KMT) chairman asserts Taiwan's claim to Senkaku Islands during speech at Tokyo Foreign Correspondents Club.

Dec. 13, 2008: PM Aso and Premier Hu meet in Dazaifu, Fukuoka at Japan-China-South Korea summit.

Dec. 19, 2008: Kirin Holdings announces that in 2007 Japan fell to seventh place in beer consumption. China remains number one for fifth consecutive year.

Dec. 20, 2008: Japan's Ministry of Defense draft budget for 2009 reveals that defense spending will decline for seventh consecutive year and reach a 14-year low.

Dec. 22, 2008: *Kyodo* reports declassified Japanese diplomatic documents reveal that Prime Minister Sato had asked the U.S. in 1965 to use nuclear weapons against China in the event of a Japan-China war.

Dec. 23, 2008: China's Defense Ministry spokesperson announces that China is seriously studying the construction of an aircraft carrier and related issues.

Dec. 30, 2008: *Asahi Shimbun* reports China will begin construction of two aircraft carriers in 2009 with completion date of 2015.