

Japan's Choice between Hard and Soft Power

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Abe Shinzō's succeeding Koizumi Jun'ichirō as Japanese Prime Minister in September 2006 provides a suitable occasion for a brief assessment of Japan's standing and image in the region. This paper examines the dilemmas facing Japan in her pursuit of 'soft power'. Joseph Nye has differentiated between, and contrasted, 'soft power' (the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals) and 'hard power', the use of military and economic might. Nye argues that soft power is not merely often more effective than hard power, but it is also often diminished by excessive reliance on the other power. Japan has, in the past, been charged with being an 'economic animal' with scant regard to good neighborliness. If present trends towards becoming a 'normal' state continue, then military power will complement her economic power. But at what cost? Japan's relations with her neighbors are worse than they have been for a long time. Although Japan has huge potential to generate soft power it often sacrifices this in pursuit of hard power. In addition, too much attention is paid to the domestic debate about the nature of Japan, and its place in the world, without sufficient consideration of the effect this has on foreign, especially East Asian, opinion. Public opinion polls reveal a general level of hostility to Japan in the region. This paper analyses these issues by focusing on Japan's relations with the Korean peninsula, and with China, within the broader context of global relations. In particular it examines the textbook issue and official visits to the Yasukuni shrine. Finally, it examines the reaction to Abe's accession to the premiership and current predictions as to the degree to which he follow or diverge from Koizumi's path.

Textbooks

The textbooks issue, which has bedeviled Japan's relations with her Asian neighbors since the early 1980s has flared up again.¹ In response, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has recently commissioned *Japan Echo* to set up a website specifically to present the Japanese case. *Japan Echo* is a private company which functions as a de-facto public relations organ for the government and has long published English-language translations from Japanese magazines in an attempt to reach the American audience.² The site (<http://www.je-kaleidoscope.jp>) was launched 24 August 2005 and, according to MOFA, was necessary because, "Neighboring countries have begun to have increased interest in the content of the history textbooks used in Japanese junior high schools. Much of the discussion heard from these countries, however, is not based on accurate understanding of Japan's history textbooks. Publication under this project is intended to promote understanding by foreign countries of the real picture of Japan's history textbooks and history education, by introducing in translation what is actually written in its junior high school textbooks." The press release says that this stage the website offers partial translations in Chinese and Korean

1 Prideaux 2005.

2 MOFA 2005.

and MOFA intends to add English later.³ This sequence of languages is clearly a reflection of the fact that while Japanese history textbooks are a controversial issue in East Asia, there is surprisingly little interest in the US.

The school textbooks issue has deep symbolic importance because not merely does it illustrate an attitude towards the past that most East Asians (and many, perhaps most, Japanese themselves) find unacceptable, and inform present attitudes and policies, but it also threatens to build this into the future through the education system. Paradoxically, although the symbolic impact is high, the distortions of the textbooks are neither unusual nor extreme. American textbooks, for instance, with their strong tone of triumphalism, are much more nationalistic than the Japanese.⁴ Just as history is written by the victors, so do school textbooks reflect national pride, or at least that of ruling elites and this happens, not surprisingly, in Korea and China as much as anywhere else.⁵ Indeed textbooks elsewhere come under little critical scrutiny, but in Japan there has been wide and deep opposition to the efforts of right-wing groups to revise the history of Japanese colonialism.⁶ Moreover, in 2004 only 16 junior high schools had adopted the 2001 version of the 'New History Textbook', and that represented just 0.097 percent of the school population.⁷ Whether the 2005 editions (eight of them) will do better is as yet unknown. In a sense it does not matter. It is not the actual uptake that captures media, and hence, popular in opinion, but that have appeared with what seems official approval. As the Seoul newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* put it, in commenting on Koizumi's term in office, "During his tenure, Abe's predecessor Junichiro Koizumi kept visiting the militarist Yasukuni Shrine, and his administration distorted history in textbooks and claimed territorial rights to Korea's Dokdo islets, thereby causing incessant conflict with Korea and China."⁸

The euphemisms and contrivances of the textbooks are not in themselves exceptional- we see spin doctors around the world do that same thing daily, changing 'invasions' into 'interventions' and excising victims from the record, just as the 'comfort women' have been removed.⁹ What is special is the context in which it is happening. Firstly, the victims (or their descendents) are no longer powerless. On the contrary, this is happening at a time when nationalism is burgeoning in China, and in both Koreas. Confidence is rising along with rapid economic and technological growth. Moreover, with the growth of democracy in various forms and the access to information and communication afforded by new technologies, governments are less able to contain the anger of their citizens. East Asians are increasingly aware of the contrast between Germany's handling of its past, and that of Japan.

Secondly, the textbooks issue is not an isolated incident. It is part of a wider pattern. Visits by serving prime ministers, such as Koizumi, to the Yasukuni shrine, territorial disputes with Korea (Tokto/Takeshima), China (Diaoyu/Senkaku) and Russia and the failure to recognise, let alone address, the dreadful fate of 'comfort women' all add up.¹⁰ Indeed, as Gavan McCormack has noted, whereas German participation was taken for granted in the ceremonies marking the sixtieth an-

3 The website does, in fact, offer English translations of the table of contents and at least some small bits of text; see Kaleidoscope 2005.

4 Selden 2005.

5 Jin 2005.

6 Beal 2001.

7 Prideaux 2005.

8 *Chosun Ilbo* 2006.

9 Nozaki 2005.

10 Morris-Suzuki 2005.

niversary of the end of the Second World War, it would have been inconceivable for the Japanese government to have been invited to the ceremonies in Beijing, Seoul, or Pyongyang; "There may be no other country in the world today so much at odds, on questions of history and territory, with all its neighbors as Japan."¹¹ A poll conducted in June 2005 found that 90% of South Koreans mistrusted Japan, and there is reason to think that this attitude is common through much of East Asia.¹² In recent years there has been a plethora of public opinion surveys and the selection below gives a good picture of where Japan sits within the consciousness of its neighbors.

Measuring softpower by gauging attitudes

Public opinion surveys, as an indicator of softpower, is something which the Americans have pioneered and which is being taken up widely in other countries, not least Japan. The commercial Gallup Poll, part of the Gallup Organization which also includes a consultancy arm, a university and a publisher, is probably the oldest and most famous.¹³ Whilst Gallup's polls are often reported in the press, the actual result are sold to clients and do not enter the public domain, in the way that the polls described below do.

The Program for International Policy attitudes at the University of Maryland focuses mainly on the United States and global issues that affect it. Whilst it has a section on China, it pays little attention to Japan.¹⁴

More comprehensive, and going further back, is the Japan initiative of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut. The Roper Center does not conduct surveys itself; rather it serves as a repository for surveys from a range of sources. Its active involvement in Japan, which is funded by the United States–Japan Foundation dates from 1992 and its Japanese Public Opinion Database (JPOLL) contains more than 10,000 questions and responses. Its data library has material stretching back to 1946.¹⁵ However JPOLL concerns itself with surveys in Japan does not extend to polls about Japan in Asia.

Perhaps the leader on a global scale in the public domain is the Pew Research Center in Washington DC. In 2001 it began a series of 'Global Attitudes' public opinion surveys. By spring of 2006 it had conducted seven such surveys, the largest of which, in summer 2002 comprised 38,263 interview conducted in 44 nations. The questions cover a range of public policy issues (such as global warming) but the focus, and underlying rationale, is international attitudes to the United States and US foreign policy. The report on the one conducted in spring 2006 is headed "America's Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concerns Over Iran, Hamas."¹⁶

Table 1: Favorable opinions of the US

Percentage of respondents having a favorable opinion of the US

	1999/2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Great Britain	83	75	70	58	55	56
France	62	63	43	37	43	39

11 McCormack 2005.

12 Yomiuri 2005.

13 Gallup Poll.

14 Pipa 2006.

15 Roper JPOLL 2006.

16 Pew 2006a.

Germany	78	61	45	38	41	37
Spain	50	-	38	-	41	23
Russia	37	61	36	47	52	43
Indonesia	75	61	15	-	38	30
Egypt	-	-	-	-	-	30
Pakistan	23	10	13	21	23	27
Jordan	-	25	1	5	21	15
Turkey	52	30	15	30	23	12
Nigeria	46	-	61	-	-	62
Japan	77	72	-	-	-	63
India	-	54	-	-	71	56
China	-	-	-	-	42	47

Note: 1999/2000 survey trends provided by the Office of Research, US Department of State
Source: Pew 2006a

Of particular importance in the context of this essay is the contrast, shown in Table 1, between the attitude towards the US of Japanese respondents and that of those of other countries over this period. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 seems to lead to a very definite slump in attitudes towards the US in Western Europe and previously friendly Islamic countries such as Indonesia. This rise in Anti-Americanism is of course widely corroborated from other sources. By contrast, the decline in a favorable attitude towards the US does fall, from 77% in 1999/2000 to 63% in 2006, but this is significantly less than that the decline in countries such as Britain, Germany, and Indonesia. The resilience of Japanese support for the United States does suggest a lack of a critical appraisal of American foreign policy and an indifference to the erosion of its softpower caused by the invasion of Iraq. This indifference is mirrored, as we see below, by the support given to given to Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine despite the negative impact it has on Japan's standing in Asia.

While Table 1 gives some global attitudes towards the United States, and as such is somewhat peripheral to Japan, the following eight tables from a set of Pew Research Center provides information central to a discussion on Japanese softpower. On 21 September 2006 Pew released a six-nation survey on mutual attitudes amongst Asian nations, which inevitably included their attitude to the United States. The six nations were China, India, Japan, Pakistan, Russia, and the United States.¹⁷ Unfortunately South Korea was not included in the survey, although it would have been much more relevant than Russia.

Table 2: Hostility amongst Asian neighbors

Favorability rating of

Opinion by	Opinion on>>	China	Japan	India	Pakistan
China					%
	Favorable	94	28	47	69
	Unfavorable	5	71	39	7
Japan					
	Favorable	21	77	60	43
	Unfavorable	70	22	25	16

17 Pew 2006b.

India	Favorable	33	65	-	33
	Unfavorable	43	28	-	50
Pakistan	Favorable	33	33	23	-
	Unfavorable	42	49	67	-
United States	Favorable	47	63	56	27
	Unfavorable	43	35	28	56

Source: Pew 2006b

Table 2 shows that the Chinese had far less favorable attitude towards Japan (28%) than they did towards Pakistan (69%) or even one-time enemy, and current competitor, India (47%). The Japanese viewed themselves favorably (77%) though they were less pleased with themselves than the Chinese (94%). Japan got good ratings from both India (65%) and the United States (63%) but a low assessment from Pakistan (33%). It is unclear why the Pakistanis had such an unfavorable view of Japan. A spill-over from Chinese animosity towards Japan might be part of the reason, but it seems a far from sufficient explanation.

Table 3 indicates that two-thirds of the Japanese people oppose amending Article Nine and Japan becoming a 'normal country.' This is consistent with other polls although the interpretation of such results is contested.¹⁸

Table 3: Article Nine

Do you favor or oppose changing Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution so that Japan could officially have a military and could declare war?

	Favor	Oppose	Don't know/refused
Japan	27	67	6

Source: Pew 2006b

However, it is interesting that this apparent opposition to remilitarization does not translate into a perception at least in China (and probably also in both Koreas) that Japan poses a threat. As Table 4 shows, although the Chinese respondents clearly saw the United States as the major country of danger (58%), 22% put Japan in that position.

Table 4: Country of danger

What country in the world, if any, represents the greatest danger ?

	China	N Korea	US	Japan	Other	Don't know/refused
Russia	12	2	39	2	10	34
China	0	*	58	22	7	13
Japan	39	35	18	0	2	5

Note: Other: for clarity, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia, and Taiwan, all of which had low scores, have been conflated and added to 'other'

Source: Pew 2006b

¹⁸ Junkerman 2006.

The reason that this anti-military stance does not yield a softpower benefit for Japan in China (and the Korean peninsula) is that the attitude of the Japanese people is ambiguous, if not contradictory. It might also be argued that they are myopic, not realising sufficiently how things at home, such as the Yasukuni Shrine visits, or textbooks, impact on Japan's reputation in Asia, or alternatively, not considering this to be a great importance.

The contrast between the Chinese and the Japanese attitude towards Prime Minister Koizumi's official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine shown in Table 5 is marked. The Japanese are fairly evenly divided, with a small majority (52%) supporting the visits. Only 4% of Chinese are shown as supporting the visits, with 78% opposing. The disapproval rate in South Korea is even higher, according to a survey conducted in March 2005 on behalf of the Seoul newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* translated by the Mansfield Foundation (see below).¹⁹ In this survey, in which "don't know" is not countered, 7.7% of the 1,500 South Koreans questioned supported the visits, and 92.3 % opposed.²⁰

Table 5: Yasukuni Shrine

Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi has visited and paid tribute at the Yasukuni Shrine every year since taking office

Do you support or oppose PM Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine?

	Support	Oppose	Don't know/Refused
China	4	78	18
Japan	52	45	3

Source: Pew 2006b

Table 6 shows a similar disparity between Japanese and Chinese over the question of 'apologies for the war.' 44% of Japanese thought that apologies so far were insufficient, but twice that number of Chinese (81%) thought that way.

Table 6: Apologizing for the war

Do you think Japan has apologized for its military actions during the 1930s and 1940s?

	China	Japan
Yes, sufficiently apologized	3	40
No, not sufficient apology	81	44
No apology necessary	4	14
Don't know/refused	12	2

Source: Pew 2006b

The question asked of the South Koreans in the *Dong-A Ilbo* survey was slightly different and the methodology did not allow for 'don't know,' strengthening the response. The question was "Do you think that Japan already compensated for victims of the colonial era and that the issue was settled? Or has the issue of compensation not yet been settled?" 95.2% answered "not yet."²¹ The Japanese colonial period in Korea was longer than the invasion of China, and encompassed all Korean territory, and all Koreans living there, rather than a part as in China. We might expect a

19 Mansfield 2005b.

20 Mansfield 2005b, Q28.

21 Mansfield 2005b, Q31.

stronger response from the Koreans

Table 7, which compares attitudes to Koizumi over four nations predictably shows the Chinese to have a more negative attitude than any of the others in the sample. The phrasing of the question—"how much confidence do you have in Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro?" is a bit ambiguous, at least in English, and yield a large number of those who either don't know or refuse to answer. Why the Indians have a low opinion of Koizumi compared with the Indonesians is unclear.

Table 7: Attitude towards Koizumi Jun'ichiro

How much confidence do you have in Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro?

	A lot	Some	Not so much	None	Don't now/ refused
Indonesia	7	41	19	7	26
India	8	22	13	17	40
China	1	9	28	30	32
Japan	13	48	30	8	1

Source: Pew 2006b

In general, Table 8 suggests, the Chinese tend to have a negative attitude towards the Japanese, though it should be added that this is reciprocated. At least two of the tributes listed here with high scores—modern (68) and hardworking (61)—can be seen as positive. 'Male-dominated' is more difficult to interpret. Some might see it as a positive attribute though the phrase, in English, would probably be considered pejorative.

Table 8: Chinese view of Japanese

Percentage of respondents ascribing attribute

Competitive	74	Modern	68	Rude	57
Male-dominated	72	Selfish	67	Sophisticated	42
Arrogant	69	Nationalistic	66	Tolerant	22
Greedy	68	Violent	65	Honest	15
Inventive	68	Hardworking	61	Generous	9

Source: Pew 2006b

Table 9 looks at attitudes towards Japan on a spectrum from very favorable to very unfavorable six countries, including Japan itself.

Table 9: Favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards Japan

Surveys conducted April/May 2006

	Favorable			Unfavorable			Don't know/ refused
	Total	Very	Somewhat	Total	Very	Somewhat	
USA	66	22	44	14	5	9	21
Russia	73	24	49	17	5	12	10
India	60	23	37	25	11	14	16
Pakistan	43	18	25	16	8	8	41
China	21	2	19	70	29	41	10
Japan	77	27	50	22	2	20	1

Source: Pew 2006b

Consistent with other parts of the survey is the low rating for Japan amongst Chinese, with a total of 70% having an unfavorable attitude. Interestingly, that Japanese have a less favorable attitude towards themselves than the Americans, the Russians, or the Pakistanis.

The Pew surveys are American drafted and reflect US concerns. What of surveys originating in Asia itself? One useful source is the American Mansfield Foundation which in August 2005 the announced that it was going to launch an Asian opinion poll database the following month. This would publish on the Foundation's website English translation of public opinion surveys of policy issued conducted in East Asia, by Asians rather than by Americans.²² By October 2006 they had published translations of 15 Japanese polls and six Korean ones. The Japan polls were mainly conducted by either the *Asahi Shimbun* or the *Nikkei*. The popularity of Prime Minister Koizumi was a frequent issue, but opinions about visits to the Yasukuni shrine were also probed.

Table 10 gives the responses to five questions addressing the question of the Yasukuni Shrine. What is of greatest importance here is the fact that although 64% thought that visits to the shrine by the next Prime Minister (i.e. Abe Shinzo) would "negatively affect Japan's Asian diplomacy" a substantially smaller percentage were concerned about the act itself, or the nature of the shrine.

Table 10: Asahi Shimbun August 2006 polls—selected questions

Percentage of respondents

	Approve/ agree	Disapprove/ disagree
Q5. Prime Minister Koizumi paid a visit to Yasukuni Shrine on August 15, the day that commemorates the end of World War II. Do you think it was good that he visited, or do you think he should not have visited?	49	37
Q5a. Do you think the next prime minister should visit Yasukuni Shrine, or do you think he should not? ¹	31 (20)	47 (60)
Q5c. Mr. Abe has said that he would not make it clear whether he would visit Yasukuni Shrine or not. Do you evaluate this attitude positively, or not?	32	54
Q7. If the next prime minister visits Yasukuni Shrine, do you think it will negatively affect Japan's Asian diplomacy, or do you not think so?	64	24
Q8. At Yasukuni Shrine, Class A War Criminals are enshrined along with other war dead. Do you feel uncomfortable about it, or not?	41	47

Source: Asahi 2006a

Finally, we return to the *Dong-A Ilbo* survey conducted in South Korea in March 2005. Table 11 gives the percentage of respondents who chose a particular country—and they were only allowed one—with whom South Korea should have friendly relations. The question is ambiguous and the responses subject to varying interpretations. Were the large percentage (35.5%) who put North Korea at the top of the list doing that out of kinship "We are all brother Korean, North and

²² Mansfield 2005a.

South”) or out of expediency (“it is safest for us to have friendly relations with the North”). The same argument, slightly diluted, applies to the United States and to China. One might want to have friendly relations with a country without particularly liking its people or customs. However, the low ranking of Japan does surely reflect a deep animosity amongst South Koreans.

Table 11: Name one country that you think South Korea should have friendly relations with

Percentage of respondents

North Korea	35.5
United States	28.7
China	22.1
Japan	7.9
Others	5.9

Source: Mansfield 2005b Q 6

The *Dong-A Ilbo* survey does have four questions which shed some light on the mechanism of softpower and how attitudes are molded and changed, or not.

Table 12: The origins of attitude

What do you think has shaped the basis of your historical perspective (on Japan)? Choose one among the following choices that you think has influenced you the most.

Your own or family experiences	11.5
School Education	31.8
Memorial, Museums etc	10.6
Press/broadcasting Media	44.1
Movies or TV dramas/shows	2.0

Source: Mansfield 2005b Q34

The media is claimed to be the most important source of attitudes towards Japan (44.1%), followed by education (31.8%). One implication of the importance of education in influencing people in their youth and through to adulthood is the need to consider the textbooks issue not merely in their negative impact on public opinion in Asia, but also of the opportunities multinational collaboration on textbooks can offer for a way forward.²³

Table 13: South Korea's ban on Japanese culture

<i>South Korea lifted its ban on importing Japanese popular culture in 1998, and has allowed increasing access to its cultural market for Japan since then. How do you evaluate this opening?</i>	Good	Wrong
	63.1	36.9

Source: Mansfield 2005b Q 35

Two thirds of Koreans surveyed approved of the lifting of the ban on Japanese culture from 1998 (Table 13). The *Dong-A Ilbo* survey throughout gives a breakdown by sex, age and education which for reasons of space are not shown here, but for this question it is worth noting that males, young and the better educated were more in favor of lifting of the ban.

²³ People's Daily 2005.

Table 14: Frequency of watching Japanese programs

Therefore, Japanese popular culture—movies, TV dramas for instance—has increasingly been introduced in recent years. How often do you watch Japanese movies or TV dramas?

Frequently	2.6
Sometimes	21.2
Rarely	30.9
Not at all	45.3

Source: Mansfield 2005b Q 36

It would have been useful to have comparable data referring to other cultural imports, especially from America, but table 14 does suggest that Japanese programs are not much viewed.

The crucial question, in the context of softpower, is what impact this exposure to Japanese culture, however limited, has. The survey has two tables, the first for all respondents and the second for those who had answered ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ to question 36.

Table 15: Impact of Japanese culture

Do you think you have become friendlier towards Japan after the introduction of Japanese popular culture?

All respondents			Frequent/sometime viewers		
Yes	No	Don't know/ No response	Yes	No	Don't know/ No response
15.7	83.7	0.6	41.7	58.0	0.3

Source: Mansfield 2005b Q37&38

Data on impact would have to be more rigorously surveyed before any definite conclusions could be reached, but table 15 does suggest that exposure to foreign culture, in this case Japanese, does have a positive effect on attitude. Some 16% of all respondents said they have become friendlier towards Japan through contact with its popular culture. The more contact, it would seem, the more likely it was that people became friendlier. However, this does not mean the more they watch, the more friendly they became. And it might also be a matter that those most predisposed to being friendlier with Japan were more likely to watch Japanese programs.

It does seem plausible that greater access to Japanese culture, along with increased opportunities to visit Japan as tourists or students, will ameliorate hostile feeling in China and the Korean peninsula towards Japan, but the problems lie deep and are not susceptible to easy solutions. The surveys we have looked at illustrate that whilst Japan is by no mean alone in arousing the ire of its neighbors it does have special problems. It also has unusual opportunities.

Why the softpower deficit?

Why are Japan's relations with its neighbors so bad? Here I focus on two aspects of the explanation; the conflict between the imperatives of softpower and hardpower, and the undue privileging of domestic concerns over international ones.

CONFLICT BETWEEN SOFTPOWER AND HARDPOWER. Joseph Nye has differentiated between, and contrasted, ‘soft power’ (the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals) and ‘hard power’, the use of military and economic might. Nye argues that soft power is not merely often more effective than hard power, but it is also often diminished by excessive reliance on the other power.²⁴ Nye undervalues political and economic power in the

24 Nye 2003; Nye 2004a; Nye 2004b.

fashioning of soft power; the message is to a large degree the product of the medium. This can lead to problems when the two are confused. As Gardels has pointed out, apropos of the US and the Islamic world, "The problem was not that angry Muslims didn't understand America, but that they did."²⁵

Japan has difficulties, despite the investment in the likes of the Japan Foundation and *Japan Echo*, in projecting soft power, but the problems lie deeper than control of the media. Japan has immense softpower potential; just consider, as two contrasting examples, its influence on French impressionism and its inspiration to Asian nationalists such as Sun Yat-sen. The Japanese economy, and its industrial planning and management, deriving its strength not from natural endowments but from human resources, is one of the marvels of the modern world. Yet, when we look at modern Asia we see J-pop overshadowed by *hallyu*, the Korean wave, and the growing stature of China, with its skilful, and patient, political and economic diplomacy dominating the region.²⁶ Ishihara may rail against China, but to negative effect.²⁷

Because of its acceptance of the American Imperium Japan has not struggled to carve an independent position in the postwar world. More than that, its pursuit of hardpower within that framework of subservience, inevitably depletes its ability to build softpower. The drive to become a 'normal state,' with the full freedom of military power, leading with all likelihood to nuclear weapons, worries its neighbors. Because that remilitarisation takes place in subordination to, and with the encouragement of, the United States, it necessarily is seen as threatening China, and both Koreas.

IGNORING NEAR NEIGHBOURS. Complementing this drive to hardpower is the privileging of the domestic (and US) audience over the Asian one. Official visits to the Yasukuni shrine are a prime example. Whilst these do not win any plaudits in America, they don't appear to raise much concern in Washington either. Ironically, but perhaps not really surprising, one of the few American voices raised against the visits was that of arch-conservative Representative Hyde J. Hyde, who proposed that Prime Minister Koizumi not be allowed to address Congress unless he forswore visits to the shrine.²⁸

However, given that 8 million Japanese themselves visit the Yasukuni Shrine each year, as well as the evidence of the polls, it is evident that official pilgrimages strike resonance with large segments of the electorate.²⁹ However, there is little doubting the immense damage they do to Japan's image in Asia. One cannot imagine a German prime minister making a visit to a cemetery with Nazi connotations, however popular that might be in reality with segments of the German people.³⁰

Nor does remilitarisation raise any concerns in the United States. On the contrary it is usually applauded.

The Princeton Project on National Security which, chaired by George Shultz (Secretary of State under Reagan) and Anthony Lake (National Security Adviser under Clinton), might be considered an authoritative voice of the conservative, non-neocon, foreign policy elite, noted blandly

25 Gardels 2005. Nye's response at Nye 2005.

26 Hua 2005.

27 Ishihara 2005.

28 JoongAng Ilbo 2006a.

29 McGreevy 2005.

30 It is surely significant that such a visit would cause a storm in the US, and elsewhere, whereas Yasukuni visits are scarcely noted.

in its final report on the different reactions on the two sides of the Pacific.³¹

Japan's search for a mature sense of national identity and statehood and for the traditional rights of sovereignty and self-defense that come with it—what some have called the “normalization of Japan”—is causing considerable concern among its neighbors, particularly China and South Korea.³²

The issue of the North Korean abductions brings together both the drive for hardpower and the courting of domestic popularity at the expense of foreign position. As I have argued elsewhere, the explanation for the collapse of the Pyongyang Declaration of 2002 lies in the confluence of belated Japanese connivance with the Bush administration's desire to destroy the Agreed Framework and its fear of a Tokyo-Pyongyang rapprochement, and the domestic succumbing to the temptation of exploiting popular anti-North Korean feeling.³³

Whither Japan under Abe?

The coming to office of a new Prime Minister, even one with such a high-profile reputation as a hardliner as Abe Shinzō, offers Japan the opportunity to learn from past mistakes and then go down new, and wiser, paths. Although he comes from a very political family—his father, Abe Shintaro was Foreign Minister under Nakasone Yasuhiro and was the son-in-law of Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke—he does not come into office in direct succession to his father, like Kim Jong Il, or at one remove like George W. Bush or Lee Hsien Loong. This gives him a certain freedom of action, if he so requires. As with Nixon's approach to China in the 1970s, ‘impeccable right wing connections’ can enable him to do things which would be dangerous for a politician with a more leftist reputation. The fact that his first official visit since assuming office was to be China seems to have escaped criticism; an editorial in the Daily Yomiuri, for instance, merely commented that it would ‘test his diplomatic mettle.’³⁴ Nor are the Americans likely to be concerned. On the contrary, as Jeff Kingston put it in the Japan Times,

He talks of strengthening the U.S. relationship, but knows that Washington is very concerned that Japan is gratuitously alienating China. This comes at a time when America is trying to cultivate China as a stakeholder in the international system.

For Abe, the road to better ties with Washington, and resolution of the North Korean impasse, leads through Beijing.³⁵

The ‘gratuitously alienating,’ Kingston makes quite clear, are the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine which he regards the biggest mistake of Koizumi's tenure.

A interestingly different approach was taken, in the same issue of the Japan Times, by David Howell, a former British Cabinet minister. He warmly applauded Abe's remilitarization policy and modestly assuring us that he is speaking for the ‘People in the West’ he wrote “they like what they hear from Abe about Japan becoming fully qualified as a normal nation and as a responsible global player, and about engagement with giant neighbour China, although very much on a firm, no-nonsense basis.”³⁶ Howell, apparently not realizing how important the Yasukuni issue is on the

31 Lobe 2006.

32 Ikenberry 2006.

33 Beal 2005, pp. 341–362.

34 Yomiuri 2006.

35 Kingston 2006.

36 Howell 2006.

Korean peninsula suggested that the uproar in China was perhaps a concoction of the government,

“After all, no one really knows anyway whether China is just being awkward over specific issues, like the delicate question of visits to Yasukuni Shrine, or whether the rulers in Beijing would carry on being hostile anyway, picking quarrels on other matters, even if the shrine did not exist.”³⁷

Even if there is some confusion in Britain, Abe can be in no illusion about the strength of feeling in East Asia about the Yasukuni shrine. North Korea has not been happy about the prospect of Abe Shinzō becoming Prime Minister.³⁸ Taiwan was enthusiastic, anticipating a tougher line on China.³⁹ However the press in China and in South Korea was cautiously welcoming.⁴⁰ There was little illusion about his position on various issues and the rightwing Seoul paper advised that “Realpolitik Is the Only Way Forward With Japan.”⁴¹ A constant theme was the issue of visits to the Yasukuni shrine; “South Korea has once again reminded Japan that the two sides could hardly mend fences if the latter’s new leader visits Yasukuni Shrine and Tokyo said it understands Seoul’s position.”⁴² Abe, for his part, declined to commit himself either way.⁴³

Eventually, of course, he will have to decide whether to visit or not. While he stays away it is likely that the relative honeymoon with Seoul and Beijing will continue.⁴⁴ If he does make an official visit it is likely that relations will quickly sink to Koizumi-era levels, or below.

However, Yasukuni is symbol, remilitarization is substance. Even if Abe Shinzo refrains from antagonizing Japan’s neighbors by making official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, the substantive issues will remain. Territorial disputes with South Korea and China are unlikely to go away or be resolved. The last of the Comfort Women may die, but their memory will remain. What will happen next time the textbooks are revised? Looming over all these is the issue of remilitarization, of Japan becoming a ‘normal country’, of amending Article Nine, of putting its already considerable military capability on a more offensive posture. Ultimately, the increasingly strong prospect of acquiring nuclear weapons.

It is hugely unfortunate that Abe’s entry into office coincided with North Korea’s first test of a nuclear device. There will be the temptation, and the pressure, for Japan to go nuclear. Some think this is unlikely.⁴⁵ Many are less sanguine.⁴⁶

Japan, with its rich culture, its ‘Peace Constitution’, and its economy still relatively unencumbered by a military-industrial complex, could be a power for peace in East Asia, balancing the US and China, and inspiring the region and the wider world. Its softpower could be formidable. However, there is no indication at the moment that Japan, its ruling elite, or the electorate itself is facing up to the issue of the sacrificing of softpower for the chimera of hardpower and domestic self-absorption.

37 Howell 2006.

38 KCNA 2006.

39 Taiwan Journal 2006.

40 People’s Daily 2006; Park 2006; Lee 2006.

41 Chosun Ilbo 2006a.

42 Ryu 2006.

43 Fackler 2006.

44 Yoshida 2006.

45 Savage 2006; Kim Sue-young 2006.

46 JoongAng Ilbo 2006b; Washington Post 2006.

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NOTE

1 Figures in parentheses are results from emergency polls conducted on July 22 and 23, 2006 (*Asahi Shimbun* note).