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Sino-Japanese Diffidation in 1958: from the perspective of domestic internationalism-nationalism confrontation

Jing Sun^{a,b*}

^a*School of International Studies, Peking University, No. 5 Yiheyuan Road, Haidian District, Beijing 100871, China, +86 10 62751201*

^b*Graduate School of Public Policy, The University of Tokyo, Hongo 7-3-1, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-8654, Japan, +81 3-3812-2111*

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Abstract

One of the most important time point in the bilateral relations between China and Japan in the 1950s is the Sino-Japanese diffidation in 1958, or more specifically speaking, Chinese unilateral declaration of cutting off all connections with Japan, which also marks the abandonment of Chinese central government of the “People’s diplomacy” policy towards Japan. By digging into detailed process of the policy-making, this research tries to offer some new domestic explanation for this vital moment.

Based on the historical facts, anti-Japanese nationalism in the 1950s existed and grew gradually into some power confronting the internationalism-based “People’s diplomacy” policy made by Chinese central government. Confrontation between the internationalism-based “People’s diplomacy” and nationalism against Japan gradually made Chinese government realize that growing pressures from domestic anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiments could never be ignored any longer and Chinese government finally chose to frontally

* Jing SUN. Tel.: +81 080-2249-2673; +86 152-1062-6718.

E-mail address: sjcatfour@gmail.com



respond to domestic nationalistic voices by giving up “People’s diplomacy” policy, and stating to cut off all communications with Japan, which is the Sino-Japanese diffidation in 1958.

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1. Introduction

Regardless of all achievements in the developments of bilateral relations between China and Japan, Chinese government chose to give up the “People’s diplomacy” policy towards Japan by unilaterally cut off all connections with Japan in May 9th, 1958, defined as Sino-Japanese diffidation in this research.

This vital incident marks an important time point in the Sino-Japanese relations in the 1950s and also brings up a question of great worth for research: why did the Chinese government choose to abandon its “People’s diplomacy” policy toward Japan with the diffidation in 1958?

Explanations from perspectives of international levels are the most in previous researches. Some Japanese scholars (Okabe, 2006; Tanaka, 1991) believe that international structure of Cold War in the 1950s dividing China and Japan into opposite groups makes the Sino-Japanese diffidation predestinated. This is also, to certain extent, backed up by some Chinese scholars (Lin & Zhou, 2006) emphasizing on Chinese leaders’ optimistic prediction of Communism revolutionary power against the West, which leads to less enthusiasm for improving the problematic Sino-Japanese relations in 1957-1958.

Other researches turn to the personal factors for explanations to this question. Researches done in Japan (Wang, 2004) believe that Chinese foreign policy making is strongly influenced by the political leaders, mainly Mao Zedong and Chou Enlai in terms of Sino-Japanese relations. Mao’s arbitrary decision, therefore, becomes the main reason for the sudden diffidation in 1958 between China and Japan. On the other hand, Chinese scholars (Tian, 2002) tend to indicate that the change of Japanese government from relatively Chinese-friendly Hatoyama and Ishibashi to anti-Chinese Kishi Cabinet was the trigger for Chinese final policy choice in 1958.

Researches mentioned above give the macrocosmic as well as microcosmic background for the answer to the research question. However, middle-range part focusing on domestic factors inside China is still missing from present researches, as well as the whole picture of this historical moment.

Therefore, this research chooses the domestic perspective, more specifically, the domestic factor of anti-Japanese nationalism in the 1950s to get more comprehensive understanding of the Sino-Japanese diffidation in 1958 and “People’s diplomacy” policy, and to inspire further thoughts regarding influence of nationalism on the process of Chinese foreign policy making.

By conducting textual analysis on works of Mao Zedong and Chou Enlai, referring to available foreign office documents related to Sino-Japanese relations and memoirs of diplomats directly processing diplomatic work towards Japan, this research will sum up the characteristics of “People’s diplomacy” and persuasive evidences of existing nationalism, and explain the influence of their interactions on policy-making process of Sino-Japanese diffidation in 1958.

The following first part will give an introduction, theoretically and practically, to the “People’s diplomacy” policy towards Japan in the 1950s, which shows the characteristic of being strongly internationalism-based. The second part will focus on the anti-Japanese nationalism from grass-roots under the cover of Japanese-friendly “People’s diplomacy” policy. The third part follows to discuss about the confrontation between the internationalism-based “People’s diplomacy” policy and domestic nationalistic sentiments and its influence on the foreign policy choice towards Japan made by Chinese government in 1958. The final part will be the conclusion.

2. Internationalism-based “People’s diplomacy” policy

Internationalism is one of the main principles regarding foreign relations of Communist countries in Leninism, which is particularly influential in Chinese diplomacy back to the 1950s. According to Leninism Theory (Central Compilation & Translation Bureau, 1990 & 1991), there are nations oppressing others and those being oppressed. A true internationalist should not merely care about national interests but more about freedom and equality of all nations, and support, in all ways, those holding the same belief.

With China being a member of Communist countries, Chinese foreign policy in the 1950s had followed the Leninist ideological principles of internationalism. In 1952 when Chou Enlai (abbreviated as Chou in following parts) mentioned general guidelines for Chinese diplomatic practice, internationalism appeared as an important one to be followed, whereas nationalism was one that should be opposed.¹ Similar statement was also made by Mao Zedong (abbreviated as Mao in following parts) of the internationalist obligation to support the people worldwide still fighting for their liberation.²

Under such background, “People’s diplomacy” policy towards Japan in the 1950s also shows strong internationalist belief. By differentiating “friendly Japanese people and groups” from “imperialists and militarists”, Chinese government tried to support and work together with the Japanese people for liberation of both countries against the reactionary.

Chinese government firstly chose to stand by the left-wing powers that was believed to be the leader in Japanese people’s social movements against the so-called “American and Japanese imperialists” (Ishikawa, Ikei, Nakajima, 1970). In all the left-wing powers, the Japanese Communist Party was the main focus for China’s “People’s diplomacy” policy. On the other hand, criticism was also strong in China for Japanese government as “accomplice of American imperialists” who oppressed Japanese people and destroyed Sino-Japanese relations (Okabe, 1976).

After 1954, Chinese government changed its attitude towards Japanese government to act at same pace with Soviet Union which eased the tension with Japan. Chou’s talk during the meeting with members of Japanese Diet and Japanese scholars in 1954 explicitly stated official recognition of the Yoshida Cabinet “chosen by the Japanese people” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, CCCPC Party Literature Research Office, 1990, pp. 91-93). Furthermore, Chinese government even showed willingness to work with Japanese government, as

¹ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China & CCCPC Party Literature Research Office (1990). *Zhou Enlai Wai Jiao Wen Xuan (Works of Chou Enlai Regarding Diplomacy)*, pp. 54-55.

² See Wang T.P. (1999). *Xin Zhong Guo Wai Jiao Wu Shi Nian (50 Years’ Diplomacy of New China)*, p. 714.

representative of Japanese people, against American imperialists.³ For example, Mao mentioned in 1955 that China and Japan as two nations oppressed by America should work together for real freedom (Liu, 1999, pp. 258-261).

In diplomatic practice of “People’s diplomacy” policy towards Japan in the 1950s, the internationalist belief was reflected clearly and did help develop the Sino-Japanese relations. Non-governmental trade agreements and various cultural communication between China and Japan were strongly encouraged by the Chinese central government for the unity with Japanese people.⁴ As Prime Minister of China, Chou recommended for lenient treatment for the Japanese prisoners of war and showed willingness to help send Japanese citizens back. Stating that “Japanese people are also victims of the war and are different from militarists”, he also indicated in many public occasions that China had no intention of requiring any war compensation from Japan (Japanese Zhou Enlai Commemoration Committee, 1991, p. 44, 158, 168).

In spite of enthusiasm of central government for the friendship between Chinese and Japanese people via “People’s diplomacy” policy, there had been anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiments from grass-roots existing and growing ever since Sino-Japanese war ended in 1945.

Memoirs of diplomats in charge of diplomatic practice to Japan (Sun, 2009, p. 8) at that time give rather detailed description about the anti-Japanese sentiments: the anti-Japanese sentiments from grass-roots were said to be particularly strong in the rural areas. Japanese delegation of Asian Pacific Peace Conference in 1952 visiting Wuhan in Hubei Province caused the antipathy of local Chinese. Similar situations also existed when local people saw Japanese visitors in Shenyang, Liaoning Province.⁵ Even the diplomats dealing with diplomatic relations with Japan had some anti-Japanese emotions. Some of them got angry at Japanese delegates when the latter used certain words like “Shina” or “Manchu” that was regarded as offensive to Chinese.⁶

To promote the “People’s diplomacy” policy for closer relationship with Japanese people, the central government realized that the nationalistic sentiments against Japan should be controlled. By inculcating diplomats and the people with the idea of “differentiating militarist from Japanese people, and differentiating militarism culprit from ordinary government officials”, known as the principle of “two differentiation”⁷, central government attempted to weaken the anti-Japanese voices, which, however, turned out to be less effective than expect.

³ See CCCPC Party Literature Research Office. (1990), *Jian Guo Yi Lai Mao Zedong Wen Gao (Works of Mao Zedong since 1949) Vol. 4*, p. 540; CCCPC Party Literature Research Office. (1991). *Jian Guo Yi Lai Mao Zedong Wen Gao (Works of Mao Zedong since 1949) Vol. 5*, p. 36, 384.

⁴ See Zhou E. L. (1954). *Zheng Fu Gong Zuo Bao Gao 1954.9.23 (Report on the Work of the Government)*, p. 29.

⁵ See Wu X. W. (2002). *Feng Yu Yin Qing: Wo Suo Jing Li De Zhong Ri Guan Xi (the Sino-Japanese Relations I Experienced)*, p. 16.

⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

⁷ See Japanese Zhou Enlai Commemoration Committee. (1991). *Ri Ben Ren Xin Mu Zhong De Zhou Enlai (Chou Enlai in the eyes of Japanese people)*, pp. 44.

3. Internationalism-nationalism Confrontation and Sino-Japanese Diffidation

In the second half of 1950s, domestic anti-Japanese nationalism grew stronger against the diplomatic practice of “People’s diplomacy” policy. Confrontation between the policy of central government and local governments and grass-roots emerged, and step by step, pushed Chinese central government to rethink about its policy towards Japan.

3.1. Policy of lenient treatments vs. nationalistic indignation

The internationalism-nationalism confrontation firstly turned up during the discussion of measurement of penalty for Japanese prisoners of war when the guideline given by the central government was challenged because of the growing anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiments.

The guideline of lenient treatment for Japanese prisoners of war stated by Chou during the meeting with members of Japanese Diet and Japanese scholars in 1954 was explained more specifically later in the CPC Politburo meeting in 1955 to be “no death penalty, no life imprisonment, few for set term of imprisonment” (CCCPC Party Literature Research Office, 1997, p. 531).

However, this guideline was opposed to by the “central research group on measurement of penalty” including the Deputy Procurator-General of the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, Tan Zhengwen, as well as non-CCP professionals such as Mei Ruao and Zhou Gengsheng. In the report to Chou, the group put forward the proposal of using life imprisonment. They stated that “no death penalty is lenient enough” and “no life imprisonment” will definitely cause great wrath of Chinese people”.⁸

Meanwhile, dissatisfaction with the decision of central government also arose from local governments and institutes directly related to the implements regarding the issue. Even order directly given by Chou was rejected by some officials from local governments.⁹

To quiet down the voice of disapproval for effective implementation of the “no death penalty, no life imprisonment, few for set term of imprisonment” policy, Chinese central government used inculcation and authority. The idea of “two differentiation” and working together with Japanese people against American imperialists was again inculcated in local government officials.¹⁰ Instruction directly came from Mao to gather information from local governments, especially the county ones, which indicates the great importance attached to the problem by the central government (CCCPC Party Literature Research Office, 1992, p. 73). To seek the understanding

⁸ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. (1956). *Guan Yu Dui Ri Ben Zhan Fan De Shen Pan He Liang Xing Wen Ti De Ji Dian Yi Jian De Bao Gao (Report Regarding the Guidelines of Measurement of Penalty for Japanese Prisoners of War)*, (No. 105-00501-05). Beijing: the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China.

⁹ See Jin Y. (1999). *Qi Yuan: Yi Ge Zhan Fan Guan Li Suo Zhang De Hui Yi (Memoir of an Officer of War Criminal Management Center)*, pp. 157-177.

¹⁰ See Luo R. Q. (1995). Luo Ruiqing Guan Yu Zhan Zheng Zui Fan Wen Ti De Fa Yan (Statement by Luo Ruiqing Regarding Issues Related to Prisoners of War, March of 1956). *Dang De Wen Xian*, Issue No. 2, p. 25.

of Chinese people, even visits of the prisoners were organized to demonstrate their successful ideological reformation after the communist indoctrination.

The confrontation ended with the suppression of anti-Japanese nationalism by the authority of Chinese central government. The nationalistic sentiments against Japan, however, didn't melt away because of the inculcation but turned to an outbreak later, bringing more pressure to Chinese central government and its "People's diplomacy" policy towards Japan.

4.2 Outburst of anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiments and Sino-Japanese diffidation

After 1956, the anti-Japanese nationalism suppressed by the central government tended to grow stronger due to setbacks in Sino-Japanese relations in 1958, leaving Chinese government no other choice but to put an end to the "People's diplomacy" towards Japan.

During the negotiation of the Fourth Sino-Japanese non-governmental trade agreement, opposition of Kishi Cabinet regarding the clause of flying Chinese flag in Chinese non-governmental trade institutes in Japan caused tremendous dissatisfaction among Chinese people.

The anti-Japanese sentiments of Chinese people showed up rather expressly during the exhibition of Japanese goods in Guangzhou and Wuhan in 1958. Questions like "why the exhibition is still allowed in Wuhan under such situations?" and "why Japanese national flag is hung here in the exhibition?" were asked by lots of Chinese people. In the guest books of the exhibition, comments such as "feeling so distressed when I see the Japanese national flag", "so difficult to forget the historic enmity with Japan" also appeared. There was even a public speech in the venue condemning Japanese atrocity towards Chinese people during the Sino-Japanese war (Ouyang & Li, 2009).

Under such situation, the "Liu Lianren incident" in April of 1958 irritated Chinese people further. Liu Lianren, kidnapped to work in Japan during the war time and later escaped was found and sent back to China in 1958. Liu's miserable experience, together with the inhuman treatments and irresponsible attitudes of Japanese government reinforced the memory of Chinese people about Japanese aggression, which strengthened the anti-Japanese nationalism as a result.¹¹

Domestic pressure of anti-Japanese nationalism built up and gradually influenced the policy choice of Chinese government. And this is rather clearly reflected in the editorials of People's Daily in 1958, which signalled changes of central government's attitudes and policy towards Japan, and at the same time worked as the main channel for response to domestic anti-Japanese nationalistic voices.

From April of 1958, editorials of People's Daily related to Sino-Japanese relations were mainly criticism for Kishi Cabinet with few positive comments regarding bilateral relations. Criticism towards Japanese government as "the enemy for all Chinese people" also began to appear frequently.¹² After Liu Lianren was sent back to China, anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiment of Chinese people became so strong that Chinese government chose to frontally respond to it by one

¹¹ See Liu J. P. (2010), *Zhan Hou Zhong Ri Guan Xi: "Bu Zheng Chang" Li Shi De Guo Cheng Yu Jie Gou* (Sino-Japanese Relations after War: Historical Process and Structure of "Abnormal" Relations), pp. 146-148.

¹² See People's Daily (2013). *Ren Min Ri Bao She Lun Quan Ji (1956.9-1966.5) (All Collections of Editorials of People's Daily) Vol. 2*, pp. 331-333.

editorial in *People's Daily*, in which Chinese government, “in the name of Chinese people”, expressed extremely strong indignation and regrets for Japanese government failing to respond to Chinese “People’s diplomacy” policy.¹³

Paralleling the strengthening anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiment, the “Nagasaki national flag incident” in May, seen as a direct provocation by Japanese government, finally left Chinese government with no choice but to react with strongest protest. Meanwhile, for abreaction of anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiments from grass-root level, *People's Daily* also provided certain space for anti-Japanese voices from readers.¹⁴

All these necessitated the abandonment of “People’s diplomacy” policy towards Japan by cutting off all connections with Japan as the response to domestic anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiment, which led to the Sino-Japanese diffidation in 1958.

4. Conclusion

“People’s diplomacy” policy towards Japan is one typical example of the foreign policies mightily influenced by the internationalism ideology in the 1950s. Following the principle of “differentiating militarist from Japanese people, and differentiating militarism culprit from ordinary government officials”, known as the principle of “two differentiation”, Chinese central government enthusiastically promoted the “People’s diplomacy” for friendship between Chinese and Japanese people. In diplomatic practice, Chinese government also persisted in the “People’s diplomacy” with encouragement for bilateral cultural and economic communications, support for sending back Japanese citizens left in mainland China, and lenient treatment towards Japanese prisoners of war.

Nevertheless, anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiments existed and gradually put pressure on the “People’s diplomacy” policy made by the central government. Confrontation between the internationalism-based “People’s diplomacy” and nationalism against Japan first appeared in 1956 when opposition arose against the decision made by central government of lenient treatment to Japanese prisoners of war. Indignation from local governments and the people, though was suppressed by central government, never disappeared but grew stronger after 1956.

Gradually realizing that the internationalism-based “People’s Diplomacy” policy towards Japan faces unignorably growing pressures from domestic anti-Japanese nationalistic emotions, Chinese government finally chose to frontally respond to domestic nationalistic sentiments by giving up “People’s diplomacy” policy, and stating to stop all the communications with Japan, which is the Sino-Japanese diffidation in 1958.

“People’s diplomacy” policy towards Japan, with the ultimate goal to promote friendship between Chinese and Japanese people, has to, on the contrary, face the fate of being abandoned due to domestic pressure from Chinese people. Absence of Chinese people, or strictly speaking, insufficient consideration of the Chinese central government about nationalistic sentiment of

¹³ Ibid, pp. 375-376.

¹⁴ See *Wo Guo Guo Qi Jue Bu Rong Wu Ru* (Our National Flag shall never be insulted). (1958, May 12). *People's Daily*.

Chinese people in the process of policy-making may be the source of domestic pressure for the “People’s diplomacy” policy.

Furthermore, this research also brings up the question of how important nationalism is in the process of Chinese foreign policy making. As the experienced Japanese politician who is deeply involved in Sino-Japanese relations after war, Furui Yoshimi (1993, p. 20) mentioned in his own memoir that “Nationalism comes first” may be the core of consideration in China’s relationship with foreign countries back to Mao’s era. Whether this is still true in contemporary Chinese diplomacy remains to be studied. However, the influence of domestic factor of nationalism is undoubtedly something important especially in the discussion about Sino-Japanese relations and therefore needs more attention.

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