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**Commentary** (April 25, 2005)

## Abusing History for Political Ends

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The past few weeks have been marked by the rapid deterioration of relations between China and South Korea on the one hand, and Japan on the other hand. The outward symptoms of the crisis have been daily anti-Japanese demonstrations in the largest cities of China and South Korea. They have also included rude lecturing aimed at Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, by Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jia-bao that Japan remember and "sincerely" repent for its aggressive policies on the Asian continent sixty years ago.

History and history textbooks, territorial disputes and Japan's quest to become a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations are said to be the core of the crisis. A closer look, however, suggests that Beijing and Seoul are using history and territorial disputes to thwart Tokyo's drive for the UN position. Moreover, South Korea's leftist ultranationalist President Roh Moo-hyun, with China's support, is using the crisis to concoct a scheme that would drastically rearrange the security structure in northeast Asia. Roh seems to be aiming for an axis of sorts between the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China with the possible de-facto affiliation of North Korea.

The initial salvo in the Sino-Korean attack involved one (out of eight) junior high school history textbook approved by Japan's Ministry of Education which whitewashes the country's aggressive policies toward its two neighbors and Asia Pacific until 1945. The historical accuracy of some Japanese history books has been an issue not only in Beijing and Seoul. In Japan, over the years, there have been at least four major court cases through which historians such as the recently deceased Saburo Ienaga pressed for the accurate depiction in history books, of facts related to the period involved. However, texts with an ultranationalistic bend continue to be published because in postwar Japan freedom of expression (wrong in the case of false history books) and religion (equally wrong like in the AUM Supreme Truth gang which still operates) are absolute. Japanese school texts are selected by each school district, from a list approved by the Education Ministry which has always included ultranationalistic volumes. The Ministry cannot force schools to choose any particular manual. Most importantly, however, South Korean data indicate that only 0.04 percent of schools have selected controversial books in the past.

The historical accuracy of Japan's aggressive policies toward China, Korea and Asia Pacific until 1945 is documented and beyond dispute. That being said, the present crisis is still a textbook case of China and South Korea using history for political ends.

In China, the wave of "spontaneous" anti-Japanese demonstrations has been facilitated by authorities for reasons of foreign and domestic policy. Beijing is inciting its public (indoctrinated for decades through government-

sponsored history books permeated by communist and ultranationalist oneness) to provide itself with an acceptable pretext to oppose Japan's bid for the Security Council seat. Internally, the demonstrations serve to deflect growing popular discontent (of 800 million farmers, 150 million unemployed, thousands of poorly pensioned veterans etc.) over rampant corruption and growing socio-economic gaps, from the Hu administration, to Japan. Tokyo is chastised for insisting on ownership over a tiny archipelago (China calls Diaoyu, Japan Senkaku) rich in natural gas near Okinawa, for not banning flawed history books, for not apologizing sincerely enough for aggressive policies until 1945 and for prime ministerial visits to the national war memorial.

At the recent signing of a "strategic partnership" with India, premier Wen Jia-bao played the stern teacher brusquely wagging his finger at Japan to not forget history when dealing with its neighbors. The Chinese leader himself was obviously hoping that India would forget the Maoist aggression of the early 1960s, or the Maoist thrust into Tibet in 1951, which forced the Dalai Lama and countless Tibetans into Indian exile, or Deng Xiaoping trying to "teach Vietnam a lesson" for daring to get rid of genocidal Maoist Pol Pot, China's protégé.

The row over history between South Korea and Japan also coincides with a dispute over ownership of a group of rocky outcroppings Koreans call Dok and the Japanese Takeshima, located in the Sea of Japan which Korea calls the East Sea. When Shimane prefecture (within whose jurisdiction Takeshima was when Korea was a colony of Japan until 1945) declared February 25, "Takeshima Day," a move that Tokyo did not initiate and could not prevent, Korean President Roh Moo-hyun on his website, declared a "diplomatic war" against Japan. The Korean leader's bombastic style gained him fame as a human rights lawyer, then the presidency on a nationalistic, anti-American platform. Roh's bluster on Dok, however, is unfortunate since Korean forces have been in firm control of the islet for fifty years. One might add that South Korea has an army of 800,000 soldiers vs. genuinely pacifist Japan's 225,000.

Roh has been using anti-Japanese feelings (the result, in part, of one-sided nationalistic history education) of many Koreans for internal politics as well. Recently he has suggested that a blacklist be compiled of Koreans who cooperated with Japan until 1945. This move is designed to embarrass Park Gyeong-hye the leader of the opposition Grand National Party and daughter of late dictator and founder of the Korean economic "miracle" Park Chung-hee. Park was a graduate of Japan's military academy and, while in power, had a positive relationship with that nation, which greatly benefited Korea.

Beijing and Seoul chastising of Japan for not having expressed sincere remorse for its past aggressive policies simply ignores 18 such apologies, the most memorable ones having been offered by prime ministers Tomiichi Murayama and Keizo Obuchi and emperor Akihito.

China and Korea have also been taking Japan to task for religious visits by some of its prime ministers to Yasukuni Shrine, the country's national war memorial. The criticism is said to be justified because the remains of seven of Japan's wartime leaders are interred at Yasukuni thus, that the dignitaries through their presence, are identifying with Japan's pre-1945 policies. In fact, prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine have usually occurred on August 15, the date of Japan's unconditional surrender. Furthermore, the ashes in question are of leaders who, as class A war criminals, were tried and hanged by the Allies, which included China. Prime Minister Koizumi's explanation that visits at Yasukuni arouse in him feelings

of reflection, contrition and commitment to peace, sounds convincing, particularly when considering Japan's actual policies in the past 55 years.

In an address to the graduating class at the South Korean Air Force Academy in March, President Roh Moo-hyun stated that the alliance with the United States formed during the Cold War era was obsolete. Since then, Roh has been pushing the idea of his nation as the "security balancer" of Northeast Asia. That position can only suggest the end of the security treaty with the United States ( which he denies to pursue )to be followed by a new alignment of South Korea, China and North Korea vs. Japan and the US. Mr. Roh's repeated statements on China, North Korea and the United States, since November 2004 reflect the above tendency. This impression is reinforced by China's instant approval of the Korean proposal. Criticism of the "balancer" scheme in the National Assembly and by some media outlets in Seoul has only had a limited echo.

China and Roh Moo-hyun's South Korea pretend to be oblivious to the fundamental change Japan has undergone since 1945. Peaceful and hardworking Japan has brought prosperity to its people; at the same time, as an economic, technological and foreign aid superpower its largesse, investment and advice have amply benefited its present foes and the rest of the human family, amply qualifying it to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. In stark contrast, the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong gave its people brainwashing, poverty, 30 million dead of starvation in the early 1960s, countless dead in the "Cultural" Revolution in the late 1960s, and to the world, terrorist "people's war" ideology. Since 1980 Beijing has given its people raw capitalism disguised as "socialist market economy" and billionaires carrying Communist Party membership cards. It has supplied the capitalist world with vast reservoirs of cheap labor which amounts to exploitation of its own people and unfair competition to the Third World which it pretends to champion.

It is absolutely necessary for young Chinese and Koreans to be taught about past Japanese aggression. Yet, enlightened nations should use dark historical legacy not as an instrument of perpetual hate against a foe turned friendly pacifist, but as an incentive for the building of a strong society, economy and military making foreign encroachment impossible. The picture of China's growing economic and military capacity ( which includes nuclear arms and three million soldiers ), democratic South Korea's thriving economy and superb military and Japan's consistently constructive policies toward its two neighbors, reinforces the feeling that at present Beijing is playing a high stakes political poker using history as chips and aiming at regional domination. Under Roh Moo-hyun, South Korea seems ready to abandon its postwar allies (US and Japan) in favor of a nation in whose suzerainty it was for 1500 years and a brotherly thugocracy.

Japan, through its cool, dignified yet determined reaction to Chinese and Korean ultranationalistic provocations is worthy of support and respect as well as a permanent seat on the Security Council of the UN. The coming increase in the number of permanent members of the Security Council of the UN is considered in the context of the postwar evolution of the world. If positive contribution to the human family over the last sixty years is one of the criteria for candidacy, Japan is at least as qualified, and probably more, than China, for the position.

If history and territory were the real issues, China should have tried to retrieve Siberia, the enormous area sparsely populated and rich in natural resources it once owned. Instead, recently, Beijing settled its border issues with Moscow, to China's disadvantage, and quietly. Today's anti-Japanese events may easily be followed by an anti-Russian campaign in China's

cities, when the time is right for Beijing. Western bullying after 1839, mainly due to the corruption and incompetence of China's leaders before Mao Zedong, can become the subject of future anti-"colonialism" riots in Beijing and Shanghai. South Korea has not asked its brotherly regime to the north or Russia to apologize for having launched the devastating Korean War, or China for participating in it on the aggressors' side; or Pyongyang for having caused tens of thousands of dead in the south during the terrorist campaign before the war or for kidnapping thousands of South Koreans.

Beijing's reckless use of history to accelerate the realization of its dreams of regional domination through Japan bashing, is one of many reasons disqualifying it for the leadership position it seeks. China's irresponsible gambit and South Korea's proposal for the establishment of a Northeast Asia dominated by a Beijing-Seoul- (Pyongyang) axis is bound to reinforce the US-Japan alliance. For the sake of the nations directly involved in the present crisis and that of Asia Pacific and the world, one hopes that China's irresponsible bullying and South-Korea's proposal for a Hu-Roh-Kim "entente" do not end up resurrecting in Japan forces like the ones which dominated it between 1931-1945.

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