China's success in freeing the Daiouyu skipper may offer lessons for US efforts to aid a jailed geologist, writes Jerome A. Cohen

Across stateslines

By Jerome A. Cohen

The news that Beijing has freed the skipper of a Japanese fishing vessel stopped in China in early September to avoid foreign interests was welcome news. China and Japan, of course, have had a long history of tension and conflict. It is a history that has included incidents of internecine belligerence, such as the sinking of a Japanese naval ship by the US navy in 1942, and the loss of hundreds of Chinese lives in 1974 when a Chinese ship rammed a Japanese oil tanker. In the late 1990s, relations were further strained when several Chinese ships rammed a Japanese fishing vessel, the I-858, in the Senkaku Islands dispute.

China has a good reason to be wary of Japan’s assertiveness. Even as China and Japan cooperate on issues ranging from international relations to economic integration, Japan continues to aggressively pursue its own strategic interests. China has lost no opportunity to remind Tokyo of the sad history of their relationship, and it is hard to believe that Beijing’s enthusiasm for cooperation will outlast Tokyo’s unchecked assertiveness.

In the present case, China’s decision to release the skipper was perhaps motivated by a desire to curb an emerging crisis, to reaffirm the commitment of both countries to peace, and to offer an incentive to Japan to reconsider its current course. China is undoubtedly hoping that Japan will respond in kind by moderating its behavior and adopting a more conciliatory stance.

This month’s release of the skipper is an important development in the ongoing Sino-Japanese relationship. Yet it is also a reminder of the challenges that lie ahead. In the years to come, Beijing will need to be vigilant in monitoring Tokyo’s actions and ensuring that it does not take advantage of China’s generosity.

China has a long history of respecting the rule of law. It is to be hoped that Japan will follow its example and adopt a more cooperative and conciliatory approach to its relations with China.

Jerome A. Cohen is a former US ambassador to China and is professor of law at New York University School of Law. He is the author of "China's New Power: How Beijing is Taking Charge in Asia and the World." 

Value of a view

If the words "Yes, but" should be eliminated in every government office, as one senior official recently observed, then the answer to the question, "Yes, but what?

The answer is "Yes, but what?" That’s a standard question in government offices, but it’s often asked in a negative context, as if to say, "Yes, but what can we do about this?

President Peter Kammerer

Peter Kammerer

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Whatever ends up developing, it will always be a personal and public use. The development is therefore always an end in itself, never a means to an end. The primary goal is to create value, not simply increase economic value. The development should provide a sense of purpose and meaning to those who engage in it.

Peter Kammerer is a senior writer at The Atlantic.

Party lines can wash away the rise of the sinews of state

By Dong Deyu

China's electoral system is in for a major shake-up in the People's Congress. The current system of single-member electoral districts is known as a "first-past-the-post" system, which is used in most democratic countries. This system is characterized by the dominance of party politics.

Under the new system, candidates will be elected based on their performance in election districts, which are smaller and more localized. This will give voters more choice and allow for greater political representation.

The new system will also make it easier for small parties and independent candidates to gain representation. This will help to increase political participation and prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a few major parties.

China's transition to a multiparty system will not happen overnight. However, the move towards greater political pluralism and accountability is an important step forward for the country. It will help to ensure that China's political system remains transparent and accountable to its citizens.

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