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Japan-China Relationship Entered New Stage

By SHINDO Eiichi

Chinese President HU Jintao himself referred to his last visit to Japan as a trip of “warming spring.” The visit has proven the reality of the current Japan-China relations which gets into the stage of maturity.

If the visit had been made five years ago under the Koizumi Administration, it would have been broken off at the outset, due to the historical issues over Yasukuni Shrine. If it had been made ten years ago when Mr. ISHIHARA Shintaro, now the Governor of Tokyo, attempted to land on the Senkaku/Daiyudai Islands, there would have been fierce disputes over the territorial claims surrounding the gas field development in the East China Sea. Then Japan and China could have been on the brink of collision. Then if it had been made fifteen years ago after Tiananmen Square incident, the public opinion on this side of the Sea could have been in ferment over the issues of the human rights with the Tibetan problems. So the visit would have been ended with sheer exchanges of blame and charges. A Chinese leader’s visit to Japan as the head of the state has never been attempted in the last ten years since the one of JIANG Zemin in 1998, while the visit as a Chinese top political leader was followed by the “ice-thawing” trip to Japan last year by Premier WEN Jiabao. The Japan-China relationship is now heading for the stage of maturity based on “common strategic interests with the mutual benefits “of both countries.

According to Professor Martin JANICKE, “strategy is deliberately drawn scheme to change the current status quo.” Driven by the rapid economic growth of China with the expanding huge Asian market, both countries have noticed the dire necessities to change the status quo coming from their past policies, moving boldly out of the traditional Cold War

mindset of the 20th century into the new Asian Age in the 21st century.

It is true that President HU's visit seems to have no fruit in any issues such as the Tibetan problem, the disputes over the gas fields in East China Sea, and the troubles of imports of the tainted frozen dumpling made in China. However, regarding the Tibetan, the Chinese government has started intense dialogue with the 14th Dalai Lama to solve the problem just prior to HU's visit to Japan to defuse the conflict. The dispute over the gas fields has now converged into the final pragmatic stage of agreement and deal to share costs and benefits of joint development, putting aside the thorny political issues of territorial claims over the problematic islands with demarcation of the contiguous zones of the Sea. As Primer FUKUDA told at the press conference, they have almost agreed on the issues. In addition, on the troubles of the imported tainted frozen dumpling, they have had the understanding to seek the future-oriented solution for the prospects and premises for the commonly developed market of food production in East Asia, rather than to demand full accountabilities of the accidents in the past. It would be even schemed to create the joint food-risk management system with an East Asian version of European Food Safety Authority, as suggested by Dr. YASUE Noriko of Ritsumeikan University.

What should be noted here is that Japan and China have started to closely cooperate in the issues of global climate change. As the current Joint Statement has folded out, Japan succeeded in gaining Chinese approval of her proposal for a "sectoral approach" which focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions within each industrial sector across the national border, while Japan agreed to cooperate in providing for China energy-efficient and environmentally-friendly science and technologies. In addition, China has accorded to take positive and constructive attitude to participate in the negotiations for the post-Kyoto Protocol regime. These are the realistic diplomacy in the true sense of the word on both sides of the parties to create "win-win" relationship between Japan and China, which would be implemented between the country with environmentally sophisticated technologies and the country with huge

environmental pollutions. In order to expand the "win-win" relationship from the fields of energy and environment to those of food and agriculture, they will have to move further towards the formation of East Asian community of agro-production and food systems. Prior to President HU's visit, both countries accorded to resume the import of Japanese rice by China who had suspended it since 2003. From now on, the export of Japanese high qualified food products such as rice, fruits and seasonings to the Chinese markets will be expanding, which have hundreds of millions of rich middle class people living in large cities in East Coast. It demarcates exactly the formation of an East Asian community based on the common energy, environment and agricultural markets.

The agreement to implement the exchange programs of about 3,000 students per year over the coming four years will pave the road to a full fledged East Asian community in the future through expanding the cultural exchanges among younger generations. In these senses, President HU's visit has been firmly founded on his own innate determination for expanding much closer relationship with Japan, which would be even more significant than the strategic thinking of Chinese past political leaders. Between the first generation (pro-Russian group) and the third generation (pro-American group) within the Chinese Communist Party, President HU represents the second generation which has attached greater significance to the China-Japan relationship. The trip of "warming spring" must have been based on his own convictions of and views to Japan since his younger days in the 1970s in charge of China-Japan Youth Friendship Exchange Program.

Now both countries have had the irreversible relationship of socio-economic interdependencies. This fact of reality is even recently demonstrated by Japan's emergency relief activities for great calamities of Sichuan Earthquake which occurred just one week after President HU had returned to China. They have clearly vindicated the fallacies of the opinions of currently over-claimed "New De-Asianism" among the Japanese right-wing political circles that have persistently insisted Japan should not take the road to associate with the continental

Asia.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. SHINDO EIICHI, Professor Emeritus of Tsukuba University, which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on May 22, 2008.)