

Taiwan's Strategic Significance to Japan

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The three tenets of Japan's foreign policy toward the Asia-Pacific region are: 1. Promoting diplomacy in alignment with the principles of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty; 2. Strengthening relations with neighboring countries, including China, Korea, ASEAN countries, Australia, and India; 3. Emphasizing universal values such as democracy, human rights, and rule of international law.

Taiwan has great strategic significance to Japan. First, Taiwan straddles the strategic location between the East and South China Seas. In recent years, China has frequently conducted activities in and around these waters, heightening tensions in the region. Second, historically and geographically speaking, Taiwan and Japan have shared long and deep relations. According to a Nielsen survey carried out in 2011, 84 % of the Japanese surveyed responded that "the Taiwanese people are trustworthy." Besides, Japan has also been the Taiwanese people's "favorite country" over the past several years. Taiwan and Japan have seen their annual tourist visits to each other totaling at more than nearly 4 million. After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, the Taiwanese people gave donations of more than 20 billion yen to Japan, topping the list of donor countries. The Japanese people were greatly moved. Finally, democracy and freedom been established and fortified in Taiwan; Taiwan and Japan are bound by these common values.

On the economic front, Japan is Taiwan's second largest trading partner after only China, and Taiwan is Japan's fifth largest trading partner.

In recent years, many economic agreements were signed between the two. The signing of the Fisheries Agreement and Investment Agreement has in particular demonstrated that despite the lack of diplomatic ties between Taiwan and Japan, both sides are still enjoying special closeness. Signed in April, 2013, the Taiwan-Japan Fisheries Agreement was achieved after nearly two decades of negotiations. By eschewing the sovereignty issues surrounding the Senkaku Islands (known in Taiwan as the Diaoyu Islands), Taiwan and Japan were able to define their fishing areas and successfully resolve the major disputes between both sides.

What is most important to Taiwan's economy now is to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement. The Japanese government has stated that it welcomes Taiwan to participate in the TPP. I am convinced that it is mutually beneficial to reach a free trade agreement (FTA) or economic partnership agreement (EPA) between Japan and Taiwan. For that purpose, both sides have already devoted significant efforts.

For more than six years President Ma Ying-jeou's administration has boosted economic and personnel exchanges between Taiwan and China and remarkably eased cross-strait tensions. However, over the same period Taiwan's economic dependence on China has grown significantly (at present China absorbs about 40 % of Taiwan's total exports and about 60 % of its foreign investment).

Meanwhile, China's moves such as increasing its ballistic missiles aimed at Taiwan, continuing

its unilateral activities in the South China Sea, and conducting sea trials of aircraft carrier have continued to tip the cross-strait military balance in Beijing's favor. Official statistics published by the Chinese government show that China's military spending has seen a string of double-digit annual increases over the past two decades.

Regarding unification with Taiwan or at least obstruction of Taiwan independence as its "core interests," China has adopted the so-called "Anti-Secession Law" and has never changed its position on using force against pro-Taiwan independence movements. China intends to impose the "one country, two systems" policy currently governing Hong Kong on Taiwan in the future, but the situation in Taiwan, which is not under Chinese rule, is radically different from that in Hong Kong. China's proposal to rule Taiwan with the "one country, two systems" formula reveals that China lacks understanding and is ignorant of the situation in Taiwan.

Japan has expected China to abide by the norms of international law and to assume the responsibilities of a major country that plays a constructive role on the world stage. However, China's recent behavior in the East and South China Seas shows that China continues to ignore international rules and is pursuing the path to hegemony by expanding its powers.

During a joint press conference held by President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the 2014 APEC, Xi claimed that the two countries "agreed to continue to advance the development of a new model of major-country relations between China and the United States." President Obama's response to this statement remains unclear. Caution needs to be exercised when such a term "a new model of major-country relations" is used, for it calls attention to China's intention to divide the

Pacific Ocean into two parts, with Hawaii as the middle point. China wants to manage the west part of the Pacific Ocean and leave the east side to the U.S. If the U.S. also recognizes this "new model," it may imply that the U.S. also recognizes China's "core interests," which include Taiwan. That is why the usage of such an ambiguous term should be avoided.

When it comes to cross-strait relations, both the U.S. and Japan oppose any unilateral change of the status quo across the Taiwan Strait by either China or Taiwan and expect both sides to resolve cross-strait issues through peaceful means. Both countries have responded to the Chinese assertion that "Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China" by stating that they "respect" or "acknowledge" China's position. Such language indicates that neither has granted *de jure* recognition to China's claim.

The Japanese government has recently decided to recognize, in a limited way, the right of collective self-defense enshrined in the UN Charter. After the reinterpretation, if Japan and the U.S. make progress in their defense cooperation, both countries will be able to enhance deterrence in the event that disputes over the East China Sea or over Taiwan's territorial waters occur. Unlike the U.S., which maintains its relations with Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act, Japan cannot directly engage in operations relating to Taiwan's security. However, if armed conflicts take place, Japan will play a supportive role in U.S. military actions. **BT**

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