

Japan and America

Two Different Nations Draw Closer

Commentary By Everett C. Ladd

August marks the 50th anniversary of the climactic events of World War II: the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945; the dropping of the second bomb on Nagasaki on August 9; and then the Japanese surrender on August 14. These anniversaries will, appropriately, occasion much reflection and reconsideration, especially because of the relationship between Japan and the United States.

The August 1945 events ended a harsh and bitter war, in which full American involvement had begun on December 7, 1941, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. They also, however, mark a beginning—of a remarkable success story in both Japan's post-war development and in US-Japanese relations. These accomplishments very much need fuller recognition.

Commentary in recent years has focused on tension between the two countries, notably on trade issues. Yet the conflict which we see in contemporary relations pales in comparison to the reach of the comity. Surely one of the most remarkable developments in modern history is the rapidity with which many of the participants put behind them the bitterness of the second World War. This is true of America and both of our principal antagonists in that war, although I'll limit my specific observations to the Japanese.

Just three months before the war ended, Gallup asked a cross section of Americans the extent to which they believed "the Japanese people have approved of the killing and starving of prisoners. . ." Sixty-three percent replied that the Japanese public entirely approved the atrocities, while twenty-five percent said they approved in part. Only two percent absolved the Japanese populace. Yet just six years later, in August 1951, when Gallup asked Americans to characterize their "feelings. . . toward the Japanese people at present," fifty-one percent said they were friendly, eighteen percent neutral, and only twenty-five percent unfriendly. By and large the Japanese have reciprocated this sentiment—as the data presented on pp. 32-36 indicate.

In 1992, the Roper Center was fortunate to receive from the Center for Global Partnership of the Japan Foundation a grant enabling it to begin constructing the first comprehensive archive of comparative Japan and US survey information. The Center has long been active on the US data side, but it had not been able to sustain development of the Japan collection until CGP gave its support. For three years now, Center staff

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have been acquiring survey research information collected by Japanese research organizations and translating the questions for entry into an on-line information system. At present, the system is available to in-house staff only, but we look forward to opening it to researchers around the world—just as we opened US data through "POLL" a decade ago.

The emergent Japan data library permits us to make a comprehensive comparison of opinion and values in the two countries for really the first time. Nineteen pages of survey findings, drawn disproportionately from research in Japan, follow here. This fall, the Roper Center, in conjunction with the American Enterprise Institute, will publish a full-length book on the US and Japan, seen in comparative perspective through survey research.

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isons involves the idea of convergence: Are these two countries becoming more and more alike as they're propelled along a course to which the very idea of modernity points? A century and a half ago, Alexis de Tocqueville argued the case for convergence with a grand historical sweep. He saw the beginnings of a "great democratic revolution." What he had in mind is better captured in current usage by "egalitarian"—the erosion of ascriptive class norms as the basis for social organization and their replacement with norms positing the moral equality of each individual. Tocqueville believed that the American experience was one that the entire world would eventually undergo—although each country according to its own pace and historic traditions. The various nations would not become alike, but they would converge in the sense of coming to share a common new moral standard by which their principal social institutions would be judged.

The US and Japan remain very different in certain social values. America, so stridently individualist when Tocqueville visited it in the 1830s, is the same today. But if Japan today strikes Americans as collectivist and "traditional," there seems to be little doubt—as the survey data presented here attest—that, having achieved advanced industrial status, that country is moving, on its own terms, toward an ever more insistent assertion of egalitarianism and individuality.

We conclude our survey review with data on how the populations of the two countries see the other. Tensions are evident. Nonetheless, as noted above, the story which the data tell is on the whole encouraging. Since 1945, Japan has developed stable democratic institutions and entered firmly into the community of free and peaceful states. The Japanese economy has recovered—with American assistance—from the war's devastation, and ranks second only to our own in productive capacities. Americans have grumbled but have resisted moves toward protectionism. We quickly put the war behind us and established sound ties with our one-time foe. Of all these things, both Americans and Japanese should be proud.