

Tokyo International University

Symposium scrutinizes Asia-Pacific geopolitics

Michiru Mekata
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

Together with the Harvard University Asia Center, Tokyo International University held a National Security Symposium at Tokyo's Palace Hotel on Oct. 28. The opening remarks were delivered by Nobuyasu Kurata, chancellor of the Tokyo International University Foundation.

The first speaker, Joseph S. Nye Jr., a Harvard University professor, delivered a speech titled "Is the American Century Over?" Nye didn't think so and he noted the danger of believing in this, "as it could lead to hubris among the Chinese and fear among the Americans." Specifically, he indicated how Americans succumb to psychological cycles of believing they are in decline and that China is about to overtake the position of the U.S. in the world. Nye said that won't happen by distinguishing two different concepts of decline: absolute and relative. He said: "Absolute decline is what happens to a country due to its internal affairs.

In economic terms, the U.S. is doing relatively well and there is productivity. In demographic terms, the U.S. is one of the few advanced countries likely to increase population and maintain its No. 3 ranking in 2050. The new shale revolution will make North America largely self-sufficient in oil and gas by 2020. On top of that, the U.S. is a leader in the research and development of new technologies such as biotech, nano-tech and information.

Moreover, nearly half of the top 100 universities in the world are American universities, and entrepreneurship is also active. All combined, nothing shows the absolute decline of the U.S."

In terms of relative decline, Nye highlighted two questions: "How much of a threat will China pose?" and "Will China exceed the U.S. in terms of

overall power?" He then distinguished three different aspects of power: economic, military and soft. Regarding economic power, he noted that purchasing power parity, which is used to estimate the standard of living, is often used to measure the size of the Chinese economy. "But since this index compares what you can buy with different currencies instead of what you actually pay to exchange one currency for another, it is not a very useful figure for judging power." He then turned to what may happen when the Chinese economy continues to grow at 7.5 percent a year, against the U.S. growth rate of 2.5 percent. "The curves will intersect, with China eventually overtaking the U.S. But an extremely high rate of economic growth tends to return to the average as a country gets richer. Hence, China's growth may drop to around 3.9% in ten years' time." Even in that case, Nye said China may still not be more powerful than the U.S., "because its economy may not be so sophisticated, with a huge per capita income gap remaining against the U.S. Furthermore, China's exported products don't have a high added value, as they are labor-intensive and rely on imported components." In terms of money, another index, Nye said: "China's accumulation of \$4 trillion in reserves also doesn't give it much power. The Chinese Yuan is unlikely to become the world's reserve currency, since it doesn't create a wide, deep capital market assuring currency convertibility or a secure feeling."

Turning to military power, although China has been increasing its spending by double digits, U.S. expenditures are still over four times that of China. China recently launched its first training aircraft carrier, but the U.S. has ten carrier battle groups. There also is a big gap in capital military stock, which currently stands at ten



Joseph S. Nye, Jr.



Yukio Okamoto

(the U.S.) to one (China). "Hence, Chinese military capacity expansion can happen only regionally."

As for soft power, China has been spending generously to create institutes, global TV networks and so on. "But it hasn't obtained a good return on investment, because the Communist Party persists to control society. The government, however, does not generate pop culture and cinema. Furthermore, after staging the successful Shanghai Exposition in 2009, China dared to lock up Liu Xiaobao, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient." Another thing that limits China's soft power is nationalism, which restricts the country from compromising with its neighbors on territorial disputes. "While setting up a Confucianism institution in Manila, China sent ships to force the Philippines out of the disputed sea area," Nye said.

"Nevertheless, we should try to accommodate China within its framework of institutions. I look forward to a 'triangle of stability in East Asia,' which accomplishes a good U.S.-China-Japan relationship."

The second speaker, Yukio Okamoto, senior fellow at the Center for International Stud-

ies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, spoke about Japan's Diplomatic Agenda. He noted that top priority should be placed on restoring Japan's relations with China and Korea.

In terms of the territorial sea and the contiguous zone issue, he said, "Japan cannot accept China's claim that it can freeze and maintain the status quo as it is." Turning to the Senkaku Islands, Okamoto said the U.S. should admit Japan's sovereignty, since the 1972 Japan-U.S. Treaty included that area, and because the U.S. frequently uses the Senkakus as targets for its bombing exercises with Japanese government approval.

Regarding anti-Japan campaigns, Okamoto noted how China is demonizing Japan in Europe and Africa. "China says Japan is a maverick nation still retaining the DNA of WWII militarism. It wants to create a new bilateral super-power relationship with the U.S. But then, it doesn't approve human rights, clamping down on Tibet and Uyghur. It doesn't admit the right to express or to organize associations. Hence, China is trying to exchange its global maverick position with Japan. Japan has to stop such action and explain its own positioning to the world. One bright light is China's recent subdued criticism toward Japan. Another positive sign is Xi Jinping's elimination of his political rivals, allowing him to solidify his power base and act progressively, he said."

"Of greater issue is Japan's relationship with Korea," he continued. "Taking a positive step forward is difficult, because it is unclear what they are after. Korea is shifting the goal post for a solution, without telling us what the real problem is."

Turning to the Yasukuni Shrine issue, Okamoto said that is totally unrelated to the value sense of the people. "Enshrined there are the souls of 2.4 million ordinary citizens and soldiers who were killed in the service of Japan. Yasukuni became a political issue only after priest Nagayoshi



Above, Tokyo International University, based in Kawagoe, Saitama Prefecture, organized a National Security Symposium at the Palace Hotel, Tokyo, on Oct. 28. Right, guest speakers Joseph Nye (center), a professor at Harvard University, and Yukio Okamoto (right), a senior fellow at MIT's Center for International Studies, take part in a panel discussion moderated by Jon Mills, manager of Harvard's Asia Center.



Matsudaira enshrined 14 Class-A war criminals there in 1978. Japan must properly teach such Showa-era history to its high school students. Furthermore, direct dialogues between Japanese and Chinese students should be held with Japanese government support. In that context, it is worrisome that Japan's official development assistance has dropped, the interest of the young people toward other countries is dwindling and fewer people are joining the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers to help poor countries."

In terms of securing safety, "one recent positive act is the government's decision on the right of collective self-defense. Japan can now take proper action when the need arises, such as the Self Defense Forces patrolling the East and China Seas together with the U.S. naval fleet."

Following the speeches, a panel discussion was moderated by Jon Mills, manager of the Harvard University Asia Center.

As to the U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relationship, Nye said developing better relations between China and Japan is difficult, because it's good politics for China to paint Japan as an enemy. "However, projects of common interest might be undertaken in such areas as climate, air pollution and clean

energy. High-level talks and bottom-up projects should also be conducted to build confidence." Okamoto noted that the very presence of the U.S. helps to create a good relationship between Japan and China. "More important politically is to stop China from thinking that it can decouple Japan from the U.S."

Referring to Okamoto's speech, Nye commented that the Senkaku Islands are covered by Article 5 of the Security Treaty and the U.S. does not make any expressions on sovereignty regarding the entire East China Sea, including the Senkaku Islands. "Questions on what happened in the 1890s are regarded as ancient history and are for those involved to discuss among themselves."

As for the Yasukuni Shrine issue, Mills asked Okamoto whether Japan could satisfy its neighbors if the prime minister stops his visits. Okamoto replied that such action may be a practical solution.

Nye then referred to the ambiguity of the South China Sea situation, and noted that the U.S. takes the stance that any disputes thereof are resolved by the U.N. Law of the Sea Conference. Okamoto argued that if the U.S. withdrew from that area, a power vacuum would be created, allowing China to move in. Nye responded that Japan has an inherent right to exercise its right to collective self-defense in that case.

Nye further commented that he places full confidence in the Japanese government's cautiousness, and its actions being fully consistent with the U.N. Charter. "My only concern is that if you want to reassure your neighbors, you should not combine the issue of your right to collective self-defense with visits to Yasukuni Shrine or reviewing the Kono Statement."

In the Q&A session, a question was raised on how to not further aggravate the Japan-China relationship, while responding to the U.S. requests for joint patrols. Okamoto said,

"The South China Sea does not belong to anybody, and the Self Defense Force is free to sail its vessels there. Japan may have hampered itself by worrying about angering China." As to the Japan-Korea relationship, Nye said, "It was a tremendous mistake for Japan to talk about reviewing the Kono Statement. You cannot afford to be at odds with South Korea because of the clear and immediate danger from North Korea. As for the Sankei reporter issue, Korea should drop the case if it wants to live up to its democratic credentials, and be done with it. Meanwhile, Japan should drop the movement to revise the comfort women issue and be done with it. It's time for both countries to start looking ahead." As to the assumption that China has already risen over Japan, Okamoto stated that the living standard of China today is probably on par with that of Japan in the late 70s, and Japan is still a technologically advanced stable society.

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1-13-1 Matobakita, Kawagoe, Saitama 350-1197, Japan