

An Imperialist Asia?

Bharat Junjhunwala

The respect bestowed on Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe by the Indian Government during his recent visit makes it clear that India intends to join Japan in containing China. China is put up as the villain while Japan the saviour. But China has mostly been inward-looking in her long history while Japan has repeatedly tried to conquer others. The character persists in the global economy today-Japanese companies are spreading their tentacles across the globe while China is mostly exporting her resources.

Japan's history has been aggressive and outward-looking. The Funk and Wagnall's *Encyclopedia* states that in the fourth century Queen Jinjo attacked and captured Korea. Toward the end of eighteenth century. Japan captured Ryukyu Islands and Korea again. Japanese pirates were looting ships on the eastern coast of China in the sixteenth century. In 1931 Japan conquered Manchuria and established a puppet government there. China raised the matter in the League of Nations. But rather than quit Manchuria, Japan chose to quit the League of Nations.

In contrast, China has largely been inward-looking. She has been repeatedly subjected to attacks by neighbours from Mongolia, Korea, Japan, Viet Nam, Burma and Tibet. About 2,500 years ago, during the Chin dynasty, the Great Wall was constructed to keep the tribal intruders away. In sixth century, during the Tang dynasty, peace was bought by handing over defense to non-Chinese peoples and generals. In the tenth century the Sung dynasty established peace in the north by agreeing to pay a yearly tribute to those rulers. In the thirteenth century China succumbed to attack by Mongol Genghis Khan, who captured Beijing. During the Second World War China was encircled by France in Viet Nam, England in Burma, Russia in Manchuria and Japan in Korea. The main problem faced by the Chinese rulers in their long history-has been to protect their territory from intrusion from the outside.

It can be argued that China's role vis-a-vis Tibet is to the contrary. But Tibet has historically been under Chinese suzerainty. Its position is more like that of Bhutan or Nepal with India rather than of an independent nation. Presently the Chinese are trying to integrate Tibet with the mainland economy by building a railway line and settling mainland people in the region. The Tibetan leadership-in-exile considers this to be an affront to the culture of the Tibetan people. But as far as basic economics is concerned, China is behaving like a big brother, even though a domineering one, rather than like an Imperialist power seeking to exploit its resources.

China has not tried to exploit other countries. She has a huge domestic market. The Grand Canal was constructed in sixth century so that the agricultural produce of the Yangtze basin could be reached to other areas. The Wagnall's *Encyclopedia* notes that "Commercial relations with the West were grudgingly accepted by the Manchus in the late 18th century... China, with her long history of economic self-sufficiency, was not interested in increased trade."

How does one explain the present day huge exports by China? These appear to be rooted in China's need to acquire foreign technologies and should not be seen as 'imperialism'. In fact, by undervaluing the *Yuan*, and not charging royalty for the export of its natural resources, China is giving away her resources for consumption by America and other countries.

In comparison Japan has tried to aggressively open up new markets. Japan started establishing modern industries after the First World War. It needed markets to sell the goods that were produced. Emperor Hirohito adopted an aggressive policy towards China after 1926 for this purpose. Japan forged an axis with Germany and Italy to rebuff the traders from England, Portugal and France who were seeking entry into Asia.

It can be alleged that China is allowing her to be enslaved by accepting huge amounts of foreign investments. But this argument does not hold because simultaneously China is making huge purchase of US Treasury Bonds that likewise enslave the United States. It is noteworthy that China has steadfastly refused to intimidate the United States by threatening to sell its huge forex reserves. China is content to buy US Treasury Bonds and hold them in order to keep the exchange of Yuan low and provide fillip to its exporters.

Japanese companies, on the other hand, are buying American automakers and prime estate in Manhattan. Toyota, for example, is threatening the great icon of America-the General Motors. Suzuki's most profits are coming from its India operations. Japan is buying US Treasury Bonds and American companies aggressively. It is a one-way street for Japan. China is using its dollars to provide subsidies to its exporters while Japan is using them to buyout America.

Both China and Japan are exporting their goods in huge quantities. China's exports are low-priced and of low quality. It is not charging royalties for its natural resources such as water in the reservoirs and coal. China's cost of production is therefore less. China is virtually giving away its natural resources for free to foreign consumers in order to support its nascent industrialization. China's aim is to provide employment and income to her people. She does not aim to 'kill' other economies. In comparison Japan is exporting hi-tech goods like Flat Screen TVs and silicon semiconductors. Japanese companies aim to conquer their Western competitors.

Like China, India too has not attacked any country in the long history. Perhaps this is the reason that these two old civilizations have survived uninterrupted for about 5,000 years. Some experts believe that Indian people migrated and settled in West Asia in the Vedic period. Thus there are names of cities that are similar to India's own. Rama's messengers settled in East Asia. Buddhist monks went to northeast Asia. These representatives accepted the host countries as their own and permanently settled there. They accepted other lands as their homelands. They did not try to conquer other countries.

Premier Abe said during his visit that "A broader Asia that breaks away from its geographical boundaries is now beginning to take a distinct form." The question is whether this breaking of geographical boundaries will involve exploiting other countries or helping them in their development? Will the new Asia conquer other countries as Japanese companies are trying to do; or will it be a friend and supporter of rest of the world in its quest for development? The

Japanese approach will get people to exploit other countries and bring their resources to India. Asia must surely break away from her geographical boundaries but let that be good, not bad, for the rest of world as well. □□□