

Mutual interest defies stereotypes

Reports of Chinese and Japanese disdain for one another do not stack up when weighed against feelings they share in common

Lately I've been surprised to learn just how closely Chinese netizens follow what happens in Japan.

Earlier this month, a short Japanese TV program about a middle school touched the hearts of many Chinese. In the show, the school's principal encouraged his students to announce their "love" for their classmate sweethearts.

Some students texted or tweeted words of affection to their peers

rather than have a loud mouth, as the principal said. He wanted his students to share their emotions and bare their souls.

Several teens came forward to holler out their love for others in front of the

whole school. One boy was delirious when discovering his feelings for a girl were mutual, while others were rejected and tearful.

The annual program is designed to help children to speak about either their affections or anxieties.

Chinese Internet users — many of them adults — said they were moved to tears by the principal and students who dared to open up their hearts. Puppy love is part of teen development. But in China, teenage romance is something that teachers and parents do their best

to prevent and nip in the bud.

On Aug 30, Chinese netizens also followed a news report on Kahoku city, in Japan's Ishikawa prefecture, where a group of mothers came up with a "proposal" for imposing a tax on single people. The report has sparked heated discussions online.

The city has been bombarded with phone calls and e-mails protesting an idea that would violate human rights. The city has denied there is such a motion, saying only one mother complained to a local fiscal official about the cost of raising children and suggested that single people contribute more to Japan.

Japanese netizens also pay attention to news about China. They worried about Wei Qiuji, a 27-year-old Chinese primary school teacher, when she went missing during her Hokkaido trip in late July. They wished she rests in peace after her remains were found in the sea off Japan's northernmost region.

Good things come in small packages, as the saying goes. A record 322,581 suggestions have been made for the name of a giant panda cub born at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo in June. The zoo solicited names from the public from July 28 to Aug 10. A committee will announce the name for the new cub later this month.

Reading these reports, I cannot help but question whether the opinions that Chinese and Japanese have of each other are really that bad.

A survey conducted by the US-

based Pew Research Center in 2016 showed that China and Japan viewed each other with disdain and harbored mostly negative stereotypes of one another.

Just 11 percent of Japanese expressed a favorable view of China. And over the past decade, the average favorability of China among Japanese has been just 18 percent. Only 14 percent of people in China voiced a favorable opinion of their East Asian neighbor, in line with the average of available data over the past decade.

It is unbelievable that a large number of Chinese tourists visit Japan if they really do have a low opinion of the country.

More than 4 million Chinese visited Japan in the first seven months of this year, up 6.7 percent from the same period last year. And more than 48 percent of the arrivals in the April-June quarter were repeat visitors, highlighting Chinese tourists' keen interest in Japan.

After splurging on Made-in-Japan products, which is a byword for high quality, Chinese tourists enjoy Japan's *omotenashi* — the Japanese way of hospitality — and embrace other parts of the culture.

Japan is said to be ready for an influx of Chinese visitors during China's weeklong national day holiday, or Golden Week, that begins Oct 1. A total of 506,000 Chinese tourists visited Japan during the holiday last year.

Nongovernment organizations

in the two countries have launched people-to-people exchange programs even when the diplomatic relationship strains.

On Sept 1, some 500 Japanese students from 60 Japanese universities gathered with 500 Chinese college students in Beijing for building mutual understanding and friendship.

But the number of people involved in exchanges now may pale in comparison with the honeymoon of China-Japan relations in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1984, Hu Yaobang, then general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, invited 3,000 Japanese young people to visit Beijing. They joined their Chinese peers at an evening gala at Tian'anmen Square on Oct 1, 1984.

In March of the same year, during his China visit, then Japanese prime minister Yasuhiro Nakasone met with then Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and other high-ranking officials.

Nakasone called close Sino-Japanese relations "the basis for peace in the Asian region and a powerful pillar for world peace". Deng was emphatic that "the development of China-Japan relations into the 21st century is more important than all other issues".

Nakasone also spoke to the students and faculty of Beijing University, announcing that Sino-Japanese relations would abide by "four principles": Peace and friendship, equality and mutual benefit, mutual

trust, and long-term stability.

"The future of Japan and China," he said, "should not be in any way affected, no matter how violent the storms in the world may be. We should set great store by and safeguard Japan-China relations."

The relations, however, have gone through rocky times and were at the lowest point ever in 2012 when Japan "nationalized" the islands that China claims as a part of its territory. China has sent its coast guard ships to patrol the waters of the islands.

The territorial dispute in the East China Sea has become a flashpoint for the two countries and a major reason for the two peoples' negative opinions of each other.

Nakasone liked to talk about Japan's foreign relations in terms of "equations with many variables". Like it or not, China and Japan, as neighbors, are always in each other's equation.

In June, a white paper released by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China showed that 40.1 percent of 8,852 Japanese companies were willing to expand on the Chinese mainland. This was up from 38.1 percent in 2015, marking the first increase in recent years.

Only 7.1 percent wanted to scale down in China or leave, down from 10.6 percent the previous year.

The author is China Daily's bureau chief in Tokyo. caihong@chinadaily.com.cn



Cai Hong

India sending mixed signals

To build sound bilateral ties with China, country should avoid being a pawn in US-Japan strategies

By LIN MINWANG

The militaries of India and the United States are holding the Yudh Abhyas ("training for war" in Hindi) joint exercise in the US until Sept 27.

The joint drill, an annual feature since 2004 that focuses on anti-terrorism maneuvers, has come just two months after the US, Japan and India held the Malabar 2017 naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal. Also, from Sept 13 to 15, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was visiting India.

India's close interactions with the US and Japan have sent mixed signals to the outside world after the country experienced a bump in its relations with China.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the BRICS Summit in Xiamen, East China's Fujian province, from Sept 3 to 5, after a two-month-long standoff between Chinese and Indian troops in China's Donglang area. (The five BRICS economies are Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.)

China has showed its sincerity in maintaining good relations with India. The two large developing countries, both important players in Asia, are critical to fairer global governance. So, India should learn from the standoff and help China to build sound bilateral ties.

Washington and New Delhi now want to upgrade the September exercise to "a more complex, combined arms, division-level" drill.

The US Navy's Nimitz Carrier

Strike Group, the Indian Navy's sole aircraft carrier *Vikramaditya* and Japan's 27,000-ton helicopter carrier cruiser *Izumo* all took part in the trilateral drill.

India has been trying to highlight its geopolitical importance to the US and Japan, but it must take the accompanying costs into account.

Modi's election as India's prime minister three years ago has helped lift US-India ties.

The two countries' defense cooperation, in particular, has evolved into a quasi-military alliance. The process started when then US president Barack Obama was invited to attend India's Republic Day celebrations in 2015. It developed through the bilateral defense pact aimed at simplifying the transfer of US defense technology to India.

Donald Trump's election as US president, however, turned out to be a letdown for Modi, who managed to meet with Trump only five months after he entered the White House.

The Trump administration might be aware of India's "strategic significance", but it is not likely to fully endorse Modi's aggressive China policy, even though it can give Washington an opportunity to drive a wedge between Beijing and New Delhi.

Besides, few experts on India studies in the US would describe New Delhi as an apt ally that commits itself to an alliance without making waves in its neighborhood.

For India, on the other hand, the US can hardly be a reliable partner, especially with the Trump admin-

istration poised to shirk some of its global obligations and focus on domestic affairs.

As for India-Japan ties, analysts were watching to see whether Abe, during his visit to India, would seek to synergize India's Act East policy with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

And it will soon become clear whether the two countries' Asia-Africa Growth Corridor will be complementary, or a countermeasure, to the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

India would do well to not become a mere piece on the US-Japan chessboard.

The author is a researcher at the Institute of International Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai.