

Ambassador Hayashi's comment in Financial Times

Time for China to calm down and stop bullying

The Chinese Communist party congress is a decisive moment for the future of China. The country insists its rise is peaceful and I hope that will be the case. However, China's record suggests otherwise. It has not hesitated to resort to violence or coercion to try to get its way. Many European countries, for instance, still remember how, two years ago, China tried to lobby against the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo, a human-rights activist.

In Asia, China is increasingly aggressive, as shown by its dealings with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei over the disputed Spratly and Paracel islands. Meanwhile, Japan has had to bear the brunt of China's abrasive attitude over the Senkaku islands.

China's claim to the Senkaku islands, which its ambassador to the UK explained in the FT this month, is groundless. The Senkaku islands are an inherent part of Japan, as evidenced by both historical facts and international law.

Japan acquired the islands peacefully through the internationally recognised principle of terra nullius (no-man's-land) in 1895 after 10 years of thorough surveys. China did not raise any objection until 1971, three years after a UN report had indicated possible petroleum resources in the area.

The San Francisco Peace Treaty, which legally determined the postwar international order, was signed in 1951 by 49 countries, including the US and the UK. It stipulated that Japan should renounce Taiwan and the Pescadores islands while the Senkaku islands were placed under US administration as part of the Nansei Shoto archipelago, thereby confirming Japan's residual sovereignty over them. Crucially neither China nor Taiwan objected to this settlement.

Japan has squarely faced its past and has made formal apologies to the countries concerned on many occasions. Our renunciation of militarism shines through our recent history. Since the end of the second world war, the Japanese Self-Defence Forces have never fired a single bullet in combat. This is in stark contrast to the Chinese forces, which have engaged in many wars.

Japan has also contributed to China's development. Since 1979, Japan has provided China with more than £30bn of aid. Coupled with an estimated £60bn of private capital investment, which has created more than 10m jobs in China, and constant technology transfers, Japan has done much to help China's modernisation. It is worth recalling a passage in the Joint Statement following Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Japan in May 2008, which reads: "The Chinese side expressed its positive evaluation of Japan's consistent pursuit of the path of a peaceful country and Japan's contribution to the peace and stability of the world through peaceful means over more than 60 years since World War II."

When it comes to the Senkaku islands, China's words and deeds do not match. It argues that China and Japan agreed in 1972 to shelve the issue. But it was China that in 1992 introduced the Territorial

Waters Law, in which it declared that these islands, firmly controlled by Japan, now belonged to China. This was an explicit attempt to change the status quo.

In recent years, China has intensified its maritime activities around the islands. Since 2008, China has been sending government vessels into the waters around the islands, infringing Japanese sovereignty. Recently, the Japanese owner of the islands decided to sell them. The Japanese government, as their sole tenant, decided to purchase them to place the islands under peaceful and stable control. What happened was only a domestic commercial transfer of ownership and has no significance whatsoever under international law. Yet, China seized on this and reacted disproportionately and violently.

Japan stands firm and calm against China's attempt to challenge the postwar international order over the Senkaku islands by coercion and intimidation. The US remains fully committed to the defence of the Senkakus which, according to Hillary Clinton, secretary of state, "fall within the scope of Article 5" of the US-Japan Security Treaty that commits the US to defending Japan if the latter is attacked.

China occupies an important place in an interdependent world. It is in everybody's interests for China to behave as a responsible member of the international community, instead of seeking to impose its will. The recent tension over the Senkaku islands has been created and is being exacerbated by China alone. As soon as it has stopped its provocation, through its dispatch of quasi-military vessels or rogue fishing boats into Japanese waters, the tension will be defused. I hope the international community will speak up: "Calm down, China. Stop bullying."