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LESSONS FROM THE UIGHURS' REVOLT

Keiko Chino

G8/G7 summits held in Italy are prone to accidents despite the relatively low interest of international society: Japanese Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira died shortly before the 1980 Venice Summit, prompting Japan to send an acting prime minister, and the 1994 Naples Summit was held just after the death of North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. This year's summit in L'Aquila in central Italy was also plagued by an accident – riots in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

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Chinese President Hu Jintao hurried home, resulting in the absence of the central player in the summit's limelight. In other words, a primary theme of the G8 summit – whether China is really trustworthy – was revealed. However, the Uighur issue was totally skipped, not even mentioned in the Declaration. This is in stark contrast to the 1989 Paris Summit, which issued a political declaration after harshly condemning China for the killings of pro-democracy protesters at Tiananmen Square. Even the torch relay before the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing drew harsh international criticism due to China's handling of the unrest in Tibet.

A Japanese foreign ministry official told me there were “many reasons” behind the silence at the summit, which had too many agenda items to be discussed on a limited time schedule. The “many,” I guess, can be summarized as follows: the world owes too much to China. As such, world leaders avoid issues that would offend China.

The Uighur problem and the G8's silence on this revealed at least two things. Firstly, the G8 summit missed a golden opportunity to present its *raison d'être*. It has been pointed out in recent years that the importance of the G8 summit is declining. The rise of the G20 and even the G2 (the United States and China) replacing the G8 have been talked of this year. It is certainly true that the G20 better reflects the reality of the global economy than the G8 does. Yet the question is: can the G20 hold responsible discussions on the problem of the Uighurs?

The G8 is certainly at a crossroads, but the key is to improve it, not to discard it. I think it is time for the G8 to get back to grass roots. These include respect for democracy, or human rights and freedom, and an emphasis on open market economies. The G8 must address in a timely manner issues that cannot be ignored from the standpoints of human rights and humanism, such as China's handling of the Uighurs' revolt. The G8 should take up global issues that cannot be handled by the G20. Such issues should come before agenda items prepared well in advance like traditional cuisine for New Year's in Japan.

Secondly, the incident revealed the seriousness of the problems facing China in both domestic and foreign affairs. What underlay the Uighurs' riots were

not just the clash between the authorities and the minority, but the ethnic conflict between the Hans and the Uighurs. It has been pointed out that mass migration of the Han people into Xinjiang along with the large-scale development of the western regions may be behind the riot. According to a book written by Ke Wang, a Kobe University professor, the 2000 population census of China showed that the Han population in Xinjiang had increased by 27% over the previous ten years, growing from 37.68% to 40.61% to Xinjiang's total population. This is a result of the rapid economic development and growth propelled by the Chinese government.

An economically “strong” Han population oppressing the minority – a similar pattern can be found in China's foreign relations. Clashes between China aggressively pursuing resources and energy around the globe and local peoples have often been reported from Africa, Latin America, the South Pacific and elsewhere.

The Chinese authorities insist that China is seeking a “peaceful rise,” but repression or conciliation await those who refuse to conform. There are also cover-ups and media control designed to consolidate the government's line. Nonetheless, the number of riots and protests is only increasing: from 8,300 in 1993 to over 90,000 in 2006 (which translates to 250 per day.) It is all the more surprising that the Chinese government has stopped releasing the statistics (according to the August 6 morning edition of *The Mainichi Shimbun*).

It is important for China to respect ethnic traditions, cultures and religions, and to present a vision and policy to realize a multiethnic and multicultural country. As the Scriptures say, people do not live by bread alone. Both the United States, which is engaged in strategic and economic dialogue with China, and Japan, which is promoting a strategic relationship of mutual benefit with China, must rethink their approaches. An easy engagement policy well serves neither the international community nor China. This is the lesson from the Uighurs' revolt. 

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