

# 40th year, but little to cheer

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This year marks the 40th anniversary of the normalization of China-Japan ties, but there seem few reasons to celebrate.

The launch of trilateral free trade negotiations was announced at the trilateral summit between China, Japan and the Republic of Korea on May 13-14. However, Japanese media kicked up a fuss because President Hu Jintao had direct talks with ROK President Lee Myung-bak, but not with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda. Yet this was not surprising given Japan provoked China by allowing Uygur separatists to hold a conference in Tokyo at the same time as the summit. And this was not Japan's first provocation this year as it came on the heels of Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara's proposal to "purchase" the Diaoyu Islands and the denial of the Nanjing massacre by Takashi Kawamura, the mayor of Nagoya.

Meanwhile, Japan's request to extend its continental shelf based on its claim that the Okinotori Atoll is an island was finally dismissed by the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. If successful this would have given Japan the right to claim the surrounding area as an exclusive economic zone.

China and Japan have missed a number of historical opportunities to improve regional cooperation. Around 1880, when Japan said it wanted to revive Asia, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) officials replied, "How can a small country like Japan revive Asia?" After the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, some Chinese people thought China had fallen behind Japan, and began to ask it for advice.

However, when Li Dazhao and Sun Yat-sen called for a "New Asianism" and "Great Asianism" around 1920, Japan's "Classical Asianism" of equality and cooperation had already been replaced by the Japanese government's aggressive "continental policy" and the "regionalism" theory designed to conceal its aggression and expansion.

Since the end of World War II, Japan has eagerly followed Washington's lead and it has allowed the United States to guide it. Especially over the past two decades, it has been fretting about China's rejuvenation.

Noda visited the US at the end of April and in a joint statement the two countries pledged to work together to build a new Asia-Pacific order and

further boost the Japan-US alliance. This suggests that Japan will improve its "dynamic defense capability" and join hands with the US to contain China's rise in the Western Pacific.

Japan's active cooperation with the US to engage in the Trans-Pacific Partnership will squeeze China. But the fact that Japan must surrender part of the profits if it joins the TPP has attracted substantial domestic opposition. So the government has looked back at East Asia in an attempt to gain economic benefits from China while ensuring military security under US protection.

However, Japan has been unsatisfied with the "10 +3" framework, which is the ASEAN members plus China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, and it first wanted to pull in the US, and later attempted to replace it with "10 +6", which would add India, Australia and New Zealand to the "10+3".

At present, the Japanese political situation is in turmoil. According to the latest polls in late April, support for the Noda cabinet had declined to around 22 percent, the lowest since Noda took power. About 70 percent are not satisfied with Noda's defense policy. But the right wing within his Democratic Party of Japan has become a stumbling block to the implementation of harmonious-Asia diplomacy.

Moreover, internal affairs are putting pressure on him. In order to pass the bill on raising consumption tax in the Diet, Noda is risking his "political life". If the Diet does not pass the bill, Noda has to either dissolve the House of Representatives for an early general election or resign. If an election is held, the DPJ is likely to lose power. Therefore, the most likely scenario is the DPJ will change the prime minister and keep power until next year's regular election.

A change of leader will probably affect Japan's diplomatic strategy toward China and its regional cooperation policy in Asia. Without greater mutual trust and coordination in political and security areas, regional economic cooperation will not have an optimistic outlook.

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