

Soviet-Japanese Relations and the Principle of the “Indivisibility of Politics and Economics,” 1960–1985

Ozawa Haruko

In his March 1971 speech to the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev included a special mention of Japan. This was the first time, before and since the 1970s, that the leadership of the Soviet Union publicly acknowledged the importance of Japan's role in international politics. At the time, bilateral relations largely followed the line of the territorial dispute. Why, then, was there this change in the Soviet leadership's attitude toward Japan?

The first reason lay in the rapid growth of the Japanese economy from the 1960s onward. Building cooperative relations with the economically strong Japan was very attractive to the USSR; moreover, there was a possibility that the progress of economic relations would have a certain positive effect on the diplomatic relations. Second, the international relations in East Asia between the second half of the 1960s and the early 1970s was changing at a dizzying speed. The relaxation of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, an era known as *Détente*, also led to an improvement in Soviet-Japanese relations. Following the border clashes around Zhenbao (Damanskii) Island in March 1969, however, the USSR's relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) moved into the phase of all-out confrontation. When in July 1969 the United States expressed its intention to withdraw from the conflict in Vietnam following its Guam Doctrine (Nixon Doctrine) released on July 25, 1969, Sino-American and Sino-Japanese approaches quickly intensified. With the situation of Sino-Soviet confrontation and the improvement in Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations, the Soviet Union was keen to avoid international isolation in East Asia. From this perspective, it is possible to understand why the Soviet leadership viewed an improvement in relations with Japan as absolutely necessary.

This essay will initially examine the impact of East Asian international relations on Soviet-Japanese relations, with a special focus on Sino-Soviet, Sino-Japanese, and US-Japanese relations. It will then look at the potential paths for the development of the Soviet-Japanese relations during the years of the Cold War era from 1960 to 1985, giving special consideration to the economic cooperation between the two countries. Through this twofold analysis this paper aims to explore the possibilities and limitations for the progress of Soviet-Japanese relations during this era.

1 Soviet-Japanese Relations in the 1960s

When the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between the United States and Japan (US-Japan Security Treaty) was revised in January 1960, the Soviet Foreign Minister Andreï A. Gromyko sent his government's memorandum to its Japanese counterpart, in which Moscow called for the addition of a new stipulation regarding the Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration of 1956. The condition was linked to the Soviets' promise to return two of the four disputed islands in the Southern Kuriles (J: *hoppō ryōdo*, or "Northern Territories"), Habomai and Shikotan, to Japan. Now that Japan had a new security treaty with the United States, Moscow demanded that the return of the islands would be possible only if, as stated in the Gromyko statement of January 28, 1960, that "military bases of foreign countries are removed from Japanese territory." The Soviet Union's subsequent stance toward Japan hardened, with disagreements over Habomai and Shikotan underlining the gulf between the sides regarding the territorial dispute. The Gromyko memorandum was therefore a protest against the revision of the security treaty and the strengthening of the US-Japan alliance. While the Soviet government did not formally acknowledge the US-Japan Security Treaty—its reaction to the 1960 revision was restrained—one could argue that the treaty did not have a substantial impact on Soviet-Japanese relations. The 1960s were in fact a decade during which time signs of progress in Soviet-Japanese economic relations become more conspicuous. In diplomatic relations, too, there were significant advances.

In August 1961, a trade fair for Soviet commercial and industrial companies opened in Tokyo's Harumi district, with First Deputy Premier Anastas I. Mikoyan arriving in Japan expressly to attend the event. Mikoyan proclaimed at the fair that "Soviet-Japanese trade can equal a billion dollars in a few years." In reality, the trade turnover between the two nations at this time stood at just over USD 200 million, and it would not reach the billion-dollar mark until 1972. Mikoyan's visit to Japan nevertheless became the occasion following which the interest of the Japanese economic world in the Soviet market soared. In August 1962, a year after Mikoyan's trip to Japan, a delegation of Japanese business leaders visited the Soviet Union under the leadership of the president of Komatsu Limited, Kawai Yoshinari. Yet the reaction in Japan to the Kawai delegation was rather indifferent.

The members of the delegation, starting with its leader Kawai, met with top Soviet officials responsible for economy and trade: First Deputy Premier Mikoyan, chairman of the All-Soviet Chamber of Commerce Mikhail Nesterov, and the Minister of Foreign Trade Nikolai S. Patolichev. Most importantly, the Japanese delegates were given an audience with Nikita Khrushchev, who was