

Continuity and Change in ASIA



Join us every Wednesday for an insightful look at *Continuity and Change in Asia*, a social studies-based program exploring political and social issues shaping Asia today and designed to encourage students to better understand the various issues shaping the countries and regions of East, South and Southeast Asia. This *Newspapers In Education* program is in partnership with the Asia Outreach Centers at the University of Washington Jackson School of International Studies. Series will run through Wednesday, June 7, 2006.

Activities

ARTICLE 3

Legacies of Imperialism and Colonialism:

Changing Japan's Constitution

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In almost any country, changing the Constitution is a big deal. It's even more so for the Japanese because their Constitution has never been amended since it was written in 1946. The changes in Japan's Constitution that their lawmakers are considering are a big deal to China and the Koreans (both North Korea and South Korea), and they should be to the United States, too. Why are the proposed changes so important?

To understand why, you have to know that Japan's Constitution contains strong pacifist language. Article 9 renounces "war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." Actually, Americans wrote the famous Article 9 and most of Japan's Constitution during the U.S.-led occupation of Japan (1945-52) after WW II. Our occupation had twin goals to demilitarize and democratize Japan, and it succeeded on both counts. Because the U.S., China and the Koreans consider themselves victims of Japanese aggression in and before WWII, these countries feel they have a stake in Article 9 and are interested in any changes. Of course, the U.S. and Japan have also had a close military alliance since 1952.

But, East Asia is changing. China's economic modernization is shaking things up. Thucydides

might have told us what would happen when a new power emerges – the old powers react. These days, Japan wants an even tighter alliance with the United States. Japan has deployed troops to Iraq and is seeking to become a better global ally to the U.S. Many American policy-makers welcome revision of Article 9 because it would allow Japan to work more closely with the U.S. around the globe.

China and the Koreans see things differently. While the U.S. welcomes a more active Japan as an ally, Chinese and Koreans remember Japan as an enemy. These war memories still color the relations among the countries. Japanese feel that much of the current anti-Japanese sentiment is deliberately stoked by governments to legitimize their rule. Many Chinese and Koreans feel the Japanese have not fully accepted their responsibility for the brutal suffering they inflicted in and before WWII. Anti-Japanese demonstrations flared up in China in 2005 after Japan approved a textbook that critics claimed whitewashed Japan's role in WWII. Asian leaders bristled when a Japanese Prime Minister visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, which houses the spirits of Japan's war dead including convicted war criminals. Simply put, many Chinese and Koreans feel they cannot trust Japan because Japan's failure to fully admit responsibility implies they might do it again. They oppose any change in Article 9.

The stakes are high for Japan, China, the Koreans and the United States. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party has recently released a draft revision of the Constitution, but Japan's legislature must pass revisions by a 2/3 majority in both houses and by popular referendum. Japanese, who want to keep the Constitution intact, are organizing for a struggle. Keep an eye on three things as the process unfolds.

First, Japan's military force is currently called the "Self-Defense Force" (JSDF). It's not called an "army" despite the fact that Japan's military budget is sometimes calculated as the fourth largest in the world. If the name is changed, that shows a more assertive perception of the force's role. Second, watch the Defense Agency – does it get upgraded to a Ministry or a full-fledged Cabinet position? Third is the wording of the Constitution itself. Clause 1 of Article 9 was quoted earlier. It won't change and its stability should reassure. Clause 2 says, "land, sea, and air forces as well as other war potential, will never be maintained" and it probably will change. Words matter for Constitutions, so the precise wording will be important. The most critical provision could be what happens with "collective self-defense." Japan's Constitution permits the country to defend itself, but "collective self-defense" would mean that Japan could aid others if they were attacked, and this has been interpreted as illegal under Article 9. The likely beneficiary would be the U.S., Japan's sole military ally. And, perhaps the most likely scenario for it to be invoked would be a military conflict between China and the U.S. over Taiwan. Changing Japan's Constitution is a big deal.

Questions for discussion:

- What is Article 9? What changes are proposed?
- How might changes in Article 9 impact Japan, China, North and South Korea and the U.S.?
- What does this article about the Japanese Constitution have to do with the theme of legacies of imperialism?

- 1: This week's article mentions Thucydides, a general from ancient Greece. Research this historical figure more thoroughly and write an expository essay explaining why Professor Pekkanen used this example to make a point about power in the article: "Thucydides might have told us what would happen when a new power emerges – the old powers react."
- 2: Look through The Seattle Times and in the online archives at www.seattletimes.com for stories related to Japanese relations with China and Korea. Decide how you feel about the proposed constitutional changes and write a persuasive essay expressing your opinion for or against the changes, using examples from your research and from this week's Continuity and Change article to back up your opinion.

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