



Japan-China Relations:
New Year, Old Problems, Hope for Wen

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

Japanese and Chinese political leaders and diplomats, focusing on the steps necessary to build a strategic mutually beneficial relationship, worked throughout the quarter to lay the groundwork for a successful April visit to Japan by Premier Wen Jiabao. Dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful resolution were omnipresent bywords. But, in fact, little progress was made in addressing longstanding issues related to the East China Sea, North Korea, security, and China's Jan. 11 anti-satellite (ASAT) test – all hopefully deferred for resolution to the Wen visit. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) were caught up in a debate over history, comfort women, and Nanjing. Interestingly, Beijing's response was low key, suggesting a commitment on the part of China's leadership to progress with Japan.

Abe and China

On Jan. 13-14, during the ASEAN Plus Three and East Asia Summits, Prime Minister Abe met China's Premier Wen Jiabao on the island of Cebu in the Philippines. Abe welcomed Wen's desire to visit Japan in April. Discussion then focused on North Korea, with Abe asking for China's support in Japan's efforts on the abductees issue and Wen expressing China's understanding and offering necessary cooperation. Abe broached a proposal for a five-year youth exchange program that Wen said he would study. Abe also raised the issue of Japan's intent to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and Wen, avoiding a direct answer, expressed China's understanding. Both leaders highly valued the work of the joint history study launched in December. While not directly raising the issue of Yasukuni, Wen noted that 2007 would mark the 70th anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and expressed the hope that issues of history would be handled properly. This year also marks the 35th anniversary of Japan-China normalization as well as the 70th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre. Abe replied that Japan would reflect on its past and asked China to appreciate Japan's postwar record of peace. Both leaders agreed to accelerate discussions on the East China Sea. On Jan. 23, the *Asahi Shimbun* published the results of a Jan. 20-21 public opinion poll on Abe's diplomacy toward China and South Korea. The poll found 60 percent of 3,000 respondents supporting his diplomacy.

On Jan. 17, when questioned about the 2007 LDP platform calling for a continuation of visits to Yasukuni, Abe observed that this was a longstanding party position. Previous LDP presidents had visited the shrine to pray for lasting peace and for those who had fought for their country, and, as party president, he would not change his feelings toward such expressions. However, given the diplomatic and political implications of visits, Abe repeated that he would not address the question of his visiting the shrine.

In his Jan. 26 address to the 166th meeting of the Diet, Abe called attention to his visits to China and the Republic of Korea, his high-level meetings with leaders of both countries, and his intent to build a “mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests” with China. Foreign Minister Aso Taro, in his foreign policy address, echoed the prime minister’s commitment.

Earlier in the month, during his trip to Europe, Abe, in a speech delivered at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Jan. 12, spoke of his efforts to develop a strategic relationship with China. At the same time, he thought China’s future to be marked by a number of uncertainties, in particular a lack of transparency in its military spending. Later that day, in an evening meeting with French President Jacques Chirac, Abe expressed his opposition to any lifting of the EU arms embargo against China.

High-level political visits to China and South Korea

Building on the success of Abe’s October visit to China, high-level political visits began early in January and continued throughout the quarter.

On Jan. 7, the leader of the New Komeito Party, Ota Akihiro, left for Beijing. On his arrival, he met Wang Jiarui, head of the Chinese Communist Party’s External Liaison Department. Ota asked for China’s assistance with regard to North Korea.

The next day, Ota met China’s President Hu Jintao in the Great Hall of the People. During the meeting, Hu told Ota that since Prime Minister Abe’s visit in October, “there has been a clear improvement in Sino-Japanese relations” and called for fleshing out the strategic reciprocal relationship. Ota told Hu of Abe’s hope that Hu would visit Japan as soon as possible; Hu expressed his interest in visiting Japan at a mutually convenient time and asked Ota to convey that message to the prime minister. Hu’s failure to be specific about a timeframe for his visit was interpreted by some analysts as part of a strategy aimed at constraining any decision by Abe with regard to visiting Yasukuni Shrine. Ota again asked for China’s assistance with regard to North Korea, and Hu replied that he understood Japanese concerns with regard to the abductees issue. Ota also met State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan, who announced that China would welcome a visit by Abe later in the year. On Jan. 9, Ota met Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei to discuss the scheduling of Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing’s visit to Japan, which would advance Premier Wen’s April visit.

In Tokyo Jan. 16, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the Chinese Communist Party's External Liaison Department opened the first meeting of their Exchange Talks Organization. Wang Jiarui pointed to the significance of Premier Wen's April visit and said that he expected both countries would work to realize a successful visit. He told the meeting that the most difficult period in Sino-Japanese relations since normalization had passed, and, following Abe's October visit to China, relations were now on a proper path. North Korea was a major topic of discussion. The Chinese urged that denuclearization be effected peacefully through dialogue, while the Japanese urged China to exert its great influence on the abductees issue. Wang also touched on Taiwan, asking Japan not to send a signal that could be interpreted as supporting Taiwan independence. While opposing visits to Yasukuni by the prime minister and chief Cabinet secretary, DPJ members also asked that China treat Yasukuni as a domestic Japanese political issue. The Chinese side asked Japan to fully understand the feelings and conditions of those outside Japan.

The Chinese took up the Yasukuni issue during the visit of Nikai Toshihiro, chairman of the LDP's Diet Affairs Committee. On Jan. 22, Nikai met State Councilor Tang who told Nikai that Wen's April visit coming during Yasukuni's Spring Festival could result in "a delicate issue in Japan-China relations." The clear message was that Abe should not think of visiting the shrine at that time. Nikai also met Wu Bangguo, chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, who also pointed to "a number of delicate issues" in the relationship. On Feb. 28, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shimomura Hakubun raised the possibility of an Abe visit to Yasukuni sometime during the year. Shimomura told the *Asahi Newstar* television program that "The Yasukuni card is not in the hands of China. It is in the hands of Prime Minister Abe." The next day China's ambassador told a meeting of the LDP's Asia Strategy Study Group that, while he personally was not pessimistic about the prospects of an Abe visit to the shrine, should the prime minister do so, the results would be "irremediable."

On Feb. 12, former Defense Agency Director General Nukaga Fukushima met in Beijing with China's Minister of Defense Cao Gangchuan. Taking up criticism of China's ASAT test, Cao told Nukaga that he did not consider the test to be a violation of international law; but, at the same time, there was no thought that China would continue with follow-on tests. Cao explained that the test was aimed at no specific country or threat. During the meeting, discussions were held on the coordination of mutual ship visits scheduled to begin in September. Nukaga also met Vice Foreign Minister Wu and State Councilor Tang, who told Nukaga that Premier Wen, during his April visit to Japan, would extend an invitation to the prime minister to visit China in October. Nukaga said that he would report back to the prime minister.

Three days later, on Feb. 15, Foreign Minister Li arrived in Tokyo to advance Premier Wen's April visit. Upon arrival, Li met separately with Lower House Speaker Kono Yohei, New Komeito leader Ota Akihiro, and Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki Yasuhisa. Li and Shiozaki agreed that, in advance of Premier Wen's visit, both countries would work to produce "concrete results" on resource development in the East China Sea. Li told Shiozaki that China fully understood Japan's concerns with regard to North

Korea and committed to continuing cooperation. Shiozaki expressed Japan's dissatisfaction with China's explanation of the ASAT test.

Kono likewise raised China's ASAT test, calling it "regrettable" and noting that it caused Japan to "harbor doubts." Li replied only that "we firmly uphold the policy of using space for peaceful purposes." When Kono called attention to the need to reach a concrete formula for resource development in the East China Sea, Li acknowledged that differences of opinion did exist but that China and Japan shared many common points as well. China wanted to make productive efforts to make the area a sea of peace and cooperation.

The next day, Foreign Minister Li met Prime Minister Abe for 45 minutes. Abe underscored the importance of resolving the abductees issue and made clear that, in the event of progress, Japan was prepared to play a major role toward North Korea. Absent progress, Japan would not be able to respond to calls for energy assistance. Li replied that he "completely understands" Japan's position and that China would offer as much assistance as it could. Abe also raised the issue of Chinese activities in Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), called for early resolution of the issues relating to the East China Sea, asked for China's support for Japan's UN Security Council bid and, addressing China's ASAT test, called for greater transparency and a persuasive explanation of China's reason for the test. Avoiding direct answers, Li expressed China's expectations that Japan would play a major role in the UN, put off the East China Sea issues to the March consultations, and raised Taiwan and the history issue. Li added that the proper handling of Taiwan and the history issue would serve as the foundation for the development of "healthy and stable" bilateral relations. Abe said he considered Wen's visit an opportunity to demonstrate the building of a strategic reciprocal relationship.

Later at a meeting with Aso at the Foreign Ministry, Li called Aso's attention to 2007 as marking the 70th anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, and, without touching on specific historical issues, urged both countries to maintain "the current environment" with respect to the past. The two ministers agreed to cooperate on UN Security Council reform.

Also on that day, Li addressed a meeting of Diet Members of the Japan-China Friendship Association. Li told the supra-party group that the 35th anniversary of China-Japan normalization offered the chance to develop friendly relations. At the same time, he noted that, even as sensitive problems of the past remained, he wanted to work to develop cooperative relations.

At the end of the month a delegation led by the Chairman of the LDP's Executive Council Niwa Yuya left for a three-day visit to China. Accompanying Niwa were Kawamura Takeo, acting chairman of the LDP's Policy Research Council, and Suzuki Shinichi, chairman of the Social Security Research Council. On arrival, Niwa visited the Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan.

Also on Feb. 28, Niwa's delegation met Premier Wen. Wen told the delegation that on the occasion of his visit he hoped to issue a joint communiqué outlining the agreed contents of the strategic reciprocal relationship. Without directly referring to Abe's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, Wen remarked that "sensitive problems ought to be handled properly." As for the East China Sea, Wen called for putting conflict on the shelf and advocated joint development. In turn, Niwa emphasized the importance of a complete resolution of the abductees issue and asked for China's assistance.

At the end of February, senior Chinese and Japanese diplomats, led respectively by Vice Ministers Dai Bingguo and Yachi Shotaro, conducted the seventh bilateral Strategic Dialogue. The talks began in Beijing on Feb. 25 and concluded on Feb. 27 in Hangzhou.

Security: ASAT

On Dec. 29, Beijing released its 2006 Defense White Paper. The White Paper expressed Chinese concerns over the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance, Japan's pursuit of constitutional revision and the right of collective self-defense, as well as a clear trend toward the external deployment of Japan's military strength. The document dismissed the "China threat" argument, observing that China's aim was the development of a modern military.

Two weeks later on Jan. 11, China carried out a successful ASAT test. After learning of the test from U.S. intelligence sources, the Abe government on Jan. 17 sought, through the Japanese embassy in Beijing, confirmation of facts and of China's intentions. Two days later, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki told reporters that the test, from a security perspective, raised concerns about the peaceful use of space and made clear that Japan considered an explanation to be necessary. Addressing China's military build-up, he went on to observe that China's lack of transparency invited speculation.

On Jan. 22, Defense Vice Minister Moriya Takemasa focused on the ASAT test and its implications for the objectives of China's space policy. At the same time, he raised the issue of China's mass production and deployment of the state-of-the-art fighter, the *Jian 10*, stating that Japan was "seriously concerned about China's military modernization." Making clear Tokyo's dissatisfaction with China's response to Japan's request for information on the ASAT test, Shiozaki told a Jan. 23 press conference that China's explanation was insufficient." In a near simultaneous news conference in Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson confirmed the test, said that China had no plans for second test and told reporters that China had notified Japan and the United States. As for Japan's request for a detailed explanation, the spokesperson said that if that's what Japan wanted, China would welcome an exchange of views.

In a speech delivered in Nagoya on Jan. 26, Nakagawa Shoichi, chairman of the LDP's Policy Research Council, looked at the implications of China's build-up, telling his audience that "if something happens to Taiwan, Japan might become China's next province over the next 20 years or so." Nakagawa pointed to China's 18 consecutive

years of double-digit defense spending and a budget that “does not include nuclear spending, R&D, or arms imports.”

China’s reaction to Nakagawa came the next day. Addressing a press conference, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang asked “What is the purpose of constantly making a big fuss over China as if it is a threat.” Qin asserted that Japan’s military spending was “enormous” which he found “absurd” given the fact that Japan’s land mass was “1/25 of China’s size with 1/10 of China’s population.” In total, China’s military spending was “67 percent of Japan’s and only 7 percent per capita.” China, he emphasized, is a “peace-loving country committed to the road of peaceful development.”

On March 4, in advance of the National People’s Congress, Beijing announced a \$17.8 billion increase in military spending for 2007. Reasons cited for the double-digit increase were rising personnel costs, increasing costs of joint exercises with foreign militaries, and the need to upgrade high-tech capabilities. Tokyo took note of the announcement but noted, as the chief Cabinet secretary told the media, that “aside from the military spending that was announced, there are other elements that lack transparency.” Shiozaki called on China to “improve transparency on its national defense, including military spending.” Asked whether Japan considered China a threat, he replied, “we have never said so.”

The Japanese Foreign Ministry’s 2007 Diplomatic Blue Book took China to task for its lack of transparency in defense spending and for the lack of a persuasive explanation for the ASAT test. At the end of March, the National Institute for Defense Studies released its annual report *East Asian Strategic Review 2007*. With regard to China, the report observed that it is “difficult to say that its military power and national defense policy have been fully made transparent.” The institute considered Beijing’s diplomatic efforts to be aimed at expanding its influence in the region – a goal Japan “cannot share.”

Territorial issues: the Senkakus and East China Sea

On Feb. 4, the Japanese Coast Guard detected the Chinese research ship *Dongfangfong No. 2* operating within Japan’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Senkaku island chain. The ship’s research activities violated the 2001 Japan-China agreement to provide prior notification of research activities. The Coast Guard warned the ship to cease operations but the warnings were disregarded and the ship conducted research activities in four separate locations before leaving the EEZ. That evening, the Foreign Ministry protested to the Chinese Embassy and through the Japanese Embassy in Beijing. The following day, the chief Cabinet secretary told reporters that China had failed to provide a satisfactory response to the Foreign Ministry’s demarche.

On Feb. 6, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson fired back that the island chain was Chinese territory, and accordingly notification was not required for Chinese research activities in the area and expressed China’s “strong dissatisfaction” with the Japanese announcement. This led Foreign Minister Aso to brand China as “lacking an honest response” and told reporters that Japan would continue “to demand a convincing

explanation.” Meanwhile, Shiozaki told reporters that the issue would be taken up during the pending April visit of China’s foreign minister and made clear that “The Chinese side was basically just repeating its position on the Senkaku islands and that is not something we can accept.” He called on China to honor the terms of the prior notification agreement.

At the same time, issues related to resource development in the East China Sea flared. During the Abe-Wen meeting in Cebu the two leaders agreed to accelerate a resolution of the East China Sea dispute based on the principle of joint development. The *Yomiuri Shimbun*, however, reported that Japanese officials were skeptical of rapid progress. At the end of January, Hong Kong media reported that, as of September 2006, China had begun to convey natural gas from the Shirakaba (Chunxiao) field to the mainland. Although Chinese authorities denied any change in the status quo, Shiozaki made clear that Japan had strong concerns about the contents of the reports.” “The ball,” Shiozaki told reporters, “is now in China’s court.”

The politics of history: the Honda Resolution, comfort women, and Nanjing

2007 is marked by anniversaries, good and bad, in modern Japan-China relations: the 35th anniversary of the normalization of postwar diplomatic relations, the 70th anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, as well as the 70th anniversary of the Nanjing massacre.

At the end of January, a group of LDP lawmakers, under the leadership of Nakayama Nariaki, formed what became known as the Parliamentary Council to Consider the Future of Japan and History. The primary focus of the group was to consider revisions of the Kono Statement, a document issued in 1993 by then LDP Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei. The Kono Statement accepted responsibility for the actions of the Japanese Imperial Army in the forcible recruitment of comfort women during the war and expressed “apology and regret.” During the autumn session of the Diet, Abe announced that his government would continue to honor the Kono Statement, though ruling out “forcible recruitment in the narrow sense.” The Nakayama group was concerned about a resolution, authored by Rep. Michael Honda (D-Ca) and introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives, condemning Japan for actions taken by the government and Imperial Army with respect to comfort women. Addressing the Honda resolution, Foreign Minister Aso told the Lower House Budget Committee that “it is extremely regrettable that the proposed resolution is not based on objective facts.” Taking a similar line, Abe told reporters that “basing it on objective facts is essential.”

Nakayama’s Parliamentary Council was also concerned with the December anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre and determined to clear up what it considered misunderstandings over the incident. Nakayama took the position that “If foreign visitors see articles on display showing exaggerated and falsified Japanese soldiers’ actions, their image of the Japanese will be damaged.” Nakayama believed that “unless we say what should be said, a real friendly relationship will never be established between Japan and China.” To provide understanding of Nanjing, a number of political figures, professors, and journalists met on Jan. 24 to support the efforts of Director Mizushima Satoru to

produce the movie “Nanking No Shinjitsu” (“The Truth About Nanking”), scheduled for release in December. The gathering included Upper House members Ryu Hirofumi and Matsubara Jin, Tokyo Gov. Ishihara Shintaro, and journalist Sakurai Yoshiko. When asked about the movie, China’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu emphasized that the Nanjing massacre is “iron-clad.”

A month later on Feb. 26, 22 members of both the ruling and opposition parties as well as 26 Diet members agreed to hold three study sessions on the Iris Chang best seller “The Rape of Nanking.” The lawmakers were concerned that the book could spawn a number of anti-Japanese films as the anniversary approached. Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) member Matsubara Jin said that “documentation would demonstrate to Diet members that the massacre was without foundation.” The LDP’s Inada Akemi told the group that “not to protest a lie would be to harm Japan’s national interest and impair its national honor.”

The Nakayama-led group thought to present the government with a resolution calling for a review of the Kono Statement. The resolution would insert the following “Although there may have been forced recruitment of women against their will by traders, there was no forced rounding up of women by the military or other authorities.” The group argued that the Kono Statement was based “only on the investigation of the oral testimony of former comfort women; no documentary proof was ever discovered.” The proposed language also called for deletion from the Kono Statement of the word “military” in the term “military comfort women.” A member of the group, Nakayama Yasuhide, acknowledged that comfort women may have existed but asserted that “they were not under military control.”

What was an in-house Japan discussion became an international issue when the prime minister on March 1 told reporters that with regard to the issue of coercion, “the fact is that, there is no evidence to prove there was coercion as initially defined. I think it is true there was no evidence to prove it.” Asked if the lack of evidence might suggest a review of the Kono Statement, Abe replied “we need to consider that possibility on the premise that the definition of coercion has changed.” The issue then was the definition of coercion, and Abe’s view was that “we have to take it from there.” Ultimately, the Nakayama group decided against petitioning for a review of the Kono Statement and instead called on the government to review the issue of comfort women. In a 1997 interview with *Asahi Shimbun*, former Foreign Minister and Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono said “If you ask whether there was any document that ‘the government followed up legal procedures and rounded up women by force’ my answer is, there was no such document ever found. But, if ‘coercion’ is defined as rounding up women against their will, a number of such cases existed.”

The intra-party debate appeared to take the LDP and government down different policy paths. Nakagawa Shoichi, chairman of the LDP’s Policy Research Council, appeared to support calls for the revision of the Kono Statement noting both its “lack of precision” and “the existence of factual errors.” Revision, he felt, would set Japan’s relations in a positive direction; this was an objective with which he sympathized. Meanwhile, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki pointed to Abe’s statement before the Lower House Budget

Committee; namely, that there would be no change in the Kono Statement. Seko Hiroshige, special advisor to the prime minister for public relations, attempted to explain what the prime minister had said or meant to say. Seko told a *TV Asahi* talk show audience: “What the prime minister meant in the statement is that though there are various definitions of ‘coercion’, including a narrow sense or a broad sense, Japan will continue to stand by the Kono Statement without fail.”

The first full political week in March opened with Abe telling the Upper House Budget Committee on Monday that his government would comply with the Kono Statement. As for the Honda Resolution, Abe announced that “we will not apologize because of a resolution,” reiterating that the resolution “is not based on objective facts” and that it fails to “reflect the Japanese government’s responses so far.” Abe did admit to coercion “in the broad sense” though observing that “there is no data in the narrow sense. There was no coercion like police authorities taking away women from their homes like kidnapers.” Nevertheless, he acknowledged that “There would have been no one who went willingly into that situation. There was coercion in the broad sense.”

The next day, a group of young LDP and DPJ lawmakers established The Committee to Verify the Facts of the Nanjing Incident. During its meeting the committee listened to a presentation from Professor Higashinakano Shudo of Asia University. The professor said that in his research on the Nanjing Incident he was unable to find, in either the official documents of the International Committee to Protect Refugees or reporting from British and American consulates, any reference to “a massacre.” While acknowledging misconduct by individual Japanese soldiers, he pointed out that even in the records of the KMT government there was no reference to a massacre of non-combatants. The young lawmakers decided to present a proposal to the prime minister requesting a review of the Kono Statement. In subsequent meetings, the Nakayama group determined that it would not call for a review of the Kono Statement but would ask the government to reinvestigate the issue of comfort women and the Nanjing Massacre.

Attempting to clarify matters and gain control of the unfolding events, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki told reporters that the government would stand by the Kono Statement and that there was no reason for the government to say anything new about the matter. On Wednesday, Abe told reporters at the Kantei that “The Kono Statement will be followed, there will be no changes in it.” Abe then made clear his displeasure with the press for what he said was its failure to accurately report what he said and how he answered questions.

The issue of revising the Kono Statement or reexamining the comfort women issue and who, the government or LDP, would do what was the leitmotif for political maneuverings. On March 8, Abe announced that the government would not reexamine the comfort women issue; that task would be left to the LDP, which would have the cooperation of the government. Speaking to reporters at the Kantei, Abe reiterated that he “basically” stood by the Kono Statement. Earlier in the day, the Nakayama group met with Abe and asked him to review the comfort women issue, which would open the door to revising the Kono Statement. Later, Nakayama told reporters that Abe had in fact

accepted his group's call for a reexamination. Addressing Abe's assignment of the review to the LDP, a senior member of the Nakayama group said that it had "no intention to reinvestigate the issue."

On March 9, LDP Executive Council Chairman Niwa Yuya responded to reports that the government would cooperate with the LDP in a review of the issue. Niwa cautioned that "This is not a matter that the party's leadership should conduct." Doing so could "cause misunderstanding." He warned that "developing it into a political issue is not diplomatically preferable." Foreign Minister Aso thought it "not necessarily bad to conduct another round of investigations" but favored the LDP taking the lead. Meanwhile, Nakayama's group, meeting at LDP headquarters, agreed to present the prime minister early next month with a proposal to reinvestigate the Nanjing Massacre.

Appearing on NHK television on Sunday, March 11, Abe told viewers "I will stand by the Kono Statement." He noted that this had been the government's "consistent position." He went on to say "We have been apologizing sincerely to those who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable psychological wounds as comfort women." Abe noted that former Prime Ministers Hashimoto and Koizumi had signed personal letters to former comfort women and that he carried "the same feeling." The Chinese Communist Party's *People's Daily* and other media outlets carried the Abe statement.

Despite Abe's statement, the Nakayama group was determined not to let the issue of reinvestigating the comfort women issue die. The group continued to insist that Abe had committed the government to reexamine the issue, causing Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki to tell reporters March 12 that "the government has not decided to conduct an investigation." Three days later, the *Nikkei* reported that the Nakayama group was preparing to undertake a review of the comfort women issue.

The following day the Abe government, with the endorsement of the Cabinet, released a written reply to a question posed by Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Lower House member Tsujimoto Kiyomi. The government's statement announced that, in conducting a review of documents relating to the Kono Statement, "it did not come across any references that directly indicated the use of so called coercion by military or civil authorities."

While the debate continued in Tokyo, officials in Beijing were noticeably low-key. On March 6, five days after Abe's March 1 statement, Beijing responded. Foreign Minister Li told a press conference held in the Great Hall of the People that the Japanese government "should recognize the facts of history." Li then went on to address Premier Wen's coming visit to Japan and called attention to the significance of efforts by both governments to develop cooperation in various fields.

On March 16, at the conclusion of the National People's Congress, Wen met with the media. Looking back at Abe's October visit, which he characterized as "ice-breaking," Wen said he wanted to make his visit "ice-melting."¹ He intended to concretize the strategic reciprocal relationship and establish an economic cooperation mechanism. As for the abductees issue, Wen expressed his "sympathy and understanding" but pointed out that the issue was between Japan and North Korea. Addressing the history, Wen repeated the well-worn talking point of taking history as a mirror and facing the future.

That same day, President Hu met with LDP Secretary General Nakagawa Hidenao and New Komeito Secretary General Kitagawa Kazuo at the Great Hall of the People. Hu said that the Chinese people were old friends of Japan and that he wanted to do his utmost to improve and advance relations with Japan. Nakagawa reciprocated Hu's feelings. As for Yasukuni, Hu said that it should be managed as "an important and sensitive issue" allowing for a healthy development over the long-term. Nakagawa and Kitagawa reported on their visit to the prime minister March 20, telling Abe that China's leadership was intent on improving relations with Japan and citing "positive" Chinese positions on North Korea and the abductees issue, the East China Sea and the holding of economic ministers meetings. Abe replied that their visit had produced "terrific results" and that he "definitely" wanted to Wen's visit to be successful.

On March 19-20, members of the Joint History Study Group held their second meeting in Tokyo. The two sides agreed to take up issues related to the Nanjing Massacre and Yasukuni Shrine, as well as the understanding and teaching of history. The scholars also agreed on separately authored articles, setting a target date of June 2008 for publication. Minor revisions will be allowed in individual texts.

On the issues of history, the quarter ended much as it began, with Japanese political leaders reacting to developments in the U.S., namely the *Washington Post's* March 24 editorial, "Abe Shinzo's Double Talk," which asserted that the prime minister was "passionate" about the abductees but "blind to Japan's own war crimes." Responding to reporters' questions at the Diet building, Abe drew a distinction between the abductees and comfort women; the latter was an "issue of the past," whereas the former is "ongoing violation of human rights." Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shimomura told a radio audience that the "so-called comfort women did not exist." He acknowledged that there were instances of prostitution, such as parents selling their daughters, but "the Imperial Japanese Army was not involved."

The failure to discover official documents indicating that the Imperial Army or government authorities had coerced women into prostitution suggested to Shimomura that there was "no coercion of women into sexual servitude by the Imperial Army."

¹ Author's query: Recalling the title of the fourth quarter 2006 report "Ice Breaks at the Summit," it is tempting to ask: is Wen a reader of this journal?

Outlook

Political leaders and government officials in both Beijing and Tokyo pointed to Abe's October visit to China as breaking the ice in the bilateral relationship, where things go in the coming quarter will depend to a large degree on Wen, Hu, and Abe.

Chronology of Japan-China Relations January-March 2007

Jan. 7, 2007: New Komeito Party leader Ota visits China meets Wang Jiarui, head of CCP's External Liaison Department.

Jan. 8, 2007: Ota meets with President Hu Jintao; State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan.

Jan. 9, 2007: Ota meets with Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei.

Jan. 9, 2007: Japan's Defense Agency becomes Ministry of Defense; Chinese Foreign Ministry expresses hopes that Japan will continue to advance along the path of peaceful development; Jan. 20-21 *Yomiuri* poll indicates that 46 percent support the upgrade.

Jan. 11, 2007: China conducts ASAT test.

Jan. 12, 2007: Abe speaks at NATO headquarters in Brussels; meets French President Chirac and urges continuation of EU arms embargo on China.

Jan. 12, 2007: Japanese and Chinese sources report Premier Wen Jiabao will visit Japan in April.

Jan. 14, 2007: Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki expresses Japanese concerns over ASAT test.

Jan. 13-14, 2007: Abe meets Chinese Premier Wen at ASEAN Plus Three and East Asia Summits in the Philippines.

Jan. 16, 2007: Democratic Party of Japan and CCP's External Liaison Department hold first meeting of Exchange Talks Organization in Tokyo.

Jan. 17, 2007: LDP adopts 2007 platform calling for continued visits to Yasukuni Shrine by members; Abe refuses to address question of a personal visit to shrine, citing diplomatic and political implications of such a visit.

Jan. 20, 2007: Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Suzuki Seiji announces that Japanese and Chinese governments plan for an Abe visit to China in the summer or autumn.

Jan. 22, 2007: Chairman of LDP's Diet Affairs Committee Nikai Toshihiro meets in Beijing with State Councilor Tang and Chairman of NPC Standing Committee Wu Bangguo.

Jan. 22, 2007: Vice Minister of Defense Moriya expresses concerns with ASAT test.

Jan. 23, 2007: Shiozaki expresses dissatisfaction with China's explanation of ASAT test.

Jan. 24, 2007: Japanese political figures, academics, and journalists meet to support Director Mizushima's efforts to produce movie "The Truth about Nanjing."

Jan. 24, 2007: Director General of Asian and Ocean Affairs Sasae meets Vice Foreign Minister Wu to discuss Six-Party Talks with North Korea.

Jan. 25, 2007: Forty-eight Chinese file suit in Tokyo District Court seeking damages for injuries suffered from poison gas leaking from weapons abandoned in China by the Imperial Army.

Jan. 26, 2007: Abe addresses opening session of 166th Diet; with China, he aims to advance a "mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests."

Jan. 29, 2007: Tokyo High Court orders NHK to pay ¥2 million in compensation to women's rights group over 2001 program on wartime comfort women.

Jan. 30, 2007: Tokyo District Court dismisses suit, filed by war-displaced Japanese citizens, seeking compensation for government's failure to repatriate from China at end of war and failure to support adequately after repatriation; decision is appealed on Feb. 7.

Jan. 30, 2007: Chinese Ambassador Wang meets Diet leaders to explore possibility of Premier Wen addressing Diet during April visit.

Jan. 31, 2007: Abe tells group of war-displaced Japanese that he has asked Ministry of Health to look for ways to support citizens resettled from China.

Feb. 1, 2007: Beijing sounds out Japanese government officials on possibility of the Crown Prince and Princess attending 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing

Feb. 4, 2007: Japanese Coast Guard finds Chinese research ship operating without prior notification in Japan's EEZ in Senkaku island chain; Foreign Ministry protests to Chinese Embassy in Tokyo and through Japanese Embassy in Beijing.

Feb. 5-8, 2007: Defense Intelligence Director Mukunoki Isao visits China.

Feb. 6, 2007: China explains that Senkaku islands are Chinese territory.

Feb. 9, 2007: Parliamentary Council to Consider the Future of Japan and History decides to present government with resolution calling for review of Kono Statement.

Feb. 12, 2007: Former Defense Agency Director Nukaga meets in Beijing with China's Minister of Defense Cao Gangchuan, Vice Foreign Minister Wu, and State Councilor Tang.

Feb. 15, 2007: Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing arrives in Tokyo meets Lower House Speaker Kono; New Komeito Party leader Ota; and Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki.

Feb. 16, 2007: Foreign Minister Li meets with Abe and Foreign Minister Aso Taro.

Feb. 16, 2007: Li addresses meeting of Japan-China Friendship Association.

Feb. 25-28, 2007: Japanese and Chinese diplomats hold seventh bilateral Strategic Dialogue in China.

Feb. 26, 2007: Chairman of LDP's Policy Research Council Nakagawa Shoichi in Nagoya speech raises concerns with China's military build-up; cautions that Japan could be target.

Feb. 26, 2007: Members of ruling and opposition parties agree to form study group to review the Iris Chang book, *The Rape of Nanking*

Feb. 27, 2007: China reacts to Nakagawa's remarks; blasts Japan for "enormous" defense spending.

Feb. 28, 2007: Shiozaki again expresses dissatisfaction with lack of satisfactory explanation of ASAT test.

Feb. 28, 2007: Chairman of LDP Executive Council Niwa Yuya arrives in Beijing; visits Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan; meets Premier Wen.

Feb. 28, 2007: Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shimomura raises possibility of Abe visit to Yasukuni.

March 1, 2007: Chinese Ambassador Wang tells LDP Asia Strategy Study Group that a visit to Yasukuni by Abe would cause irremediable damage.

March 1, 2007: Abe tells reporters that there is no evidence that either Imperial Japanese Army or government officials used coercion in recruitment of comfort women; suggests possible revision of Kono Statement.

March 4, 2007: Seko Hiroshige, special advisor to the prime minister for public relations, tells television audience that there are various definitions of coercion but that government will stand by Kono Statement.

March 5, 2007: Abe reaffirms government will stand by Kono Statement.

March 5, 2007: Japan decides to cut FY 2006 yen loans to China by 20 percent to approximately ¥62 billion; yen loan program by mutual agreement will end in FY 2008.

March 6, 2007: Young LDP and DPJ Diet members form Committee to Verify the Facts of Nanjing Incident.

March 6, 2007: China's Foreign Minister Li urges Japan to learn from its history; expresses hopes for successful April visit to Japan by Premier Wen.

March 7, 2007: Abe reiterates no change in Kono Statement to reporters at Kantei.

March 8, 2007: Abe announces government will not review comfort women issue, but would allow LDP to do so.

March 11, 2007: Abe appears on national television; upholds Kono Statement; expresses sincere apologies for physical and psychological suffering to comfort women.

March 11, 2007: Vice FM Wu meets visiting Senior Vice Minister Asano Katsuhito to discuss the six-party process and Japan-North Korea Normalization Working Group, as well as security related issues, including China's ASAT test and defense budget.

March 14, 2007: Tokyo High Court upholds lower court dismissal of petition from Chinese citizens seeking compensation for injuries suffered as a result of exposure to chemical weapons abandoned in China by the Imperial Army.

March 15, 2007: Tokyo High Court, citing statute of limitations, overturns ruling granting compensation to wartime forced Chinese laborers in Japan.

March 15, 2007: Abe government releases statement that review of documents related to Kono Statement reveals no accounts relating to direct use of coercion by Imperial Japanese Army or civil authorities in recruitment of comfort women.

March 16, 2007: President Hu meets LDP Secretary General Nakagawa and New Komeito Secretary General Kitagawa; on March 20 Nakagawa and Kitagawa report on trip to Abe.

March 19-20, 2007: Members of Joint History Study Group meet in Tokyo.

March 23, 2007: Parliamentary Council to Consider the Future of Japan and History decides to reinvestigate comfort women issue; will ask government for documents relating to Kono Statement.

March 25-26, 2007: Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shimomura denies direct involvement of former Imperial Army in comfort women activities.

March 26, 2007: National Institute for Defense Studies releases *Asian Strategic Review 2007*. The report calls attention to China's lack of transparency and China's efforts to expand its influence in East Asia.

March 26, 2007: Miyazaki District Court dismisses suit filed by forced wartime Chinese laborers, seeking compensation for damages suffered from Japanese government and Mitsubishi Mining Company; expiration of 20-year statute of limitations is cited as grounds for dismissal

March 26, 2007: Abe responds to March 24 *Washington Post* editorial on distinction between comfort women and abductees.

March 27, 2007: Nagasaki District Court rejects suit by Chinese seeking compensation for wartime forced labor in Japan, expiration of 20-year statute of limitations is cited as grounds for dismissal.

March 27, 2007: Japanese Foreign Ministry publishes 2007 Diplomatic Blue Book, which expresses concerns with China's lack of transparency and lack of satisfactory explanation for Jan. 12 ASAT test.

March 27, 2007: Abe Cabinet formally invites Wen to visit Japan April 11-13.

March 31, 2007: The Japanese Asian Women's Fund, established in 1995 to deal with "comfort women" compensation, expires.