

Japan and China: Their National Image

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Summary

“ . . . images create stereotypes. Once established, it takes great effort to repair them. This is illustrated by Japan’s examples from the past.”

1. Image and National Strategy

This report discusses the national image of Japan and China. It could also be described as a report that asks how Japan and the world see China. That’s because today the issue of how we respond to China is of interest not only to Japan but also the United States and countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the chaotic international political situation of the last few years, national image wields significant influence. This is true for both Japan and China. E.H. Carr has said that national power comprises military power, economic power and power over opinion. The ability to project a positive image to the international community – that is becoming a vital element of national strategy.

2. Japan and the Abe Government’s Image Strategy

All countries put effort into creating their image for the world. Japan is no exception. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868 Japan worked to counter the European powers’ prejudice against Japan and to eradicate and correct mistaken images of Japan. The same was true after World War II. Japan had to battle a new distorted image. In the post-war era, the image imposed upon Japan and the criticism based on that image was generally that Japan was conducting an economic invasion, that it was becoming a military power and further, in the 1990’s, that Japan was not a normal country. Japan has expended great effort to change these images in response to these distortions and the criticism based on them.

Prime Minister Abe is devoting diplomatic efforts into shaping Japan’s national image in international politics. His strategy is to shift Japan’s image from emphasizing Japan’s uniqueness to emphasizing its universality.

3. China’s Image Strategy

China has become the world’s second largest superpower by GDP. If one looks at China from the perspective of national image, however, China does not look like a “superpower.” What kind of superpower will China become? What kind of superpower does it want to be? This is not clear to us. This is related to China itself creating an image of itself as it wants to be seen. Put another way, because China grew and attained superpower status at a very fast pace, it might be that it has not yet fully developed its own image.