Abe and Fukuda’s Contrasting Approaches to Value-Oriented Diplomacy towards China

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The paper compares contrasting approaches to policy towards China under the administrations of two Japanese prime ministers – Abe Shinzō (2006-2007, since 2012) and Fukuda Yasuo (2007-2008). It argues that while both politicians promoted Sino-Japanese mutually beneficial relations based on common strategic interests, they interpreted this concept in different ways. Under the first Abe administration the concept was treated as an element of purely pragmatic approach to foreign policy and lacked consistency with the value-oriented diplomacy pursued by Foreign Minister Asō Tarō. When Fukuda Yasuo assumed office, values diplomacy stopped being treated as a geopolitical strategy, and the idea of mutually beneficial relations based on common strategic interests instead gained a value-oriented component. The very same values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law that had been employed by Abe to counterbalance China served Fukuda to seek common ground for constructive dialogue, thus becoming a foundation for an unprecedented rapprochement between both countries in 2008. I argue that under the second Abe administration the concept of Sino-Japanese mutually beneficial relations based on common strategic interests was once again disjoined from the value-oriented diplomacy, and it thus proved counter-effective in rebuilding friendly contacts between both countries.

Values as Diplomatic Instruments

According to political realists, universal values do not really exist, as they are nothing more than camouflaged interests of the most powerful states. Representatives of the liberal school of IR theory disagree by emphasizing gradual expansion on global level of such values as liberal democracy or free-market economy. Regardless of whether some values can be considered as universal or not, soft-power theory indicates that they can constitute valuable assets that produce attraction of one country to another. According to Joseph Nye, political values, along with culture and foreign policies, are an important source of soft power, provided the country that promotes them ‘lives up to them at home and abroad’.

Due to the fact that soft-power resources are beyond direct control of governments, attractiveness of a given country as a cultural or developmental model only to little degree results

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from a conscious public diplomacy. Values that have positive connotations in one part of the world can be perceived differently by the representatives of other civilizations. This could suggest the necessity for a careful selection of target countries for soft power-based policy, but public diplomacy may be rendered futile or even counter-effective if it is inconsistent. No one treats seriously a government that behaves contrary to the values it promotes or tries to strategically apply different values in distinct parts of the world. As emphasized by Joseph Nye: ‘In today’s world, information is not scarce but attention is, and attention depends on credibility. Government propaganda is rarely credible.’

Even if a country lives up to the values it promotes, its public diplomacy may bring detrimental results if it is found excessively obtrusive. After all, no one likes being forced to absorb alien ways of thinking. Instead of being imposed in a top-down style, soft power has to arise from civil society in a bottom-up fashion. Yet, in authoritarian regimes gaining direct access to the civil society, assuming that one even exists, may be problematic or even impossible. In such cases, it might be a better solution to find understanding on common interests with the leaders of an undemocratic regime, and subsequently try to gradually transmit one’s values to the society.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned difficulties in carefully selecting adequate methods of public diplomacy, the very sense of soft power-based policies has been called into question. It has been emphasized that soft power cannot fully substitute for hard-power instruments of foreign policy. As pointed out by Colin S. Gray: ‘Soft power tends to co-opt the readily co-optable, while hard military power is necessary for more demanding missions.’ Moreover, there is no decisive evidence that emulating a set of values of country A by country B may be of any help for country A in shaping the policy of country B. In fact, there are proofs that opposite can be true. After all, absorption of the values of Western colonial powers by Japan in the Meiji period eventually led to clash of interests and war between Japan and the very states it tried to imitate.

Aware of the limitations to applying soft-power approach as an analytical tool, I examined the role of value-based diplomacy in Japan’s China policy as interpreted by Abe Shinzō and Fukuda Yasuo. Under the first Abe Cabinet (2006-2007) Tokyo tried to attain rapprochement with China separately from pursuing value-oriented diplomacy that was aimed at different countries. This discrepancy was eliminated under the Fukuda administration (2007-2008) who incorporated elements of values diplomacy to the concept of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests with Beijing. Instead of trying to contain China, Fukuda worked hard to elaborate common understanding of universal values with the Chinese authorities. As this approach, however, required mutual trust between top leaders of both countries, it was abandoned by

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Fukuda’s successors. Abe’s return to treating Western values as a tool for encircling China since 2012 eventually deprived the concept of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests of its soft-power dimension.

**The First Abe Administration’s Value-Oriented Diplomacy and China Policy**

Abe Shinzō, who assumed the office of prime minister of Japan in September 2006, considered value-oriented diplomacy to be one of the pillars of the policy of his government. The concept of value-oriented diplomacy was elaborated by Administrative Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Yachi Shōtarō. It was an attempt at overcoming intra-ministerial sectionalism between distinct regional bureaus in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and formulating a general diplomatic strategy for Japan.\(^7\) As the concept ideally fitted rightist convictions of Prime Minister Abe and Foreign Minister Asō Tarō, it was quickly embraced by them as a means of promoting Japanese influence in the world.

Asō emphasized that diplomacy was gradually becoming a skill of providing a new identity for the Japanese people.\(^8\) As he stressed during the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar in November 2006:

First of all there is “value oriented diplomacy,” which involves placing emphasis on the “universal values” such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy as we advance our diplomatic endeavors.

And second, there are the successfully budding democracies that line the outer rim of the Eurasian continent, forming an arc. Here Japan wants to design an “arc of freedom and prosperity”. Indeed, I believe that we must create just such an arc.\(^9\)

Asō explained that Japan could be already proud of its contribution to the world peace and economic development. He stressed that some of the elements of democratic values, such as the rule of law, observance of contracts or easily accessible education had been inculcated in Japanese culture and civilization long before the Meiji era. As a result, in this sphere Japan was entitled to be considered as a veteran who was ready to share its experience with the developing countries. Asō emphasized that after the Second World War Japan added to this set of universal principles the rule of pacifism, which made the Self-Defence Forces one of the least aggressive military organizations in the world.\(^10\)

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\(^10\) Asō Tarō, *Jiyū to Han’ei..., 29-32.*
As for the geographical scope of the ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’, Asō stated it comprised the countries at the outer edge of Eurasia that experienced significant changes after the end of Cold War. This vast region stretched from Northeast Asia, through Southeast Asia, Central Asia and Middle East, up to Central and Eastern Europe. Asō promised to cooperate with befriended democracies, such as the US, Australia, India, or EU and NATO member states, in order to promote Western values in this unstable geographical belt. As he emphasized:

(...) democracy is a never-ending marathon. And it is the first five kilometers or so that are widely understood to be the most difficult part of all.

It is at this stage that young democracies produce a tremendous amount of what we might call “growth hormones.” Those can be channeled towards creating systems which settle the society down. But within these early years there is also the case that the impulse for destruction prevails.\textsuperscript{11}

Asō perceived Japan’s role as the one of an ‘escort runner’ who would support the democratization processes in the developing countries.\textsuperscript{12}

The concept of ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ was a rare example of a strategic vision of diplomacy proposed by Japan. Asō admitted that he wanted to enlarge the geographical scope of Japan’s foreign policy and overcome the habit of short-term thinking by Japanese decision makers. In order to do that, he needed ‘credentials’, which he found in the concept of value-oriented diplomacy.\textsuperscript{13} He was convinced that Japan possessed large deposits of soft power, such as rich traditions of \textit{zen}, \textit{bunraku}, \textit{kabuki} or tea ceremony, but also an attractive popular culture based on \textit{manga}, \textit{anime}, J-pop and J-fashion. Asō emphasized that the fact that Japan generally enjoyed a cheerful, warm and cool image among other nations much helped Japanese diplomats in conducting international negotiations. He stressed that due to democratization trends in the world, the public opinion became a significant determinant of foreign policy making. As a result, as claimed by Asō, diplomacy turned into a competition to improve a brand image of one’s country.\textsuperscript{14}

Both the geographical scope and the democratic character of the promoted values seemed to indicate that the ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ was a concept devised to contain the authoritarian regime in Beijing. Asō stressed that he did not lean to the ‘China threat’ theory, but rather welcomed the rise of China’s position on the international scene. He was convinced that fast economic growth would lead to the strengthening of middle class in China, and thus to gradual increase in their demand for freedom. As Asō emphasized, through mutual competition both Japan and China could develop, which was beneficial for the whole Asian continent. Nevertheless, he warned that in order to limit frictions in the future, such a competition needed to be based on

\textsuperscript{11} Asō Tarō, ‘Speech by Mr. Taro Aso...’
\textsuperscript{12} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{13} Asō Tarō, \textit{Jiyū to Han’ei...}, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibidem, 283-286.
commonly shared rules. For that reason, Asō appealed to Beijing to increase transparency of military spending and political system.\(^\text{15}\)

Taking into account the fact that Japan based its diplomatic strategy on Western, not Asian, values, it is not surprising that China treated the whole concept with suspicion. Beijing was concerned with the strengthening of ties in security sphere between Japan and other democratic powers in the Asia-Pacific region: the US, Australia and India.\(^\text{16}\) Nevertheless, China’s criticism of the idea of ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ was mitigated by Abe’s policy of rapprochement with Beijing. Yachi Shōtarō explained that he intentionally did not include Russia to the arc not to turn it into a circle surrounding China. This strategy proved to be effective, and initially Beijing did not voice strong objections against the idea of value-oriented diplomacy during bureaucratic-level negotiations with Japan.\(^\text{17}\)

Concurrently to the formulation of the idea of value-oriented diplomacy, Japan started preparing the ground for improvement of relations with China after a series of crises during the premiership of Koizumi Jun’ichirō.\(^\text{18}\) These efforts were conducted by two groups – MOFA bureaucrats and Japanese politicians. Whilst the former perceived the problem mostly from the perspective of national interests of Japan, the latter were largely motivated by their political interests.

It was Foreign Administrative Vice Minister Yachi Shōtarō who in May 2005 visited Beijing in order to negotiate conditions for a breakthrough in bilateral contacts after the anticipated Koizumi’s stepping down from office. Yachi took part in the first round of meetings on the level of high-ranking officials from foreign ministries of both countries, which were called a ‘general policy dialogue’ (sōgō seisaku taiwa) by the Japanese and a ‘strategic dialogue’ (zhanlüe duihua) by the Chinese. Whilst the talks did not immediately bring any significant results, they enabled Yachi to establish a link of trust and understanding with Chinese Foreign Vice Minister Dai Bingguo. In 2006 Yachi invited Chinese delegation to the Tsukioka warm spring in Niigata Prefecture, and Dai reciprocated by inviting Japanese diplomats to his home village in Guizhou Province. Thanks to this mutual exchange both parties could frankly share their views on bilateral problems. Yachi received an impression that the future of Sino-Japanese relations would depend on the approach of the next prime minister to the Yasukuni problem.\(^\text{19}\)

Whilst MOFA officials were conducting negotiations on the bureaucratic level, several groups of Japanese politicians started seeking connections to China in order to realize their own political goals. Diplomatic crisis in Sino-Japanese relations became an ideal opportunity for Koizumi’s opponents to voice their dissatisfaction with the government’s policy. In July 2006 Ozawa Ichirō,

\(^{16}\) Li Xiushi, Riben Xinhaoshouzhuyi Zhanlūe Yanjiu [A Study on Japan's Neo-Conservatism Strategy] (Beijing: Shishi Chubanshe, 2010), 155-161.
\(^{17}\) Yachi Shōtarō, Takahashi Masayuki, op.cit., 144-145.
\(^{18}\) From 2001 to 2006 Prime Minister Koizumi visited Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on a yearly basis. As the shrine commemorated all Japanese who died for their country, including class-A war criminals convicted by the Tokyo Tribunal, each visit provoked strong protests from Beijing and Seoul.
leader of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), visited Beijing and agreed with President Hu Jintao to establish an Organization of Exchange and Consultation (Kōryū Kyōgi Kikō) between the DPJ and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As emphasized by Ozawa: ‘The relations based solely on economic interests are fragile. True Sino-Japanese relations cannot be built without a foundation of ties of confidence between the nations and the leaders of both countries.’ Not only Ozawa was eager to appeal for Sino-Japanese reconciliation in order to gain political capital in Japan. Also anti-mainstream factions in the LDP could possibly approach China to undermine the Koizumi/Abe camp’s position in the ruling party.

Aware of this fact, LDP executives were continuing high-level dialogue with Beijing. In January 2004 LDP and Kōmeitō initiated Sino-Japanese Conference of Exchange Between the Ruling Parties (Nicchū Yotō Kōryū Kyōgikai) with the CCP. As emphasized by LDP Policy Affairs Research Council Chair Nukaga Fukushirō, a series of meeting between the politicians of both countries was supposed to enable frank exchange of opinions on difficult topics and finding common interests for the construction of win–win relations. Due to history problems-related frictions between China and Japan, however, the first meeting of the Conference took place as late as February 2006. During discussions with Chinese politicians, LDP Policy Affairs Research Council Chair Nakagawa Hidenao stressed that Sino-Japanese rapprochement required bearing the risk by decision makers of both countries, which was futile through bureaucratic-level negotiations alone. In March 2006 representatives of seven Sino-Japanese friendship associations visited Beijing. During conversation with the chairperson of the Japanese delegation, former Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō, President Hu Jintao emphasized that Sino-Japanese cooperation would be beneficial for both sides, whilst mutual frictions were counterproductive. As the most severe problem Hu once again indicated Japanese prime minister’s visits to Yasukuni.

Both the bureaucratic and political-level contacts with China convinced Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzō, who was considered as the most prominent candidate for the prime minister’s office, to apply a pragmatic approach towards Beijing. Abe held rightist convictions and he supported the head of government’s visits to Yasukuni. On the other hand, Abe was aware of

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23 The seven Japan-China friendship organizations included: Japan-China Friendship Association (Nihon-Chūgoku Yūkō Kyōkai), Japan-China Association (Nicchū Kyōkai), Japanese Association for the Promotion of International Trade (Nihon Kokusai Bōeki Sokushin Kyōkai), Japan-China Friendship Parliamentary League (Nicchū Yūkō Giin Renmei), Japan-China Friendship Hall (Nicchū Yūkō Kaikan), Japan-China Economic Association (Nicchū Keizai Kyōkai) and Japan-China Cultural Exchange Association (Nihon-Chūgoku Bunka Kōryū Kyōkai).
the gravity of Sino-Japanese economic exchange, and he knew that his nationalistic stance could be used against him during the LDP presidential race. As a result, he applied a ‘strategy of ambiguity’ (*aimai senryaku*) – he refused to clearly specify whether he would visit Yasukuni as prime minister or not. Yachi Shōtarō transmitted to Chinese diplomats that in fact this statement meant that Abe would refrain from paying homage to the controversial shrine if only China allowed him to visit Beijing. Eventually, just as predicted by Nakagawa Hidenao, Sino-Japanese rapprochement was achieved thanks to shouldering the risk by top leaders of both countries. Abe’s ‘strategy of ambiguity’ exposed him to criticism both from the left and from the right wing of the Japanese political scene, whilst Chinese authorities gave a credit of trust to Abe despite his nationalistic tendencies.

In October 2006, only two weeks after assuming office, Abe Shinzō paid a visit in Beijing, which was dubbed an ‘ice-breaking trip’ (*pobing zhi lǔ*) by the Chinese media. Welcoming him, Hu Jintao emphasized that common interests and friendship between both countries contributed not only to the development of China and Japan, but also to the peace, stability and wellbeing of Asia and entire world. In mid-April 2007 Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Tokyo, which came to be known as an ‘ice-thawing trip’ (*rongbing zhi lǔ*). What is significant, during his speech in the Japanese Diet Wen appreciated Japan’s apologies for the atrocities committed during the Second World War and thanked Japan for its contribution to the economic development and modernization of China.

Concurrently to Abe’s visit to China and Wen’s to Japan, diplomats from both countries started talks on regulating more formally the framework for bilateral cooperation. The Chinese side proposed a concept of ‘win-win relations’, which led to elaboration of the idea of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests (Japanese *sennyakuteki gokei kankei*, Chinese *zhanlū de huhui guanxi*). As explained by Yachi Shōtarō, both sides promised to focus on finding mutually beneficial solutions to concrete problems, such as the dispute over delimitation of exclusive economic zones in the East China Sea, pollution of natural environment or disposal of chemical weapon abandoned by the Japanese Imperial Army after the Second World War. Japanese Ambassador in Beijing Miyamoto Yūji, in turn, emphasized that the new concept was to embed Sino-Japanese relations in a broader context. Cooperation between both powers would exceed simple bilateral relations and would contribute to resolution of regional and global problems, such as security issues in East Asia, pandemics or climate changes.

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26 Yan Shengyi, *Dangdai Zhongguo Waijiao [Contemporary Diplomacy of China]* (Shanghai: Fudan Daxue Chubanshe, 2009), 279.
27 On the other hand, Wen skipped, presumably unintentionally, one sentence on appreciation of the peaceful development of postwar Japan as an economic power. See: Shimizu Yoshikazu, *‘Chūgoku Mondai’ no Uchimaku [Inside of the ‘China Problem’]* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2008), 24-25.
28 Yachi Shōtarō, Takahashi Masayuki, op.cit., 41-42.
29 Miyamoto Yūji, op.cit., 162-163.
Values in Relations with China under the Fukuda Administration

Whilst the concept of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests was created as a result of a very pragmatic stance towards China, it evolved towards absorbing some elements of values diplomacy. In September 2007 Abe Shinzō stepped down from office and was replaced by Fukuda Yasuo. The new prime minister was considered as a pro-Beijing politician, which explains why he supported a policy of three ‘no’s’: no to visits in Yasukuni, no to further engagement in value-oriented diplomacy (at least as a geopolitical strategy), and no to treating China as a threat.³⁰ In January 2008 the creator of the concept of value-oriented diplomacy Yachi Shōtarō ceded the post of administrative vice minister of foreign affairs to Yabunaka Mitoji. Under these circumstances, the idea of the ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ stopped being brought to the fore, and it was the concept of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests that instead started gaining a pronounced value-oriented component. Japan’s allegiance to the values of human rights, democracy and free market remained intact, but they were no longer linked with any geopolitical vision that could create an impression of encircling China.

Fukuda conveyed his new interpretation of the mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests to China during his visit in the PRC in December 2007, dubbed by the media a ‘spring-welcoming trip’ (yingchun zhi lǜ). At a speech at the Peking University, the Japanese prime minister emphasized:

Japan and China are by no means tied though only our benefits and interests. We are neighboring countries that have enjoyed a long history of exchange with each other, sharing each other’s cultures and traditions, and within that we have come to hold a common foundation that was created through interactions with each other. For example, if we look at the expression “the Meiji Restoration,” which was the dawn of Japan’s transformation into a modern state, we find that the roots lie in ancient Chinese texts. The fact that the numerous exchange activities that took place this year in the Japan-China Exchange Year of Culture and Sports resulted in strong feelings of affinity on both the Japanese and Chinese sides is something that, would you not agree, was possible because of a shared foundation between our two countries?

It is also critical for us to both work towards the common values of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. I see it as important for us to give serious consideration to the common foundation and values that deeply underlies both Japan and China.³¹

Whilst Abe’s visit to China in 2006 had been cordial, yet business-like, Fukuda managed to gain the sympathy of Chinese decision makers. By visiting Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, he put

emphasis on cultural similarities between both countries. At the same time, he skilfully embedded the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Asian traditions. The very same values that had been strategically employed by Abe to counterbalance China served Fukuda to seek common ground for constructive dialogue.

As emphasized by Japanese Ambassador to China Miyamoto Yūji, cordial relations and sincere understanding between the leaders of both countries were a necessary prerequisite for the mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests to function properly. According to Miyamoto, it was the ties of trust on the highest level that had a potential to overcome many bilateral problems that would have been otherwise unsolvable and gradually change the mutual perception between both nations.  

The culmination of Sino-Japanese rapprochement took place during Hu Jintao’s visit to Tokyo at the beginning of May 2008, which was baptized by the media as a ‘trip of warm spring’ (nuanchun zhi lü). Referring to an invitation of three thousand Japanese youth by CCP Secretary General Hu Yaobang in the 1980s, the Chinese president agreed with Prime Minister Fukuda to organize in the following four years on an annual basis mutual visits of four thousand young Chinese and Japanese. As in the mid-1980s Hu Jintao had been first secretary of the Communist Youth League of China, he remembered well Hu Yaobang’s initiative. In fact, during his visit to Japan in 2008 Hu Jintao asked for a meeting with three former members of the youth group he had made acquaintance with during their visit to Beijing in 1984. Moreover, one year earlier, in June 2007, he had invited to Beijing 200 former members of that group together with their children. Hu’s insistence on reviving closer cultural exchange with Japan indicated that the ties of trust between Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro and CCP Secretary General Hu Yaobang bore fruits in the long run by influencing the posture of Chinese decision makers of younger generation.

In the Joint Statement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Comprehensive Promotion of a ‘Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests’, Japan and China indicated five pillars of bilateral dialogue and cooperation:

1. Enhancement of mutual trust in the political area;
2. Promotion of people-to-people and cultural exchange as well as sentiments of friendship between the people of Japan and China;
3. Enhancement of mutually beneficial cooperation;
4. Contribution to the Asia-Pacific region;

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32 Miyamoto Yūji, op.cit., 143-144.
33 Yan Shengyi, op.cit., 279-283.
5. Contribution to the resolution of global issues.\textsuperscript{35}

Yachi Shōtarō admitted that initially Japanese MOFA treated with suspicion Chinese proposal to sign the fourth Sino-Japanese agreement (following the 1972 Joint Communiqué, 1978 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, and 1998 Joint Declaration on Building a Partnership of Friendship and Cooperation for Peace and Development). Tokyo feared that Beijing would include in the text of the new treaty an assertion that Japanese politicians should not visit the Yasukuni Shrine or that Japan supported China in the dispute over the status of Taiwan. Nevertheless, these concerns proved groundless. Japanese MOFA highly evaluated China’s readiness to assume together with Japan responsibility for peace, stability and development of East Asia and to stop insisting to the same degree as before on solving history problems.\textsuperscript{36} Moreover, within the framework of the first pillar both sides agreed:

To engage in close cooperation to develop greater understanding and pursuit of basic and universal values that are commonly accepted by the international community and to deepen once again understanding of culture that Japan and China have cultivated and shared together over their long history of exchange.\textsuperscript{37}

Yachi emphasized that it was the first time that China acknowledged the importance of universal values in an official treaty with Japan. Up till that moment, Beijing was reluctant to mention universal values in a treaty, as it considered it improper to meddle ideology with diplomacy. This time, however, China showed more flexibility, which was welcomed by Japan as a considerable progress.\textsuperscript{38}

In fact, there were signs that friendly relations between Hu Jintao and Fukuda Yasuo had been already bringing results in the sphere of common understanding of universal values before PRC president’s visit to Japan. In March 2008 riots in Lhasa led to more than ten civilian victims. In mid-April 2008 LDP Secretary General Ibuki Bunmei transmitted to Hu a letter from Fukuda, in which the Japanese prime minister asked Hu to start a dialogue with Tibetan leader Dalai Lama. Concerned with the reaction of international community before the Beijing Olympic Games, Hu Jintao immediately answered to Fukuda’s request and commenced talks with the Tibetan side. This conciliatory posture towards Japan was continued after Hu’s visit in Tokyo. In mid-May 2008 Chinese government for the first time accepted Japanese rescue forces that provided humanitarian aid for the victims of a large-scale earthquake in Sichuan Province. Whilst the situation was not yet ripe enough to agree to participation of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces in disaster relief activities, it was a symbolic step towards reconciliation between both nations.\textsuperscript{39}


\textsuperscript{36} Yachi Shōtarō, Takahashi Masayuki, op.cit., 42-43.

\textsuperscript{37} Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, ‘Joint Statement...’

\textsuperscript{38} Yachi Shōtarō, Takahashi Masayuki, op.cit., 43.

\textsuperscript{39} Shiroyama Hidemi, op.cit., 30-45.
Even greater success was convincing China to signing an agreement on joint exploitation of natural resources in the East China Sea. Appreciating Prime Minister Fukuda’s contribution to the amelioration of bilateral relations, President Hu Jintao agreed the joint development zone to stretch both east and west of median line, thus encompassing both the contentious region and a part of the undisputed Chinese exclusive economic zone. Nevertheless, Hu was aware of the fact that his conciliatory posture towards Japan was not shared by the whole Chinese society. In fact, joint development of East China Sea resources had been already agreed upon before the PRC president’s visit to Japan, but Beijing insisted this fact not to be announced publicly until mid-June 2008. Hu Jintao probably did not want this concession to be linked directly with his person.

The course of events showed that Hu’s concerns were well grounded. Chinese ‘weak-kneed diplomacy’ met with violent protests from Chinese nationalists who organized demonstrations in front of the Japanese embassy in Beijing. Yielding to popular demands, Chinese authorities eventually postponed negotiations with Japan on the details of Japanese companies’ participation in exploitation of the Chunxiao/Shirakaba gas field in the East China Sea. This event showed that it was much easier to find understanding on common values on the level of decision makers than whole societies. Administrative Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Yabunaka Mitoji lamented that Prime Minister Fukuda’s sudden resignation in September 2008 further hindered implementation of the agreement and prevented turning the East China Sea into the sea of peace, friendship and cooperation.

Abe’s China Policy under the Second Cabinet
In September 2012 Abe Shinzō was once more elected as LDP leader, and three months later he led his party to a landslide victory in election to the House of Representatives. Asō Tarō, who had promoted the concept of ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ as foreign minister in the first Abe Cabinet now assumed the post of vice premier and minister of finance, and Yachi Shōtarō, who had served as administrative vice minister of foreign affairs in 2005-2008, became new advisor to the prime minister (and secretary of the National Security Council since January 2014).

Just as six years earlier, Abe came to power at the moment of severe deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations. In the autumn of 2010 a wave of anti-Japanese demonstrations swept over China after detainment of a captain of a Chinese fishing boat that collided with a Japanese patrol vessel in the East China Sea. Two years later another Sino-Japanese diplomatic crisis occurred following Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko’s decision to nationalize three islands of the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyutai Archipelago. In many Chinese cities Japanese tourists were assaulted in the streets, Japanese cars were demolished, Japanese shops, restaurants and even factories were

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41 Shiroyama Hidemi, op.cit., 248.
ravaged. These events once again brutally exposed weak effects of Japan’s public diplomacy towards China and contributed to a radical decrease in mutual sympathy between both nations. The fruits of Sino-Japanese rapprochement under the Abe and Fukuda administrations seemed to have been completely nullified. As emphasized by Japanese Ambassador in Beijing Niwa Uichirō, the fact that Japanese prime ministers changed on an annual basis further hindered building ties of trust between the leaders of both countries.\(^{44}\)

As soon as Abe reassumed the prime minister’s office, he stressed the need to return to the concept of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests. Aware of the need for improving relations with Beijing, he nominated Sino-Japanese Friendship Parliamentary League Chair Kōmura Masahiko as LDP vice president. In his book *Towards a New Japan*, published in January 2013, Abe emphasized:

> What is mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests? Sino-Japanese relations have been characterised by a ‘priority of friendship’. It means that in case of circumstances that ‘infringed on friendship’ there has been a tendency to maintain friendly relations even at the expense of national interests of Japan. Despite the fact that friendship should be a method for achieving a goal, which is raison d’état, it has become a goal in itself. That is a reversal of the original intention. As within the framework of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests both countries persistently act according to their national interests, and they possess a joint sea border, it is natural that from time to time there are conflicts of interests. Nevertheless, while through investments in China Japan gains benefits, at the same time it provides employment to over 10 million Chinese. In other words, these relations are based on interdependency. Resolving political problems based on a mutual conviction that you cannot break these contacts – that is real mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests. The current behaviour of China – attacking or boycotting Japanese businesses in order to achieve a political gain which is the Senkaku Islands – destroys economic relations. This cannot be called mutually beneficial contacts. Therefore, I want to once again appeal for the return to mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests.\(^{45}\)

Just as during his first premiership, Abe was treating the concept of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests as a mere pragmatic policy. This time, however, he was unwilling to make a secret deal with China similar to his ‘strategy of ambiguity’ six years earlier. Instead, he once again started treating value-oriented diplomacy as a way of containing China. One day after formation of his cabinet, Abe conceived a concept of ‘Asia’s democratic

\(^{43}\) Yabunaka Mitoji, *Kokka no Meiun* [Fate of the State] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2010), 149-153.


security diamond’ that encompassed Japan, India, Australia and the US state of Hawaii. Pointing to the China threat, he emphasized that the four states of the geopolitical diamond should ‘safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific’. During his visit to ASEAN countries in January 2013 Abe announced ‘Five Principles to Build the Future’:

The first is protecting freedom of thought, expression, and speech in this region where two oceans meet. These are universal values that humanity has gained and they must be allowed to flower to the fullest.  

The second is ensuring that the seas, which are the most vital commons to us all, are governed by laws and rules, not by might.  

The third principle is pursuing free, open, interconnected economies as part of Japan's diplomacy. We must secure the power of networking by bringing our national economies closer together through flows of trade and investment, people, and goods.  

The fourth principle, in connection with this, is bringing about ever more fruitful intercultural ties among the peoples of Japan and this region, something that I will continue to work for.  

The fifth and final principle is promoting exchange among the younger generations who will carry our nations into the future.

Obviously, the second principle was a reference to incursions by Chinese ships to Japanese waters in the East China Sea. This time it was more evident that the value-oriented diplomacy became a mere pretext to strategically encircle China. For example, apart from the US, Australia and India, Abe strengthened security dialogue with the undemocratic Russia and Vietnam. Soon after assuming office he launched a wide-scale diplomatic offensive by visiting until May 2013 Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, United States, Mongolia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Turkey. Moreover, by formulating the concept of ‘proactive pacifism’ (sekkyokuteki heiwashugi) Abe emphasized the need for strengthening defence capabilities of Japan. As he stressed in his book, it was physical force, not negotiations, that would be important in protecting the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands.

It is not surprising that Beijing perceived Japan’s increased activity on the international scene as an attempt at containing China. Despite the fact that Abe insisted on holding a summit meeting with China, President Xi Jinping was unwilling to meet Japanese prime minister unless Japan

49 Abe Shinzō, Atarashii Kuni e..., 248.
agreed to concessions on the history problems and the territorial dispute in the East China Sea. In June 2013, soon after Abe’s visit to Poland where he appealed for the strengthening of Japan’s ties with Central Europe, News of the Communist Party of China website published an article in which it severely criticized Tokyo’s policy. Abe’s ‘value-oriented paranoia’ was compared to a Cold-War thinking that run counter the interests of East Asian countries and could negatively influence peace, stability and cooperation in the region. China called Abe and Asō to abandon their ‘short-sighted’ approach and start more constructive discussions with the neighbouring countries. Following the nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in September 2012 and Abe’s visit to Yasukuni in December 2013, Chinese diplomats all over the world initiated a large-scale anti-Japanese campaign. While Sino-Japanese relations started improving since the end of 2014, atmosphere in bilateral contacts is still tense. From Beijing’s point of view, Abe’s stance on ‘proactive pacifism’ and history issues constitutes a clear contradiction of his insistence to return to the mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests.

Conclusions

Comparison of Abe and Fukuda’s approaches to using values in policy towards China may be helpful in drawing general conclusions on the efficiency of soft-power approaches to diplomacy. Value-oriented diplomacy may constitute a double-edged sword, depending on a country it is targeting. The first Abe Cabinet’s discourse on the ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ was attractive for the developing countries that pursued the path of democracy, but it raised doubts over Japan’s sincerity in promoting rapprochement with China. Sino-Japanese breakthrough in 2006 was made possible thanks to China’s eagerness to improve relations with Japan and Abe’s willingness to employ ‘strategy of ambiguity’ regarding his visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. As such, the concept of Sino-Japanese mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests was a fruit of a strictly pragmatic choice, unrelated to Foreign Minister Asō’s slogans of value-oriented diplomacy. Initially Beijing was willing to turn a blind eye on this inconsistency, but in the long run diplomacy based on soft power has to be coherent in order to achieve its aims.

As soon as Abe was replaced with pro-Beijing Fukuda, the idea of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests started gaining a strong value-oriented component, whilst the discourse on the ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ stopped being brought to the fore. Paradoxically, the very same values that had been referred to by Abe as a way of counterbalancing China were used by Fukuda, together with the elements of traditional culture and philosophy, to stress affinity between both nations. This new approach made Japan more credible

in the eyes of Chinese decision makers, which led to culmination of Sino-Japanese reconciliation in 2008.

Another factor that facilitated Sino-Japanese rapprochement were the ties of trust between the leaders of both countries. In fact, Japan’s value-oriented diplomacy towards China seemed to bring better results when it targeted decision makers rather than the whole society. Establishing interpersonal connections with Chinese politicians through mutual exchange at an early stage of their careers proved to be effective in the long run. Whilst the promotion of Sino-Japanese cultural exchange brought demise upon Hu Yaobang, it bore fruits one generation later. Hu Jintao’s affinity towards Japan to some extent can be linked with his involvement in organization of the visit of three thousand Japanese youth to Beijing in 1984. On the other hand, protests against the joint development of natural resources in the East China Sea proved that public diplomacy could do little to change anti-Japanese sentiments that were deeply rooted in the Chinese society.

The development of Sino-Japanese relations under the second Abe Cabinet indicates that the concept of mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests was far less effective when it was deprived of its value-oriented component. A series of diplomatic clashes in 2010 and 2012 undermined Fukuda and Hu’s efforts to strengthen mutual understanding in Sino-Japanese relations. After returning to power, Abe tried to re-establish regular exchange on top level between both countries, but he was unwilling to go as far as Fukuda in interpreting the mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests. Instead, he once again separated that concept from his value-oriented diplomacy. In fact, treating values as a part of geopolitical strategy had more in common with propaganda than soft power-based approach. This move was interpreted by China as a step backwards. The inconsistency between Abe’s eagerness to approach Beijing and his attempts at containing China called into question Japan’s sincerity in promoting mutual friendship. Abe’s lack of success in persuading Beijing to constructive dialogue proved that adding hard-power components to soft power-based diplomacy was self-contradictory and ineffective.

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