

Japan-China Relations: Dialogue of the Almost Deaf

James J. Przystup
Senior Fellow, Institute for National Strategic Studies
National Defense University

It was not quite all Yasukuni all the time, but close. Set off by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's Jan. 1 visit to the shrine, Yasukuni served as the leitmotif for extensive high-level political and diplomatic exchanges over the first quarter of the year. Neither the prime minister and his political proxies nor China's political leaders gave any ground. As the quarter ended, Koizumi, determined to continue his visits to the shrine, seem resigned to not visiting China if the Chinese did not want him to visit, while the Chinese made it clear that Yasukuni was the problem.

In the meantime, the Self-Defense Forces deployed to Iraq, raising back-to-the-future concerns in Beijing, and a landing by Chinese activists on the Senkaku Islands at the end of March raised nationalist sentiments in both countries. In Japan, suits brought by Chinese nationals seeking compensation for wartime forced labor kept alive the issues of history. At the end of March, for the first time, the Niigata District Court ruled in favor of Chinese plaintiffs in a case brought against both the Japanese government and a private company.

The good news, as both Koizumi and Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao agreed, was economic. Commercial relations rapidly expanded during the quarter, stimulating Japanese growth rates. As a result, Japanese views of China were shifting from "threat" to "market opportunity" as China's consumers continued to consume made-in-Japan electronics and machine products.

Postscript and preview

As 2003 drew to a close, Japanese media reviewed the state of Japan's relations with China.

In mid-December, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* released the results of a *Yomiuri-Gallup* poll conducted in Japan and the U.S. during the previous month. In both countries respondents were asked to select, which country, will be their respective country's most important trading partner. Fifty-three percent of respondents in both Japan and the U.S. picked China. In Japan, only 27 percent picked the U.S.; meanwhile China's standing increased 26 percentage points among Japanese respondents. At the same time, Japanese

judged that the U.S. will remain more important from a political perspective: 53 percent vs. 30 percent for China. As for the current state of Japan's relations with China, Japanese opinions divided with roughly 28.4 percent viewing them as very good/good; 31.5 percent as bad/very bad; and 30.4 percent unable to judge; 9.7 percent did not answer.

The *Yomiuri*, on Jan. 13, published the editorial "China's Responsibilities as an Economic Great Power." The editorial found much to praise in China's emergence in the 25 years since Deng Xiaoping opened the country to market forces – and much to be concerned about: insolvent financial institutions, excessive budget deficits, disparities in income between coastal and inland provinces, energy and food shortages and the continuing authoritarian rule of the communist party.

To advance China's development, the editorial noted that good relations with its neighbors were indispensable and emphasized that, as a responsible Great Power, China must contribute to regional peace and stability. At the same time, the *Yomiuri* observed China's rise as an economic great power, as reflected in its yearly double-digit increases in defense spending, the modernization of its nuclear and missile forces and the increasing military might, was a source of concern to China's neighbors. What is required of China is greater international cooperation, which in turn would dispel fears of a China threat.

Prime Minister Koizumi in his Jan. 19 policy address to the Diet referred to Japan's relations with China as one of Japan's "two most important" and expressed the intention of his government to work with China's new leadership to develop a future-oriented relationship. Ever-closer economic relations based on the expansion of trade investment would mutually benefit not only Japan and China but allow them cooperatively to contribute to the resolution of regional and global issues.

In looking toward the future, however, the prime minister also demonstrated that he could turn a blind eye to the past.

Back to Yasukuni

At year's end, political and media speculation over the timing of a Koizumi visit to Yasukuni swelled. The critical question was not whether to go, but when. At play were both political considerations – the upcoming July Upper House elections, the need to solidify the Koizumi-Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) base, and the prime minister's April 2001 pledge, made, as candidate for the LDP presidency, to visit the shrine on Aug. 15 – and diplomatic desires: Koizumi's long-cherished invitation from Beijing for an official visit. (Koizumi had visited the shrine on Aug. 13 in 2001, April 21, 2002, and Jan. 13, 2003; each time, Beijing had protested vigorously.)

The prime minister put an early end to speculation by visiting the Yasukuni Shrine on New Year's Day. Koizumi signed the visitor's book as prime minister and donated ¥30,000 as an offering. Afterward, he told reporters that he had prayed for "peace and

prosperity” at the shrine. The prime minister argued that visiting shrines was a Japanese New Year’s Day custom and went on to observe that he “did not think people in any country will criticize others for paying respect to their history, traditions, and customs.” He also argued that Japan’s present-day peace and prosperity “are not solely thanks to the people who are alive now” but stand “on the precious sacrifices of people who lived and died during the war against their will.” Koizumi asked for the understanding of other countries and expressed his belief that “gradually he will be able to gain China’s understanding.”

The Chinese reaction was almost instantaneous. Three hours later, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi called in Japan’s charge d’affaires Harada Chikahito to express “strong indignation” at the visit and strongly protested actions, which “wounded the feelings of those who had suffered as a result of war.” The next day, *The People’s Daily* charged Koizumi not only with “rubbing salt in the wounds of the war’s victims” but also “damaging Japan’s diplomacy.” A Chinese Communist Party source was quoted to the effect that “China could no longer expect a strengthening of relations with Japan under Koizumi and that reciprocal visits of the political leadership would probably not take place this year.”

The visit also produced a reaction in Japan. On Jan. 3, in a letter to the prime minister, the Japan-China Friendship League protested the visit along with the pending deployment of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to Iraq as a “reckless violation” of the principles inherent in Japan’s Peace Constitution. Later, Keidanren chairman Okuda Hiroshi warned that the visit would probably affect commercial relations with China, in particular Beijing’s pending choice of technology for the Shanghai-Beijing high-speed railroad.

Nevertheless, both the LDP and the prime minister made clear that visits to Yasukuni would continue.

Addressing the issue of Class-A war criminals enshrined at Yasukuni and his visits to the shrine, the prime minister told the House of Representatives Budget Committee on Feb. 10 that he “did not recall a sense of resistance – other countries saying don’t do this or don’t do that.” Koizumi went on to announce that he had “absolutely no intention to change his feelings on the matter.” Afterward, he told reporters that postwar generations must not forget to pay respects to those who fell in the war – he would not trifl with war criminal distinctions. The prime minister considered his visits to Yasukuni as embracing all those who fell in the war, and accordingly he asked for understanding from China and Korea.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhang Qiyue pointed out that Yasukuni “honors Class-A World War II criminals who had committed grave atrocities against the people of China and other neighboring Asian countries.” China, accordingly “firmly” opposed the visit of Japanese leaders to the shrine.

On March 6, in a wide-ranging press conference during China’s National People’s Congress, Foreign Minister Li took up the issue of China-Japan relations. Li defined

“mainstream” relations as “good.” Exchanges and bilateral trade continued to expand, as did cooperation in regional and international affairs. Li also noted that Japan had extended the largest amount of assistance during the 2003 SARS epidemic. Now, however, the “prominent” issue was Yasukuni. The foreign minister said that visits to the shrine by Japan’s political leaders had “deeply wounded the feelings of the people of China and other Asian countries.” “This”, he continued, “is not acceptable in any way.” China hoped that Japan “can put themselves (sic) in the shoes of other people, show sincerity, and not letting the issue of history become their own burden, but rather take history as a mirror and draw lessons from it...”

Koizumi’s rebuttal came three days later when he announced that he visits Yasukuni because it feels appropriate. The prime minister’s remarks set the stage for another Yasukuni go around. Addressing relations with Japan before the National People’s Congress on March 14, Premier Wen Jiabao observed that political, cultural, and commercial relations continued to expand but that the major obstacle remained the continuing visits to Yasukuni by “some leaders.” The next day Koizumi observed that Japan and China are enjoying a good relationship and hoped that the trend would continue, even if he continued to visit Yasukuni. Later Koizumi told reporters that he did not have to visit China “when it does not wish for me to visit.” He went on to make the point that he had met with China’s leaders in various overseas venues and that his visits to the shrine appeared to have little impact on the development of economic relations.

SDF deployment to Iraq ... and collective self-defense

As much as the prime minister’s visits to Yasukuni raised concerns in China about Japan’s understanding of history, his decision to deploy Self-Defense Forces to Iraq was viewed in China as a potential back-to-the future curtain raiser.

During a Jan. 20 press conference, in response to the question, “What should Japan do to relieve the vigilance of regional countries, including China,” spokesperson Zhang Qiyue made clear that China was “concerned with this move.” To calm fears, Zhang advised Japan to “abide by the road of ‘exclusive defense’ and adhere to the road of peaceful development.” In light of Japan’s frequently expressed commitment to peaceful development, China hoped that Japan “can truly win trust from the international community and the people of Asia and truly honor its commitments.”

On Feb. 4, the day after the GSDF deployed to Iraq, Zhang pointed out that “historically, Japan’s military conduct has been a sensitive issue for the countries and people of Asia and that “in recent years Japan’s activities in military and security affairs have been noticeable.” Zhang noted that the deployment to Iraq will likewise “arouse suspicions and concerns.” Thus, it was important for Japan “to come to grips with history; taking the road of peaceful development is not only in Japan’s interest but supports regional peace and stability.”

At the same time, as the issue of amending or reinterpreting Japan’s postwar constitution to allow for the right of collective self-defense gathered momentum in Japanese political

circles, Chinese analysts offered preemptive visions. Pang Zhongying, head of the Nankai Global Studies Institute, opined that if Japan “fully abandoned Article 9 that kind of new Japan would find it difficult to have more constructive relations with China, the Koreas, and even the United States.” In such circumstances, Pang predicted that the Koreas and China would form a “de-facto bloc against Japan” and eventually “the nature of the U.S.-Japan alliance would be changed under a nationalism-oriented Japan.”

In March, Liu Hong Cai, deputy director of the CCP’s External Liaison Department, visited Japan. During a March 12 meeting with JDA Director General Ishiba Shigeru, Japan’s deployment to Iraq came up, with Ishiba explaining that SDF activities, developing water supply and improving the condition of hospitals, were aimed at enhancing the welfare of the Iraqi people. Interestingly, Liu expressed his understanding of Japan’s commitment to the deployment of missile defenses, finding it in “in line with defense-purpose principles.”

High-level visits

Concerns over history, Yasukuni, the SDP deployment to Iraq, and North Korea served as the leitmotif of high-level exchanges in the January-March period.

On Jan. 8, Senior Vice Foreign Minister Aisawa Ichiro traveled to Beijing, where he met with State Councilor and former Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and Executive Vice Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo. The meetings focused on the SDF deployment to Iraq and Japan’s security policy. In these matters, Wang told Aisawa that concerns in Asia were high. Acknowledging that the decisions were fundamentally domestic political matters in Japan, Wang nevertheless observed that views expressed in the debate were different from those previously voiced. He asked that Aisawa adequately explain the decisions to Japan’s neighbors, which the senior vice foreign minister committed to do.

After a hiatus of three years, the vice minister-level Japan-China defense dialogue resumed in Beijing on Jan. 9-11, when Vice Minister of Defense Moriya Takemasa met with Xiong Guangkai, deputy chief of staff of the PLA. Touching on the again postponed reciprocal ship visits, Xiong expressed his regrets for the decision but made clear the necessity of creating the “proper political environment,” code words for the Chinese perceived lack of it following Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni. Xiong also expressed China’s concerns over Japan’s decision to join the U.S. in deploying missile defenses. Moriya explained that systems were defensive in nature and aimed at protecting Japan’s citizens and industry. Before meeting with Xiong, Moriya called on Defense Minister Cao Guangchuan to whom he extended an invitation to visit Japan, which Cao favorably received. After emphasizing the need to advance the Japan-China defense dialogue, Cao took the opportunity to ask Moriya to appreciate the “anger in China and other Asian countries” generated by Koizumi’s Yasukuni visit.

On Jan. 12, the LDP’s Nukaga Fukushiro and New Komeito’s Kitagawa Kazuo, chairmen of their respective party’s Policy Research Council met China’s Vice President

Zeng Qinghong in the Great Hall of the People. Nukaga explained the SDF deployment to Iraq as humanitarian in nature; while expressing understanding, Zeng added that China's historical experience had made it "sensitive to Japan's overseas dispatch of the SDF." Zeng also made clear that, while it was natural to respect culture and tradition, neither China nor other countries victimized by the war could condone visits to Yasukuni. Kitagawa, in turn, raised the possibility of building a separate national facility for memorial services and prayer, an idea that Zeng saw as one option.

Also in mid-January, former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro traveled to Beijing to attend a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians Forum. On Jan. 14, Nakasone met with President Hu Jintao in the Great Hall of the People. Chinese television reported that Hu advocated a strengthening of the bilateral relationship, but, indirectly addressing the Yasukuni issue, cautioned that "leadership in both countries should refrain from actions which do not serve to advance friendly relations between the two peoples." Back in Tokyo, Nakasone proposed that spirits of Class-A war criminals be venerated in a shrine for the war dead separate from Yasukuni, thus allowing the prime minister and emperor to visit Yasukuni.

To coordinate policy with regard to the six-party talks in Beijing, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi traveled to Japan. Wang met with Asia Bureau Director General Yabunaka Mitoji on Feb. 10 and Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko the following day. While meeting with Kawaguchi, Wang voiced displeasure over Koizumi's remarks on Yasukuni to the Lower House Budget Committee, finding the words, "very regrettable indeed."

At the same time, New Komeito representative Kanzaki Takenori led a party delegation to China for a three-day visit, Feb. 10-12. Prior to departure, Kanzaki met with the prime minister and received a personal letter addressed to President Hu Jintao, in which Koizumi expressed his hope for the realization of a Japan-China summit. In his meetings with China's leaders, including President Hu on Feb. 11, Kanzaki focused on the upcoming six-party talks and asked for China's cooperation in resolving the abductee issue. His Chinese interlocutors, however, focused on history and Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni shrine.

Asked to comment on reports that the prime minister's Yasukuni visit was hurting Japan's chances for the Shanghai-Beijing high-speed rail contract, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Takashima Hatsuhiwa, replied that "As far as the government of Japan is concerned, we believe that this visit has nothing to do with any of the other issues between Japan and China..." On March 6, Foreign Minister Li said that "we welcome Japanese entrepreneurs to join the competition on a leveled playing field."

Territorial nationalism: the Senkakus...

On Jan. 14, 20 Chinese activists departed Xiamen in two fishing boats bound for the Senkaku (Daiyoutai) Islands, between Okinawa and Taiwan. The following day, Japanese Coast Guard ships intercepted the ships and prevented the activists from landing. The intercept marked the third attempt, in the last seven months, by Chinese activists to land

on the disputed islands. *The People's Daily* reported that the Chinese ships were "attacked" by 10 Japanese warships using water cannons.

Two months later on March 24, seven Chinese activists successfully landed on Uotsuri Island in the Senkakus and, shortly afterward, were taken into custody by the Okinawa Prefectural Police for violating the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law, the first time Chinese citizens have been arrested for landing on the Senkakus. Protests erupted in Beijing where crowds gathered before the Japanese embassy and burned Japan's national flag. Both sides asserted sovereignty over the islands.

At the same time, political leaders and foreign ministries in both countries urged calm and worked to defuse the situation. In relatively short order, the Japanese government decided to deport the activists rather than turn them over to the prosecutor's office; they left Japan on the evening of March 26. LDP Vice Secretary General Amari Akira, also secretary general of the Japan-China Parliamentary Friendship League, explained "the government wanted to avoid putting China in a politically difficult position."

Return of Chinese research ships

After a quiet 2003, Chinese research ships returned to Japan's exclusive economic zone during the quarter. Through March 8, the Japan Defense Agency reported 11 instances of illegal research activities – in 2003, only eight such operations had been detected. Because the ships were found in areas not related to the exploration of undersea natural resources, the JDA speculated that the ships might be exploring passages for Chinese submarines.

The *Yomiuri* reported that the Foreign Ministry had asked Beijing to cease research activities of the Chinese vessel initially detected on Feb. 17 by *P-3C* aircraft of the Maritime Self Defense Force. On March 8, Vice Foreign Minister Takeuchi told reporters that such activities "are extremely regrettable" and urged China to "act in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea." (The convention requires six months prior notification of the intention to undertake such activities. Tokyo and Beijing agreed in early 2001 to a prior notification regime of two months.

And security cooperation

On Feb. 27, the *Asahi* reported that Japan and China had agreed to work together to tighten export restrictions in an effort to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to countries like North Korea. On its part, Japan will provide China with detailed know-how on items to be subjected to export restrictions. A March 5 export control seminar launched the cooperative effort – the first such export control initiative that Japan has undertaken with a foreign government. Director-level officials from Economic Ministries and Police officials as well as representatives of 100 Chinese firms participated. Attention focused on electronics, missile, nuclear, and chemical weapons components.

Six-party talks

As 2003 came to a close, hopes were high for an early return to Beijing and resumption of the six-party talks on the fate of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. For Japan, the fate of the abductees and the return of their families was a major political issue that played into the six-party diplomacy. For China, being able to proclaim "success" at the conclusion of the Beijing meeting was a central diplomatic objective. Beijing viewed Tokyo's insistence on raising the abductee issue in the six-party context as inviting a strong North Korean reaction and threatening the "success" of the talks.

Accordingly, Chinese officials took every opportunity to counsel visiting Japanese political leaders. On Feb. 4, China's Vice President Zeng Qinghong told visiting former Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi, currently honorary advisor to the Japan-China Friendship Association and Association Chairman, Hirayama Ikuo, that the "nuclear issue will take center stage at the six-way talks" and that China "wanted to see the abduction issue discussed between Japan and North Korea."

Two days later, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Takashima told reporters that Japan would "convey our intention to seek a comprehensive resolution during the six-way talks," "comprehensive" being code word for the inclusion of the abduction issue during the Beijing talks. When asked whether Japan would raise the issue "regardless of what China says" Takashima replied "my understanding is that our basic position has always been known by the other parties, including China." On Feb. 12, Foreign Minister Kawaguchi, addressing the abduction issue, told visiting Vice Minister Wang Yi that during the six-party talks, "we'd like you to cooperate with us."

During a Feb. 27 press conference, in response to a question if there had been "any change" in China's attitude on raising the abduction issue during the talks, Takashima replied "my understanding is that the Chinese side fully understands the Japanese position that without there being a complete resolution of the abduction cases as part of a comprehensive solution of North Korean issues..., Japan cannot participate in any sort of final solution which includes economic cooperation to North Korea." Takashima went on to say that "we do not see any sort of change in the attitude of the Chinese side between the last session and the current round."

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)

On Feb. 4, the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* reported that the Koizumi government had decided to cut ¥20 billion from the China ODA account, reducing yen loans to China to an approximate ¥100 billion. If implemented, the decision would mark the third consecutive reduction in ODA assistance to China. The decision was formally approved on March 10 at a meeting of LDP's foreign affairs councils.

Playing into the government's decision were Japan's own financial condition, the government's commitment to Iraq reconstruction, the surging growth of China's economy, as recently exemplified by China's manned space flight, and China's own

development aid programs. When asked in a *Mainichi Shimbun* public opinion survey, published Jan. 5 and taken Dec. 12-13, whether ODA to China should be “continued in the future or stopped,” 36 percent supported continuation; 51 percent supported termination.

The courts and bilateral relations

On Jan. 8, Fukuoka police served an arrest warrant on Wei Wei, a former Japanese language student on trial for robbery for his alleged participation with two other Chinese then resident in Japan in the murder of a Fukuoka family in June of last year. Wei’s alleged accomplices are under arrest in China and will be tried there because Japan does not have an extradition treaty with China. The case has been marked by cooperation between Japanese and Chinese law enforcement officials.

On Feb. 14, *Kyodo News Service* reported that earlier in the month the Chinese District Court of Shenyang had sentenced a 61 year-old Japanese citizen to death for attempting to smuggle 1.25 kilograms of stimulants from China into Japan. The sentence is now under appeal. *Kyodo* also reported that 11 other Japanese nationals were detained in China on charges of drug smuggling during 2003.

On March 26, the Sapporo District Court dismissed a suit against the government and six Japanese companies filed by 43 Chinese nationals seeking ¥860 million in compensation for injuries suffered as a result of wartime forced labor. While acknowledging that the plaintiffs suffered under wartime conditions, the court ruled that the 20-year statute of limitations had expired. The next day, however, the Niigata District Court found in favor of the plaintiffs and order both the state and the Niigata-based Rinko Corporation to pay ¥88 million in a similar suit seeking compensation for wartime forced labor. The decision marked the first time that a Japanese court had ordered both the state and a private company to pay such compensation. The judge in the case, Katano Noriyoshi, dismissed the government’s argument that the 20-year statute of limitations had expired and found wartime forced labor to be an “illegal act.” A Justice Ministry official labeled the ruling “unacceptable” and indicated the government would appeal.

Finally the good news: business and economics

In the on-going debate over the implications for Japan of China’s emergence as an economic power, whether China represented a threat or a market opportunity, first quarter figures continued to move the debate toward the latter. Overall, China’s real GDP grew at a rate of 9.1 percent in 2003, shaking off the impact of SARS to post 1 percent increase over 2002.

In 2003, Japan’s exports into the booming Chinese economy grew 33.8 percent and totaled ¥6.6 trillion, led by machinery and electronics, while imports from China grew 13.0 percent, amounting to ¥8.73 trillion. Economists attributed much of Japan’s strong 2003 fourth quarter growth to brisk exports to China.

In Japanese eyes, China is transitioning from a low-cost manufacturing base with an abundant supply of cheap labor to a booming consumer market for Japanese exports, with consumer electronics leading the way. A senior NEC executive was quoted as saying that “China is the most important market in the world for cellular phones.” NEC manufactures all its cellular phones in China – 5 million in 2003 – but currently sells only 1 million in China. NEC aims to increase that percentage to nearly 50 percent in the near future, while increasing overall production.

Similarly, Japanese automobile makers are targeting the China market with Toyota planning to increase annual production from 30,000 to 50,000 units and capture at least 10 percent of the market by 2010. At the same time, with the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2010 Shanghai World Expo fast approaching, China’s demand for construction machinery has served to sustain Japanese manufacturers hard hit by the government’s public works cut backs. Japan’s shipping building industry has also benefited from China’s surging demand for bulk carrier and container ships, with overall orders tripling in 2003 to 13.4 million tons. Meanwhile, big four steel makers, Nippon Steel, JFE Holdings, Sumitomo Metal Industries, and Kobe Steel attributed 2003 prosperity to strong demand from China.

Efforts were also made to attract Chinese investment to Japan. In mid-February, Japan External Trade Organization hosted a Japan Investment Discussion in Shanghai. Government officials representing Tokyo, Osaka, and Kobe attended and attempted to explain Japan’s investment climate. Meanwhile, Chinese planning officials from China’s rust-belt northeast (former provinces of Japanese-ruled Manchuria) were inviting representatives of Japanese banks, manufacturers, and trading companies on business promotion tours of the region.

On March 5, *The Japan Times* lead editorial “Opportunity for mutual prosperity” asserted that “in the not so distant future, China will probably eclipse the United States as Japan’s largest trading partner.” The editorial declared that Japan-China economic relations had “reached a new stage” with the business community recognizing that “Japan needs the Chinese market to keep its economy growing, as much as China needs Japan to continue its rapid growth.” The editorial concluded with the observation that “China’s ascendancy is likely to have a significant impact not only on bilateral trade but, ultimately, on Japan’s foreign and security policy as well.”

Chronology of Japan-China relations January-March 2004

Jan. 1, 2004: Prime Minister Koizumi visits Yasukuni Shrine; Vice Foreign Minister Yang calls in Japanese ambassador to protest.

Jan. 1, 2004: Chinese officials begin to disperse ¥300 million compensation from Japan for August poison gas incident in Qiqihar.

Jan. 7-9, 2004: Senior Vice FM Aisawa Ichiro visits China, meets with Vice FM Dai Bingguo, Vice FM Wang Yi, and State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan.

Jan. 8, 2004: Fukuoka police serve arrest warrant on Chinese student Wei Wei in connection with June 2003 murder of Fukuoka family.

Jan. 9-11, 2004: Japan-China vice ministerial defense dialogue resumes in Beijing after three-year hiatus; Vice Minister of Defense Moriya Takemasa meets with Defense Minister Cao Guangchuan and PLA Deputy Chief of Staff Xiong Guangkai.

Jan. 10, 2004: Japan, China, South Korea meet in Bangkok at ASEAN-plus-Three conference on terrorism and crime prevention.

Jan. 10-13, 2004: LDP Policy Research Chief Nukaga and New Komeito policy chief Kitagawa visit China, meet with former FM Tang, Vice President Zeng Qinghong, and Vice FM Wang Yi.

Jan. 14, 2004: Former PM Nakasone meets President Hu Jintao in the Great Hall of the People.

Jan. 14-15, 2004: Chinese activists attempt to land on disputed Senkaku (Daiyoutai) Islands and are turned back by Japanese Coast Guard ships.

Feb. 4, 2004: China's VP Zeng Qinghong meets with former PM Murayama Tomiichi, currently honorary advisor to the Japan-China Friendship Association and Hirayama Ikuo, chairman of the association.

Feb. 4, 2004: Japanese Foreign Ministry announces that, beginning April 1, visas will no longer be required of short-term visitors from Hong Kong.

Feb. 5, 2004: Former FM Komura Masahiko becomes chairman of Diet's Japan-China Friendship League.

Feb. 9, 2004: Kono Yohei, former LDP secretary general and former foreign minister, currently speaker of the House of Representatives and chairman of the LDP's Asia-Africa Research Group, meets in Tokyo with China's ambassador Wu Dawei.

Feb. 9, 2004: Tokyo High Court rejects appeal from seven Taiwanese for official apology and ¥70 million compensation for being forced to serve as comfort women for the Imperial Japanese Army.

Feb. 10, 2004: Ninth Japan-China Security Dialogue held in Tokyo. Foreign Ministry and Defense delegations are led by Japan's Deputy FM Tanaka Hitoshi and China's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi.

Feb. 10-12, 2004: Vice FM Wang travels to Japan to meet with Foreign Ministry Asia Director General Yabunaka to coordinate on upcoming six-party talks; meets with FM Kawaguchi on Feb. 11 and with LDP Secretary General Abe and Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda on Feb. 12.

Feb. 10-13, 2004: Kanzaki Takenori leads New Komeito Party delegation to China, meets with President Hu Jintao, former FM Tang, and other Chinese leaders.

Feb. 17, 2004: Chinese ships detected carrying out illegal research activities in Japan's EEZ.

Feb. 17-20, 2004: Former PM Hata Tsutomu, currently senior advisor to Japan's Democratic Party, visits China, meets with former FM Tang.

Feb. 20, 2004: Lower House member Noda Takeshi, chairman of the Japan-China Society, meets in Beijing with China's VP Zeng.

Feb. 23-24, 2004: Senior Vice FM Aisawa Ichiro, at invitation of China's Academy of Social Science, visits China to attend symposium on China-Japan Economic Relations in the 21st Century; also meets with Vice FM Wang Yi and FM Li.

Feb. 25, 2004: LDP Policy Research Chairman Nukaga meets with China's Minister to Japan Cheng Yonghua at LDP headquarters to set up an LDP-Komeito-Chinese Communist Party consultative committee to exchange views on history and economic relations.

Feb. 27, 2004: Osaka District Court dismisses a suit seeking compensation brought by 631 petitioners who argue that Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in August 2001 violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

March 2-4, 2004: Japanese Foreign Ministry asks Beijing to cease activities of Chinese research ships in Japan EEZ.

March 6, 2004: FM Li addresses Yasukuni in NPC press conference; Koizumi replies March 9.

March 8, 2004: Vice FM Takeuchi brands Chinese research activities in Japan's EEZ as "extremely regrettable."

March 10, 2004: LDP approves ODA reduction for China.

March 11, 2004: Liu Hong Cai, deputy director of the CCP's External Liaison Department, visits Tokyo meets with JDA Director General Ishiba; former PM Nakasone, former LDP VP Yamasaki, President of the Democratic Party of Japan Kan, and Social Democratic Party leader Fukushima.

March 12, 2004: LDP panel proposes expansion of tour group visas for Chinese visitors to Japan to include provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shangdon, and Liaoning. At present such visas are only issued to tour groups from Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong provinces.

March 14-15, 2004: Vice FM Dai Bingguo meets with FM Kawaguchi and Vice FM Takeuchi in Tokyo. Subjects for discussion include North Korea and the prime minister's hoped-for an invitation to make an official visit to China.

March 16, 2004: Matsuyama District Court dismisses suit claiming that Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in August 2001 violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

March 17, 2004: Japanese immigration authorities deny permission to enter Japan to 150 Chinese students suspected of holding forged papers to study at Japanese-language schools in Tokyo; police suspect owner of school of taking bribes and using school as pretext to find employment for Chinese nationals.

March 19, 2004: FM Kawaguchi announces early April visit to China

March 24-27, 2004: Seven Chinese activists land on Uotsuri Island in Senkakus and are arrested by Okinawa Prefectural Police. Vice FM Takeuchi calls in China's ambassador Wu Dawei on March 24 to protest. Activists are deported to China on March 27.

March 26, 2004: Sapporo District Court rules against Chinese plaintiffs seeking compensation for wartime forced labor.

March 27, 2004: Niigata District Court rules against government and Japanese company in suit brought by Chinese nationals seeking compensation for wartime forced labor.

March 27, 2004: FM Kawaguchi telephones FM Li asking that China prevent a recurrence of the Senkakus landing and protests the burning of the Japanese flag at the Japanese embassy in Beijing.