

# Comparative Connections

A Quarterly E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



## Japan-China Relations: Old Issues Greet a New Government

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

After months of anticipation, Prime Minister Aso Taro dissolved the Diet on July 21 and scheduled elections for the Lower House. On Aug. 30, Aso's Liberal Democratic Party suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Democratic Party of Japan and DPJ President Hatoyama Yukio became prime minister on Sept. 16. With Japan focused on the historic shift of power for most of the quarter, politics took primacy over diplomacy. In this environment, Japan-China relations continued to tread water, waiting for the arrival of a new government in Tokyo. Perhaps the good news is that there were no major dilemmas or disruptions and the new Japanese leadership had early opportunities to establish a relationship with their Chinese counterparts.

### East China Sea

On July 13, Japanese media, citing government sources, reported that Japan Air Self-Defense Force aircraft had identified several Chinese ships in the vicinity of the Shirakaba (Chunxiaoo) gas field. The ships appeared to be provisioning Chinese drilling platforms in preparation for resuming operations, raising questions about China's observance of the June 2008 agreement on joint development which called for China to suspend development of the field pending further negotiations. Responding to Japanese inquiries, Beijing, on July 10, announced that the activities at the platform were solely for maintenance and management purposes.

Nevertheless, during a July 14 press conference, Foreign Minister Nakasone Hirofumi called on China "not to take actions that will undermine confidence." Nakasone acknowledged that provisioning of drilling equipment had been confirmed but cautioned that "if there are other materials that are for preparations for future development, that would be a big problem." The same day, Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry Nikai Toshihiro said that a "no surprises" doctrine was required and requested that prior notification of actions be communicated through diplomatic channels.

On July 21, a senior Foreign Ministry official announced that the Chinese ships had departed the area around the Shirakaba field and had returned to China on July 15. The official noted that the government had been unable to observe any actions that contravened the June 2008 agreement.

The next day Nakasone met with Chinese counterpart Foreign Minister Yang Jiechie in Phuket Thailand during the ASEAN Regional Forum and reiterated Japanese concerns that China not act in ways that would undermine confidence. Nakasone noted that joint development was of a

symbol of the Mutually Beneficial Strategic Partnership and that he hoped that there would be “no pulling back” from this construct. Yang replied that there was “no actual change in the present situation of that gas field.” The two ministers agreed to continue working-level contacts on the East China Sea issue.

On Aug. 24, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported that Japanese government sources had revealed that Chinese ships had again been found operating in the near the gas fields in mid-August. While exploration related activities had not been observed, the government again had contacted Beijing to learn the purpose of their activities.

### **Senkaku Islands**

In mid-July, the *Sankei Shimbun* reported that five Chinese naval vessels had been observed conducting military training exercises in the vicinity of Okinotorishima in the Senkaku Islands chain. Defense Ministry sources revealed that the Chinese ships consisted of a guided missile destroyer, two frigates and supply ship, and a support vessel.

In response to remarks by U.S. Sen. James Webb on July 18, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang reasserted China’s “indisputable sovereignty” over the Senkaku Islands.

### **Security**

The July 1 *Tokyo Shimbun* reported that the Ministry of Defense had moved to study the deployment of Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF) to Yonagumi Island in Okinawa Prefecture, which is one of Japan’s southwestern outer islands, located near the disputed Senkaku Islands chain. The newspaper reported that on June 30 the mayor of Yonagumi had petitioned Minister of Defense Hamada Yasukazu requesting a GSDF deployment to the “frontier” island. Hamada visited Yonagumi on July 8 and announced that he would consider deploying GSDF units to the island. Reporting on Hamada’s visit, the *Asahi Shimbun* noted “this ground garrisoning is aimed at buttressing up the defense of Japan’s outer islands situated near the border with China.”

On July 17, the Aso Cabinet approved the Ministry of Defense 2009 Defense White Paper. The report called attention to the increasing activity of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in waters around Japan, to the development of capabilities in excess of Taiwan requirements that would expand PLAN activities to regions beyond close-in seas, and noted the reference made by China’s minister of defense on the need for an aircraft carrier to support PLAN activities in distant seas. Overall, the report found that threats in the seas around Japan were increasing and that Japan’s defense posture was not adequate to meet the new challenges.

Meanwhile, the Aug. 22 *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported that Japanese efforts to arrange a port call for two Maritime-Self Defense Force (MSDF) training ships in Hong Kong at the end of August had proved unavailing despite the fact that the two sides had agreed to promote defense exchanges at the Japan-China Defense Ministerial in March 2009. Chinese authorities had informed the Japanese Consulate in Hong Kong that the port call would be inconvenient. On Aug. 25, MSDF Chief of Staff Akahoshi Keiji told reporters that he was unaware of the reason why the port call

request had been refused. The Japanese media, however, speculated that the refusal may have been related to the July visit to Japan by Uighur activist Rebiya Kadeer.

### **Human rights: Uighur activist in Japan**

At the end of July, Munich-based Kadeer visited Japan. In advance of her arrival, China's Ambassador to Japan Cui Tiankai labeled her a "criminal" whose organization was responsible for the July 5 rioting in Urumqi, Xinjiang. The ambassador said that Japan and China "must prevent important matters that must be worked on together from being disturbed by a criminal or attention to our common interests from being diverted."

On July 28, Beijing interrupted the *NHK* international broadcast signal in China as it showed Kadeer's arrival in Japan. At the same time, the Chinese government distributed to the Japanese media a Japanese language video of its version of what happened during the July 5 riots. Kadeer met with LDP members at the party's headquarters on July 29 and urged Japan to send an investigation team to Xinjiang to report on the recent events.

Responding to Chinese protests, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura Takeo told reporters that the Kadeer visit was the result of "a private invitation" and that "we don't believe that it will have an adverse impact on Japan-China relations." Kawamura also revealed that China on July 24 had protested the visit through the Japanese Embassy. China's Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Wu Dawei called in the Japanese ambassador to underscore Beijing's "extreme displeasure." China's media echoed the government's criticism of the Kadeer visit.

Chinese scholars used the media to call the issue to the attention of the new DPJ government. Gao Hong, deputy director of the Institute for Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, underscored the sensitive nature of China's minority issues, noting that the Aso government "did not fully understand the magnitude of the Rebiya issue." Gao, noting that Hatoyama Yukio had met with the Dalai Lama, asked Japan to "be careful about China's minority issues, Taiwan, and human rights matters."

### **Yasukuni Shrine**

The *Asahi Shimbun* headlined an Aug. 15 front page-story "Summer Election; Tranquil Yasukuni. Both LDP and DPJ political leaders worked to keep it that way. On the evening of Aug. 10, Prime Minister Aso told reporters that it would be a "mistake" to politicize paying respects to those who gave their lives for their country. Aso felt that the shrine should be distanced from the turmoil of politics and the media and be a most tranquil place for prayer. The next day, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura announced that he had no plans to visit Yasukuni Shrine on Aug. 15.

Two days later DPJ President Hatoyama Yukio told reporters he did not wish to see the prime minister or Cabinet members paying homage at Yasukuni, that he had no intention of visiting the Shrine, and that Cabinet ministers of a DPJ government should refrain from visiting the shrine. As for the possibility of a secular shrine to honor the war dead, Hatoyama said that, in the event of a DPJ victory, the government would consider the issue so that all could pay homage to the

war dead without feeling any constraint. He thought that a facility where the emperor could pay respects “with peace of mind” was “desirable.”

The following day, the *Sankei Shimbun* reported that the DPJ had decided to move ahead with plans to set up a panel to make recommendations for such a facility. DPJ Secretary General Okada Katsuya told reporters that “a place to memorialize those who died for the sake of their country and the people is necessary.” Prime Minister Aso was not confident that the public would support the idea, questioning whether the construction of a national memorial facility could really resolve the Yasukuni issue.

On Aug. 15, the only minister to visit Yasukuni was Noda Seiko, minister of consumer affairs, who visited in a private capacity. Prime Minister Aso offered flowers at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery and attended national memorial services at the Budokan. In his remarks at the memorial service, the prime minister acknowledged that Japan had “caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly those of Asian nations.” Speaking on behalf of the Japanese people, he went on to express “feelings of profound remorse and sincere mourning for all the victims of the war.”

Former Prime Ministers Koizumi and Abe visited the Shrine along with a group of former Upper and Lower House Diet members and a nonpartisan group of 36 current Diet members.

Chinese analysts welcomed the arrival of the DPJ government and its commitment to preventing the issues of history from disrupting bilateral relations. Zhou Yongsheng, a Japan scholar at China’s Foreign Affairs University, noted that the DPJ had promised to build a state-run national memorial to replace Yasukuni. Gao Hong, deputy director of the Institute for Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that the building of a state-run memorial would be appreciated as “a forward-looking initiative.” On Sept. 1, China’s Foreign Ministry welcomed Hatoyama’s pledge not to visit Yasukuni in person and to have members of his government to refrain from visiting the shrine.

## **DPJ government**

The day after Lower House elections in Japan, *Xinhua News* predicted that there would be no significant changes in China-Japan relations under a Hatoyama government. The *Xinhua* view was reflected in the Chinese media reaction to the election.

On Sept. 2, soon-to-be Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya told a Tokyo symposium that the DPJ had consistently attached great importance to Japan’s relations with China. He went on to say that he wanted a DPJ government to only deepen the relationship and that making each party mutually essential would yield a “win-win relationship.” Chinese analysts regarded Okada as a political leader who recognized the importance of Asia and was friendly to China. The Foreign Ministry welcomed Okada’s appointment as foreign minister, noting his deep ties to China.

Visiting Tokyo on Sept. 8-9, China’s Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei met with leaders of the DPJ electoral coalitions, Kamei Shizuka, Fukushima Mizuho, and Okada Katsuya; talks focused on developing the bilateral relationship. In Beijing on Sept. 9, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao met a

visiting Keidanren delegation, headed by its president, Mitarai Fujio. Wen made clear that China would continue to seek opportunities to develop the bilateral relationship. Mitarai replied that Japan's new government regarded China as an important neighbor as did Japan's industrial leaders, and together with the new government, they would endeavor to develop the Japan-China relationship.

### **The Hatoyama government: Hatoyama-Hu Jintao meeting**

On Sept. 21, Prime Minister Hatoyama met President Hu Jintao during the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. Seeking to add greater substance to the bilateral relationship, the new prime minister proposed that the two governments work together to create an East Asian Community. Hatoyama said that he wanted "to build a relationship of trust between Japan and China and on the basis of that relationship to create an East Asian Community." With regard to the past, Hatoyama said that his government would follow the 1995 Murayama statement. As for the present, he wanted to turn the East China Sea into a "sea of fraternity" and proposed that the two governments work to implement the 2008 agreement on joint development.

Hu expressed his appreciation for the prime minister's statement on history, said that cooperation between China and Japan was "important for the Asian region, and, with regard to the East China Sea, proposed "to build trust through working level discussion." Hu also proposed a five-point program to develop bilateral relations: stepped-up high level contact, a strengthening of business cooperation, deepened people-to-people friendship, cooperation on regional and international issues, and a proper handling of differences.

### **The Hatoyama government: Okada-Yang meeting**

On Sept. 28, the foreign ministers of Japan, China, and South Korea met in Shanghai to set in motion preparations for an Oct. 10 trilateral summit, to discuss Prime Minister Hatoyama's proposal for an East Asia Community, and to review policy toward North Korea. Afterward, Okada told reporters that setting aside a decision on whether to use the words "East Asian Community," he had received fundamental support for the concept from China and South Korea, although details were not discussed. The three ministers also agreed on the importance of the denuclearization of North Korea.

Prior to the trilateral meeting, Japanese and Chinese foreign ministers met to discuss Hatoyama's vision of an East Asian Community and to review the bilateral relationship. When Okada raised the issue, Yang replied that China had long supported the concept and would like to engage the countries of the region in an effort to promote cooperation in the fields of energy and the environment.

Both Okada and Yang agreed to work to advance "strategic and mutually beneficial relations," but there was no major progress on the pending bilateral issues of joint development in the East China Sea and food safety – the still-unresolved case of the contaminated *gyoza*. With regard to the East China Sea, Yang said that he wished to prepare an environment that would allow for a realization of the agreement. As for the *gyoza* issue, he cautioned against politicizing the issue, while noting the close cooperation that has continued in the bilateral police investigation efforts.

Yang, however, did, raise the issues of history and Taiwan as being the political foundation of the bilateral relationship and made clear that Tibet and the Uighur problem were internal affairs. Okada recognized the importance of history in addressing the future, indicated recognition of Tibet as an internal matter, but did not touch on the Uighur issue. When Okada asked China to pursue nuclear arms reduction, Yang replied that China was carefully watching the U.S.-Russia nuclear arms reduction negotiations.

### **Public opinion: not improving**

In late August, *Genron NPO* of Japan and the *China Daily* released the results of their annual joint public opinion poll. Among 1,000 Japanese respondents, 73.2 percent had a negative image of China; of the 1,589 Chinese respondents, 65.2 percent had a negative image of Japan.

Asked why, Japanese respondents frequently cited food safety issues (*gyoza*), China's authoritarian political system and Chinese militarism. Chinese respondents cited the Sino-Japanese war, history, nationalism, and militarism. As for impediments to improving relations, 46.2 percent of Japanese respondents pointed to food safety issues, while 43.2 percent of the Chinese respondents identified territorial issues.

Only 14.2 percent of Chinese respondents supported Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, while 73.8 percent opposed the idea. On the subject of Yasukuni Shrine, 71.7 percent of Japanese respondents acknowledged the appropriateness of visit by the prime minister; 61.7 percent of Chinese respondents said that neither public nor private visits should take place. More than 40 percent of respondents in both countries saw no value in simply increasing the number of summit meetings

### **Prospects for the fourth quarter**

A great deal of what happens over the next quarter will depend on how Beijing responds to the initiatives of the Hatoyama government and on how it addresses the outstanding issues in the bilateral relationship – the East China Sea and food safety. Regardless, there will be several more opportunities for high-level exchange and there is certain to be more probing and posturing in the months to come.

## **Chronology of Japan-China Relations July-September 2009**

**July 1, 2009:** *Tokyo Shimbun* reports Ministry of Defense is studying deployment of Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) units to Yonagumi Island, Okinawa Prefecture.

**July 8, 2009:** Minister of Defense Hamada Yazukazu visits Yonagumi Island.

**July 9, 2009:** Vice Minister Wu Dawei meets Director General for Asian and Oceanic Affairs Saiki Akitaka in Tokyo to discuss North Korea policy.

**July 13, 2009:** Japanese media report Chinese ships operating in vicinity of Shirakaba (Chunxiao) natural gas field in East China Sea.

**July 14, 2009:** Admiral Akahoshi Keiji, chief of Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) meets Defense Minister Liang Guanglie in China.

**July 14, 2009:** Foreign Minister Nakasone Hirofumi asks China not to take actions that would undermine confidence with regard to the Japan-China understanding on joint development of East China Sea natural gas.

**July 14, 2009:** Transportation Minister Kaneko Kazuyoshi announces direct flights between Tokyo's Haneda Airport and Beijing's Capital International Airport will begin on Oct. 25.

**July 15, 2009:** Prime Minister Aso Taro announces Lower House dissolution.

**July 17, 2009:** Aso government approves 2009 Defense White Paper.

**July 18, 2009:** China's Foreign Ministry reiterates claims to sovereignty over Senkaku Islands.

**July 21, 2009:** Japan's Foreign Ministry announces that Chinese ships departed the area around the Shirakaba gas field and returned to China on July 15.

**July 21, 2009:** *Xinhua News* announces the conviction of four defendants charged with illegally transporting Chinese laborers to Japan.

**July 22, 2009:** Foreign Ministers Nakasone and Yang Jiechi meet in Phuket, Thailand during ARF meeting; Nakasone reiterates concerns about Chinese actions in East China Sea.

**July 28, 2009:** Uighur activist Rabiya Kadeer visits Japan; in China, *NHK* broadcast of her arrival is interrupted.

**July 29, 2009:** *Japan Times* reports that China has pulled out of scheduled U.S.-Japan-China trilateral policy planning talks.

**July 29, 2009:** Kadeer visits LDP headquarters; Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura reveals that Beijing had protested the visit through diplomatic channels on July 24.

**July 31, 2009:** Kagawa Prefecture government files trademark complaint against Shanghai restaurant/hotel owner over use of kanji designating regional specialty noodle.

**Aug. 7, 2009:** Tokyo Gov. Ishihara Shintaro announces that he will not be able to visit Yasukuni Shrine on Aug. 15 because he will be out of the country.

**Aug. 8, 2009:** Memorial service held in Tokyo for Chinese forced laborers who died in Japan during the war.

**Aug. 10, 2009:** Prime Minister Aso cautions against politicizing paying of respect to those who died for their country at Yasukuni Shrine.

**Aug. 11, 2009:** Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura announces that he has no plans to visit Yasukuni on Aug. 15

**Aug. 12, 2009:** DPJ President Hatoyama tells reporters that Japan's prime minister should not pay homage at Yasukuni.

**Aug. 13, 2009:** China's Ministry of Health announces investigation of illegal organ transplants following Japanese media reports of Japanese tourists traveling to China for organ transplants.

**Aug. 15, 2009:** Minister of Consumer Affairs Noda Seiko is only Aso Cabinet minister to visit Yasukuni, doing so in private capacity.

**Aug. 17, 2009:** Japan announces 6.3 percent increase in exports to China in April-June 2009 over the same period in 2008.

**Aug. 19, 2009:** JETRO announces that China was Japan's largest trading partner in the January-June 2009, with exports to China surpassing exports to the U.S. for the first time.

**Aug. 21, 2009:** *Yomiuri Shimbun* reports that China has denied a MSDF request for Shanghai port call in period of Aug. 27-30.

**Aug. 21, 2009:** Japanese typhoon relief aid arrives in Taiwan.

**Aug. 26, 2009:** Japan's Yamato Holdings Co. announces initiation of door-to-door parcel delivery service in China.

**Aug. 29, 2009:** *Asahi Shimbun* reports China will commence aircraft carrier construction.

**Aug. 30, 2009:** DPJ score massive victory in Lower House election.

**Aug. 30, 2009:** *Xinhua News* expresses opposition to Dalai Lama visit to Taiwan.

**Aug. 31, 2009:** Chinese media reports DPJ victory and predicts continuity in the development of bilateral relations.

**Sept. 1, 2009:** Chinese Foreign Ministry welcomes DPJ/Hatoyama election victory and pledges China's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.

**Sept. 2, 2009:** Japanese and Chinese diplomatic sources reveal that release of Joint Study on History, scheduled for Sept. 4, has been postponed at request of China.

**Sept. 2, 2009:** Okada Katsuya addresses symposium on 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding of People's Republic of China.

**Sept. 4, 2009:** Former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui arrives in Japan for a week-long visit.

**Sept. 4, 2009:** Chinese Ambassador Cui meets with DPJ President Hatoyama.

**Sept. 7, 2009:** Japan's Foreign Ministry report on citizens residing overseas shows the number residing in China dropped 1,977 between 2008 and 2007 to a total of 125,928

**Sept. 8, 2009:** Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei meets Japanese counterpart Yabunaka Mitoji in Tokyo to discuss North Korea and relations under DPJ government.

**Sept. 8, 2009:** Minister Wu meets Peoples' New Party leader Kamei Shizuka and Japan Socialist Party President Fukushima Mizuho.

**Sept. 9, 2009:** Minister Wu meets Foreign Minister-designate Okada.

**Sept. 9, 2009:** Premier Wen Jiabao meets Keidanren delegation in Beijing.

**Sept. 16, 2009:** Hatoyama Yukio becomes prime minister of Japan.

**Sept. 21, 2009:** Prime Minister Hatoyama meets President Hu in New York.

**Sept. 24, 2009:** Taiwan inaugurates Modern Japan Center at National Chengchi University.

**Sept. 26, 2009:** *Xinhua* reports opening of new war memorial center in Nanking dedicated to Chinese Kuomintang and U.S. pilots who died aiding China in the war against Japan.

**Sept. 28, 2009:** Foreign Ministers Okada and Yang meet in Shanghai.