PRC's Politics Towards the Korean Peninsula and Prospects of PRC-ROK Relations

— Unreality of the ROK-Japan-PRC Triangle —

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1. Expectations and Actualities of the ROK-PRC Relations

Recently, anticipation for an improved relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) seems to be growing in the Republic of Korea (ROK). Needless to say, this anticipation drives from the following three factors: (1) the fact that, during the past one-two years, there was a series of "unintentional relations" between ROK and PRC, beginning from the hijacking of a Chinese airliner (in May 1983) to the Chinese torpedo boat incident, (2) the ROK's strong hope for a PRC participation in the coming Seoul Olympic Games, and (3) the ROK's commitment to the PRC "open door" policy, as seen in the recent expansion of PRC-ROK indirect trade. It is natural that ROK wishes to build its own relationship with PRC, under circumstances where ROK is left out, because of the division of the Korean Peninsula, in the rapid rapprochement now going on between PRC and Japan, and between PRC and the United States. To those who know of ROK being the most typical "Confucianist country", the logic how South Koreans have come to cherish the wish should be more plain than to others.

However, the actual situation in and around the Korean Peninsula is too severe to achieve what ROK expected. Chinese leaders are not affectionate enough to accommodate the situation for easier fulfillment of South Korean wishes.

Chairman Takeiri of Komeito (Clean Government Party), who met President Chun Doo Hwan in Seoul in late July of this year, flew to Beijing on August 1 to have a meeting with Deng Xiaoping. Reportedly, at the meeting he conveyed to Deng the ROK government's expectations such as improvement of relations with Beijing and PRC participation in the Seoul Olympic Games. Kyodo News Service of Japan said, "Mr. Takeiri first notified Deng of President Chun's position that (1) ROK places full confidence in the current Chinese leaders and expects strongly to promote bilateral exchanges in non-

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political fields, (2) ROK makes the best efforts to maintain peace on the Korean Peninsula and expects PRC to strive for prevention of conflict on the Peninsula." Kyodo continued, "In response, Deng told Takeiri that the tension on the Korean Peninsula has been relaxing but the Korean issue 'requires much time to be settled' and that Chinese policies afford the concept of 'one country, two systems." Thus, while showing his consent to PRC-ROK normalization from a long-range viewpoint, Deng revealed Beijing's prudent posture against rapid rapprochement. He also described that "the keys of the issue are the process of North-South dialogue and the realization of 'three-way talks'".

Before in visits by Chairman Takeiri and other Komeito delegates to Seoul and Beijing, respectively, there was a much favorable observation that these chances together might become a significant step towards ROK-PRC normalization, though, the Deng's statements as above resulted in giving a strong impression that the basic standpoint of the PRC government can never be dismissed even by the hands of such a person as Mr. Takeiri, who had been keeping tight contact with Chinese leaders and had played a certain role in PRC-Japan normalization. Deng Xiaoping so insistently displayed no changes in the fundamental policy of PRC towards the Korean Peninsula, that he eventually betrayed the expectations of the people who thought the ROK-PRC relations would start to flow after Chairman Takeiri's visit to Beijing.

Then, what is the basic standpoint of PRC in dealing with the matters of the Korean Peninsula? As I often pointed out,² Beijing takes the position that the Korean issue should be resolved by means of North-South dialogue, that North and South should attempt the withdrawal of US troops through tripartite conference and achieve reunification self-reliantly, and that PRC thoroughly supports the standpoint of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in these contexts. As long as these basic principles of China do not change, the improvement of relations between ROK and PRC will remain limited in nature. I cannot help saying that, however active the non-political personal exchanges and indirect trade via Hong Kong might become in the future,³ there is no likelihood that this new situation will bring a political contact between the two

^{1.} Report by Saga, a Kyodo correspondent to Bei-taiho (Heibei Province, China), dated August 1, 1985, appearing in Shinano Mainichi Shimbun (Shinano Daily Newspaper) of October 2, 1985.

^{2.} See Chapter 2 "New World Strategy of China" in Mineo Nakajima, *Politics and Strategy of Modern China* (PHP Research Institute, 1984).

^{3.} Non-political exchanges between China and South Korea for sports, international conferences, etc. are increasing.

In 1984, about 110 South Koreans visited China and some 80 Chinese came to South Korea. The number of those South Korean residents in China who temporarily returned to their fatherland in the year reached 207, and that of those returned permanently was 21.

On the other hand, South Korean Foreign Minister Lee Won Kyung explained to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly on June 4, 1985, using the statistics of the Hongkong Government, that the South Korean-Chinese trade in 1984 amounted to a total of US\$350 mn (of which the import was US\$160 mn and the export was US\$190 mn).

countries and therefore reach the establishment of diplomatic relations, i.e. PRC's recognition of ROK.

In reply to the question "How Do You See the Recent Move to Access between PRC and ROK?" by a Japanese pressman, Ho Dam, a politburo member and a secretary of the Korean Workers' Party (who had held the post of foreign minister since 1973 and now is the chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland as well as the chief of the international liaison department of the DPRK Central Committee), said, "We are informed by the PRC government of its action from time to time. However, because China continuously supports our reunification policies including the prerequisite of withdrawing US troops, we believe that relations between China and North Korea will remain basically unchanged." This comment can be seen as expressing the current DPRK-PRC relationship precisely and candidly.

The Japanese newspaper, Asahi Shimbun, which released the above interview with Ho Dam, later started to carry a serial report entitled *Kankoku no Sugao* (Unpainted Face of South Korea). Focusing on the current South Korean fascination towards the Chinese market, the report states, "A good many of South Korean and Japanese economists predict that improvement of relations between Beijing and Seoul would progress at a surprisingly fast tempo." Although South Korean image of 'Chinese Market' is not as illusionary as Japanese had in the 'Rosy Chinese Market' argument in the recent economic relations with China, it will fade away soon.

It is a logical speculation that Beijing would continue its efforts to expand non-political relations with ROK, such as personal exchanges and indirect trade, to the extent that these activities coincide with its national interests and diplomatic principles.

Particularly, if China takes into account the probable prosperity in the Pacific Basin and the socio-economic development in Asian NICs including South Korea, it should keep on building its relationship with ROK on different levels. But, what Beijing intends is merely a betterment in non-political relations to foster economic interdependency between the two countries. It must not be conceived that the ROK's expectations on higher levels could come true. It must also be remembered that trade between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, carried out via Hong Kong, had already amounted to US\$500 mn in 1984 and is expected to reach the billion mark this year. Despite such an increase in indirect trade between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, it is obvious that, for the time being, there is little ground for the two governments to have political contact with each other.

From the above passage, the China boom in South Korea in these days can be perceived as a dream interweaved with romantic longing for the Chinese mainland; in other words,

^{4.} Asahi Shimbun, May 14, 1985.

^{5.} Asahi Shimbun, July 27, 1985.

the repulsion to North Korea or to the Soviet Union has straight-forwardly led to sweet expectations on Beijing.

However, the background and basis of the recent efforts by the Chinese government to substantially improve its relations with Pyongyang as well as with Moscow are not yet recognized among the public.

2. PRC's Turnover and Sino-Soviet Relations

Today, there is a growing hope that relations between the United States and the Soviet Union will move into a new phase, particularly in terms of arms control. Under these circumstances, another remarkable move is coming to the fore in the sphere of world politics. Since some Sino-Soviet agreements on economic, scientific and technical cooperation were signed after a long blank, as a result of the Soviet First Vice Premier Arkhipov's visit to Beijing in late December 1984 and the former Chinese Vice Premier Yao Yilin's visit to Moscow in July 1985, it is becoming apparent to everyone that relations between Beijing and Moscow are now on the path to substantial improvement.

As the de-maoification represented by the Four Modernizations spreads on all levels of administrations in the country, China made a drastic change from the anti-hegemony strategy, or a policy of confrontation with the Soviet Union, which had been the core of the world strategy concepts of Mao Zedong and his followers. Thus, the Chinese government appears to be moving towards the stabilization of the international environment in which the so-called "open door" economic system of the nation must fit. At the same time, China appears to take advantage of "self-reliant diplomacy" which enables the nation to maintain an equal distance both from the United States and the Soviet Union. However, now that rapprochement between Beijing and Moscow will probably continue to proceed, more explication is needed to clarify what has brought these strategic changes on the Chinese side.6

Nonetheless, with regard to the "opened China" which is now fostering exchanges with the Western world including Japan, are we too freely talking about impressions of China, rather than analyzing the situation is and around China and considering the background of changes in these circumstances?

Of the many careless discussions noted, the most typical ones are that "China requires technological and financial support from Western countries such as Japan and the United States and, because of these national interests, Sino-Soviet rapprochement will not occur for the time being," and that "there is not the least possibility of rapproche-

^{6.} For details on this point, see my article "China's Strategy and Improvement with the Soviet Union" in Asahi Shimbun of February 5, 1985, and "Sino-Soviet Rapprochement and Modern Socialism" in the July 1985 issue of Gendai no Riron (Theory of Today).

ment between China and the Soviet Union as long as the three obstacles (the presence of Soviet troops on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian borders, the support of the Soviet government to the Vietnamese invasion of the Kampuchean territory, and the stay of the Soviet military in Afghanistan) pointed to by China remain," and that the Western countries must therefore encourage China to become a counter-force against the Soviet Union.

However, have the aforementioned national interests on the Chinese side ever exerted influence on the decisions of foreign policies by the Chinese government? Can the Chinese world strategy be restricted by such external factors? The answers to these two questions should be "No". I have reasons to believe that, basically, the PRC's strategy is never affected by the outside world and is born from the versatile internal factors which lie beyond the control of the external world.

In general, the world strategy or foreign policies of the Chinese government is defined by ideology, nationalism and tradition (perception of world order with Chinese characteristics) or by a complex of these three factors. And, the aspects of the world strategy or foreign policy should naturally be influenced by occasional restraints in domestic politics, particularly, the conception of international affairs by the political leaders. It must not be forgotten that in China, where decisions on international affairs are still rarely restricted by bureaucracies of public opinions, a distinction (differentia) which cannot be considered in an American type of decision making model exists in political practices.

Since there was a case where the so-called "balance of power" theory symbolized by Kissinger-style diplomacy could have worked effectively over the international politics centering around China, ideological or institutional effects on strategic activities in international relations are apt to be neglected nowadays, however, as the late Raymond Aron emphasized in *Paix et Guerre entre les Nations* (1962), importance must still be attached to the need to study the particularities of a government and to look deep into the philosophy of the rulers of a state, in considering China, the Soviet Union, or North Korea.

Viewed from the above standpoint, a significant change deriving from domestic policies can be pointed out in the Chinese conception of the Soviet Union.

As already known, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in December 1978 was a critical turning point of domestic politics in which de-maoification was going on. Deng Xiaoping and his comrades, who had succeeded in forming a majority in party leadership during the Third Session, dragged down Hua Guofeng, a Cultural Revolutionist and a successor to Mao Zedong, from the position of Party Chairman in the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in July 1981 and appointed Hu Yaobang, a prominent sympathizer with Deng. In the Sixth Session they also adopted A Decision on Some Historical Problems of the Party since

^{7.} Raymond Aron, Paix et Guerre entre les Nations (Paris, 1962), p. 587.

National Foundation, which was important in that it caused demaoification to be confirmed and documented.

The Twelfth Congress of Chinese Communist Party held in September of the following year (1982) was an important meeting, in which the system of dictatorship by party bureaucracy based on Deng Xiaoping's political line was set up. By means of the platform revised in the Twelfth Congress, the Chinese Communist Party came to have a Soviet-like apparatus provided with strengthened bureaucratic and organizational functions, and started to carry out its policies under an extremely bureaucratic system centering around the General Secretary and his Secretariat.

To follow the outcome of the Twelfth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, the Fifth Meeting of the Fifth Annual Session of the National People's Congress held in November-December 1982 ratified a new constitution—the fourth time since national foundation—and legalized the political courses and practices of the nation towards the Four Modernizations, and eventually decided to dissolve the people's communes which had long been a symbol of Mao Zedong politics. The Chinese government thus launched an effort to activate rural economy, using the Responsibility System for Agricultural Production as leverage. Moreover, as a result of adoption of A Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Reform of the Economic Structure in the Third Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee on October 20, 1984, China planned to start an economic reform in urban areas simultaneously with reform in rural areas.

However, it cannot be denied that there were many problems with the above changes in domestic politics. The first problem arose during the campaign against the so-called "spiritual pollution" in late 1983. This implies that different forms of resistance to the Four Modernizations policy existed even among the nucleus constituents of the Deng government.

So, to the Deng-Hu leadership, the party rectification campaign set off earnestly at the end of 1983 meant a critical political step, though a number of problems lay ahead of the rectification.

Noteworthy in the new climate of China is the world strategy or diplomatic course of the nation which is beginning to shift as the domestic scene is updated following the formation of new party leadership. More precisely, the Chinese world strategy had actually been changing since the Third Plenary Session of the Central Committee in December 1978 with the advance of demaoification, and this change was made certain by the rigid posture towards the United States and the intention of improving relations with the Soviet Union expressed in the Hu Yaobang report to the Twelfth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

Considering the constitution or essence of Chinese politics, there will be no such evaluation that the Mao Zedong pattern of world strategy of foreign policies is correct, once

the domestic policy of that pattern seeking after a "utopia of poverty" was negated to take a course of achieving economic prosperity by means of Four Modernizations. As long as today's domestic policies are directed to the total negation of Maoism, or demaoification over the entire Chinese society, the Mao Zedong pattern of foreign policies must also be negated. The confrontation with the Soviet Union, as well as the world strategy which brought the Sino-Soviet cold war, symbolized the Mao Zedong pattern of foreign policies. But, in the current situation, where Chinese Communist Party leaders basically choose the Liu Shaoqi line with their mental and physical attributes reverted to those of 1950s, an idea of "becoming closer" to the Soviet Union is no longer unacceptable to them.

As is known well, Chinese leaders used to engage in ideological controversy with the Soviet Union. The major members of the pragmatist group such as Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Peng Zhen are not exceptional. They argued intensely with the late Mikhail Suslov, a member of the Soviet Communist Party politburo. However, it must be remembered that, in the basic conception these pragmatic leaders hold with the Soviet Union, the controversy is a product of criticism at the ideological level, not a means of world strategy for continuing confrontation with the Soviet Union.

No source of ideological controversy seems to exist between Beijing and Moscow nowadays. Those members of the Zhou Enlai faction, whose ideology fell between Cultural Revolutionalists and pragmatists and was inconsistent with the Soviet Union's but who wished to keep contact with the Soviet Union by avoiding discord, are declining remarkably these days, partly because of their commitment to the Cultural Revolution.

As a result of the overall reversal of domestic politics, the leaders who were disregarded in the Mao Zedong era have long since regained influence. Even the members of the Peng Dehuai group, which attempted alignment with Khrushchev's policies in 1950s, has achieved a rollback. (For example, Zhang Aiping is now active as Minister of Defense.) The pro-Stalin Gaogang group members (such as Guo Feng, former First Secretary of Liaoning Province Party Committee) have also been restored, although they were purged in early 1950s due to their attempt to separate the Northeastern frontier to be a 'sovereign state'. Moreover, all authorities engaged in the diplomatic activities of the Chinese government, including Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian and Deputy Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, have much knowledge about the Soviet Union, learned from their different experiences in negotiations with the Soviet diplomats and in the international Communist Movement.

Thinking of these factors, it can be said at least, that after such severe experiences as the Cultural Revolution and Sino-Soviet confrontation, not only the Deng-Hu leadership but also the other mainstreamers of the Chinese government are free from the "Soviet threat" theory, i.e. the concept in which the Soviet Union is regarded as an enemy ready to attack China tomorrow, though they still regard the Soviet Union as an opponent.

Whether to see the Soviet Union as a strategical threat or not is the critical point for China in forming its policy in the international scene. A series of steps recently taken to improve relations with the Soviet Union, the silence kept about SS-20 deployment in the Far East, and the new style of negotiation designed to foster non-political ties with the United States independently of the three obstacles are deduced from the grounds analyzed as above.

Although the dispute about the sovereignty of the borderland was once the primary issue keeping the two countries from reaching a compromise, it has been replaced with the rather indirect issue, the so-called Three Obstacles, resulting in an essential change of Sino-Soviet relations. Yet, this is not be recognized commonly in Japan.

The most remarkable phenomenon sensed when Soviet First Deputy Premier Arkhipov visited Beijing in December 1984 was that senior cadres under Deng-Hu leadership—such as Chen Yun (Politburo Standing Committee Member), Yao Yilin (Vice Premier), and Bo Yibo (Vice Chairman of Central Advisory Commission)—who usually do not have contact with the leaders of the West and still prefer a socialist oriented "planned economy", supported negotiations with Arkhipov in warm atmosphere, recalling the friendship they had with Kremlin in 1950s.

Under these circumstances, China is strengthening or improving relations with South-Korea, Mongolia (with which there was once confrontation), and even with Poland which is under a military government. There is also a sign that a moderate socialist alliance may be restored between China and Vietnam or Afghanistan in future. The improvement of relations between the Chinese Communist Party and its Soviet counterpart is already on a timetable, and concurrently, the Communist Parties of China and Japan are proceeding with the recovery of their relationship.

If these attempts flow smoothly, the 'China Card' policy of the United States and other Western countries will probably encounter a deadlock. The indefinite postponement of the port call of a US Navy craft at Shanghai is seen as a bleak sign. China not only keeps silence about the Soviet SS-20 deployment in the Far East but also expresses opposition to the SDI program of the Reagan Administration. Attention must also be paid to these two phenomenon.

3. How Does PRC Look at ROK?

The reflection of China in the international environment within Asia has grown deeper in the past few years, especially concerning the Korean Peninsula which, in all likelihood, will be a matter of great importance in the near future. Nobody can deny that any active move on the part of China would exert a big influence on the future course of the Peninsula where two governments are now seeking a way to dialogue.

Many people in South Korea and in Japan hope that Socialist countries including China

and the Soviet Union will join in the coming Seoul Olympic Games and that the international position of ROK will go up accordingly. They hope so because, at the moment when the world is about to enter the 21st century and is apparently shifting to focus on "A New Pacific Era", the economic and political roles ROK should play in the Asia-Pacific region are increasing.

However, only a few people were aware of the existence of another important axis of relationship—namely "PRC-ROK relations"—in the international environment within Asia until the Chinese airliner hijacking occurred on May 5, 1983. In other words, South Korea and China had maintained the farthest diplomatic relations whereas they are so close to each other historically, culturally, and geographically. And their relations had remained obscure in the international scene in Asia.

Along with the Sino-American rapprochement and Sino-Japanese friendship movements in the international environment of 1970s, when 'official' contact between Seoul and Beijing was not yet initiated, there had been different struggles on the ROK side for the formation of a link with PRC. It was quite reasonable that the ROK government had been active in trying to effect a development in the situation with China, since culturally, historically and geographically the country should be much closer to China than to Japan. Actually, since 1980, personal exchanges have continued between the two countries including visits to relatives and business trips, although they are very small in number.

In early February 1983, when the situation was about to go into a new phase, US Secretary of State Schultz visited Beijing and queried the Chinese leadership about the possibility of so-called "North-South cross recognition". His probing action came to draw the people's attention. Japanese leading figures and scholars, through increasing contact with their Chinese counter-parts, are watching to determine the probability of success of the cross recognition scheme. However, the Chinese are negative about the issue, esteeming the North Korean argument that cross recognition would lead to permanent North-South division. In these circumstances, DPRK, which was exposed to international condemnation due to the Rangoon incident in October 1983, proposed a tripartite conference (so-called three-way talks between the United States, ROK and DPRK) on the occasion of Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang's call at Washington in January 1984. The United States instead stressed "four-way talks" including PRC. But PRC has rejected four-way talks, though they might upgrade its position in the world, and opts to keep pace with DPRK.

Basically, this position of China comes from the "lips-and-teeth" (deeply-rooted) alliance with North Korea. As is already well known, Chinese leaders Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang together made a visit to Pyongyang in secret in April 1982; North Korean President Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Jong Il, visited Beijing in September of the same year and in June 1983, respectively, and Hu went to Pyongyang again in May 1984. It cannot be denied that these exchanges of visits have brought an acknowledgement of the Kim Il Sung-to-Kim Jong Il hereditary system of control and marked a new development in the

PRC-DPRK relations.

Secondly, as studied in the previous section, China under the Deng Xiaoping-Hu Yaobang leadership is switching its world strategy along internal de-maoification; it no longer sees the Soviet Union as being a serious threat and, certainly, is advancing towards improvement of relations with the Soviet Union. Because there is such a tide of improvement, China expressed satisfaction with the Kim Il Sung's visit to Moscow—made immediately after Hu Yaobang's visit to Pyongyang for the first time in seventeen years—instead of offering opposition to it. It must be perceived that a "moderate alliance" has already been restored between Moscow, Beijing and Pyongyang. These three parties have complete concurrence regarding the tripartite-talks formula. In my view, it is superficial to conclude a discord between Moscow and Pyongyang despite the fact that no joint communique was announced while Kim Il Sung was in the Soviet Union. Looking back to the fact that even the interchange of dignitaries between Beijing and Pyongyang came to an identical result, they might have dared to skip the joint communique because of such good fraternity between them.

Thus, if the international background of DPRK is taken into account, there is no sign for the time being that PRC will move towards "cross recognition" or "four-way talks"—or, further towards the establishment of diplomatic relations with ROK. China used the name "South Korea", not "Republic of Korea", when a South Korean tennis team came for a Davis Cup match in March 1984.

In addition, when the Chinese Communist Party's organ *People's Daily* of October 28, 1984, reported extensively with photos on an anti-government student demonstration on the Seoul University campus, it criticized briefly but in high tone the indrift of police into the campus by the hand of the university authority. Although the *People's Daily* generally minimizes space for the criticism of South Korean issues—perhaps because of considerations for the recent contact with ROK at the working level of administration or in the field of sports—it continues reporting the current student demonstrations, evaluating them as "anti-government" demonstrations, and do not give up referring to "South Korean government" in quotation marks.

These Chinese attitudes were also sensed in articles about President Chun's visit to Japan in early September 1984. For example, the New China News Agency reported the visit on September 9 with the term "South Korean President" enclosed in quotation marks. In the *People's Daily*, nothing was reported on the critical event in the Japanese-South Korean history, except a simple announcement that President Chun encountered "great opposition" in Tokyo. Instead, it took up the news of the 36th anniversary celebration held in Pyongyang on September 8 of the same year; it spent rather a large space in introducing the address by North Korean Vice President Park Sung Chul that "Chun Doo Hwan's visit to

^{8.} People's Daily, September 7, 1984.

Japan would strengthen the division of nation, an obstacle to peaceful reunification, and intensify the tension in the Korean Peninsula as well as in Asia".

The *People's Daily* furthermore ignored the 25th anniversary of Japanese-South Korean normalization of June this year. This clearly displayed the posture of the Chinese government which had been consistently criticizing the strengthening of Japanese-South Korean relations for many years.

It must not be forgotten that all the above things agree with the PRC's basic concept of ROK. Even if PRC makes the friendly gesture of sending a big delegation to the Seoul Olympic Games, can any change in the political and diplomatic aspects of that concept be expected?

A recent report says that China tacitly permits the transfer of about 50 MiG-23s actually made by the Soviet Union in order to reinforce the North Korean military strength.¹⁰ This may reflect the Chinese posture analyzed as above.

It can be understood, more than sufficiently, what high expectations ROK holds for PRC today when the ROK's prestige is increasing in the international society as a result of the good economic performance the country has reached. Every reason why ROK must improve its relations with RPC can also be understood while Japan and the United States are deepening friendship with that country.

But, at the same time, however close China comes to the West, it is merely for a strategic purpose of strenghtening the nation economically and militarily. There will be no such westernization that any Communist party, which once holds the reigns of a state, may expose itself to a risk of breaking up its base of existence. It must never be forgetten that both the Soviet Union and PRC, and moreover DPRK, are the same in this point.

^{9.} People's Daily, September 9, 1984.

^{10.} Sankei Shimbun, June 28, 1985.