

FROM REOCCUPATION TO EXPO
—Hong Kong - Japanese Relations, 1945-1970—

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There was nothing very glorious about the return of Hong Kong to British rule. It resembled an improvised scramble with allies and enemies quickly reversing roles amidst a situation that paralleled the chaos of December 1941. The difficulties of the British position were illustrated by two radio messages sent out at the end of August 1945 from their senior officials responsible for Hong Kong. The first was broadcast on 28 August to Chungking (for retransmission abroad) from Frank Gimson the prewar colonial secretary, who, largely on his own initiative, had reasserted British rule when news of Japan's decision to surrender percolated through to the camps; the second, a day later, was a series of instructions to the Japanese commander in the territory from the British task force newly stationed off Hong Kong. Both statements contained a mixture of outward strength and an accurate appreciation of the difficulties facing British civil and military units. Gimson's was suitably patriotic, but acknowledged that his opportunity to speak was obtained 'with the concurrence of the Japanese.' The weakness of his authority in the face of local and external uncertainties was further underlined when Gimson spoke of having reestablished an office in Victoria once again with Japanese acquiescence and ended with an urgent plea for the return of British troops 'which I trust will not be much longer deferred.'¹⁹ Rear Admiral Harcourt was equally cautious. He could only enter Hong Kong harbour with the assistance of Japanese pilots and their charts and, more importantly, 'to ensure that law and order is maintained and that there can be no opportunity for bad elements to loot or

riot' he needed Japanese cooperation and expected 'the strict discipline of Japanese and Japanese controlled Forces to be maintained.' The reoccupation of Hong Kong was to be an Anglo-Japanese affair. Harcourt would need to balance the fact of victory over Japan with the realization that Japanese local forces had to be pressganged into keeping the peace, since neither Chiang Kai-shek⁽²⁾ nor Chinese residents in Hong Kong⁽³⁾ were about to applaud the liberators. The same strategy of coopting Japanese Imperial forces to support the returning metropolitan powers was simultaneously put into effect throughout South East Asia Command. Imperialism (however discredited) was still in the saddle.

Preliminary meetings between the British and Japanese commanders were far from smooth. Major General Fukuchi complained on 31 August of incidents were Japanese troops had been disarmed by British soldiers during a near riot, while Harcourt and Gimson, in charge of civil government before being shipped home and later rewarded with the governorship of Singapore, were both abrupt. The minutes of their meeting, however, had a slightly comic side. Harcourt, for example, reminded Fukuchi that, while Japanese units would be responsible for law and order on land, the British would control the harbour. This produced the following exchange:

'Harcourt: "It will be necessary to demilitarise the Japanese torpedo boats. There is to be no movement of merchant shipping without my permission. Arrangements are to be made to deal with all landing craft and suicide boats."

Fukuchi: English or Japanese suicide boats?

Harcourt: Japanese, of course.⁽⁴⁾"

More serious disputes arose over what the British saw as tardiness by the Japanese and deliberate attempts to drag their feet. There was also bitterness over the composition of the Japanese negotiating committee and its efforts to secure the personal safety of Japanese residents and the protection of their property, Fukuchi wanted to know about the arrangements being considered for the movement of

Japanese and touched off an angry response from Gimson when he was reminded that 'whether the Japanese can live in Kowloon or not is a matter of humanity, so we would like to enquire further.' Gimson replied that 'you can be assured that British officials in this Colony, together with the military, are fully alive to the requirements of humanity in dealing with other nationals, and I consider it is an impertinence and out of place for the Japanese authorities to raise such a question.⁽⁶⁾ Out of place it might be, but the British had to handle all sides with kid gloves. The Chinese authorities needed to be placated through assurances of Sino-British cooperation in estimating food and fuel positions, in hunting down suspected war criminals and in promising to permit Chinese troops access to Hong Kong's port and air facilities 'for the occupation of Japan, Formosa, or points on the coast of China and Manchuria.'⁽⁶⁾ Similar appreciation of American sensitivities kept any repetition of earlier anticolonialism from reappearing at the highest level at least.⁽⁷⁾ President Truman's remarks at Potsdam over Britain's sovereignty and the views of MacArthur over the retention of Hong Kong undoubtedly helped. The first United States units to visit the territory began arriving on 9 October according to reports carried in *The New York Times*. Later the same month Madame Chiang Kai-shek also visited Hong Kong and, though employing some facesaving measures to avoid any formal recognition of the British return, the issue of possession subsequently lost its immediacy. Chinese atlases would incorporate Hong Kong within their domain and then qualify this by adding "British occupied."

The immediate difficulties facing the British administration centred on restoring essential services. There was little time to spare over the colony's future, though presumably any successes in getting Hong Kong back to a semblance of normality would strengthen the British government's hand. Issues of security, food and currency had to be tackled first. (The fact that Major General Pan, the head of the Chinese Military Delegation in the Hong Kong area, wrote to Harcourt on 16 September to inform him that he had been instructed

to witness the surrender ceremonies, though admittedly without any authority to sign,⁽⁶⁾ further eased the international tension.)

The chief Japanese legacy to Hong Kong in the autumn of 1945 was an economic mess. The harbour was mined, rice scarce, the currency situation confused and the exodus of Chinese who had voted with their feet only confirmed the obvious. Hong Kong government estimates of the Japanese disruption to local industry were damning. Figures prepared in April 1947 suggested that 50% of the weaving, 75% of the knitting, 90% of the rubber factories, all the paint, 40% of the match, 50% of the vacuum flask and 30% of the torch battery plants had been destroyed.⁽⁹⁾ Yet rehabilitation in many cases appears to have been rapid and the Hong Kong government was decidedly uninterested in being lumbered with out of date Japanese machinery under possible reparations programmes.⁽¹⁰⁾

Industrialists were left to get on with it by themselves. The government saw its job to patch up essential services, to reopen communications and solve the currency situation. It had also to recommence some rudimentary policing, though the Colonial Secretary as late as June 1946 had to remind a questionnaire at Legco that 'the restoration of the rule of law after the anarchy and chaos left by the Japanese is a vital problem for every Government in the Far East area and that the circumstances in Hong Kong as elsewhere are as yet far from normal. Scarcely a week has passed without the police being fired on in the streets of our city.'⁽¹¹⁾

Measures to begin to erase memories of the Japanese occupation were quickly put into effect. Following the surrender ceremonies only one Japanese national was permitted to continue to reside in the colony. Japanese military scrip — defined by London as '“Banana” Currency' — became worthless as part of a British government decision applicable to all its Asian territories.⁽¹²⁾ Minor war crimes trials commenced⁽¹³⁾ and the Japanese war memorial was blown up. Yet the basis for future relations between Hong Kong and Japan was simultaneously being constructed. Hong Kong, despite its bitterness, could only survive through trade with its former occupier.

Pragmatism won out. What ultimately mattered for the territory's future was not the apprehension of prison camp guards or reparation claims, but reconstruction. The Governor put it succinctly to the Colonial Office in December 1947 when he noted that '[e]arly rehabilitation of Japan [is] therefore of more importance to Hong Kong.' It might be bad politics to spell it out too clearly, yet there was no option but to move fast.

Commendable speed led Hong Kong to install its own representative in Japan to press the advantages of both private and government to government trade between SCAP and the colony. Working under loose authorization of the United Kingdom Liaison Mission, Hong Kong's agent could write to General Marquat, head of Economic and Scientific Section, as early as October 1946 that the territory 'is now in a position to place firm orders for Japanese goods.' In reply it was confirmed by SCAP GHQ that Sterling would be employed for such trade, subject to agreement that accrued Sterling balances might be later liquidated in US dollars and that all cotton textiles also be paid for in dollars.⁽¹⁰⁾ This arrangement appears to have found little favour with the British government or its Mission in Tokyo. The acting head of Hong Kong's department of supplies, trade and industry wrote the following year that 'I say quite frankly that UKLIM does not and cannot represent us adequately.'⁽¹¹⁾ The same official also noted that the Hong Kong approach of encouraging 'an unconventional man' who 'does things in an unconventional way' was clearly paying off, though his 'ruthless' manner had inevitably brought him enemies.

The evidence (admittedly largely from Hong Kong Public Records Office sources) suggests that Hong Kong and SCAP's ESS section worked well together. Both were eager for substantial trade links and welcomed the opportunity to develop these without the political pressures that usually surrounded SCAP GHQ. Reports from senior Hong Kong visitors to Tokyo spoke of ESS staff as competent but working under 'heavy political disabilities imposed on them by Washington,' while UKLIM was described as wanting to assist but

'bound by all the most rigid Foreign Office rules, which leads them to take a defensive, even defeatist, attitude. They would rather make no move than run the slightest risk of offending the Americans. This is I am afraid not appreciated by the Americans who would much prefer a more vigorous, if less orthodox, line.'⁽¹⁶⁾

Ties between Hong Kong's commercial figures and SCAP GHQ were close. The territory had demonstrated its eagerness for trade by promising not to be too selective over the nature of its Japanese imports and General MacArthur himself went out of his way to assist the territory.⁽¹⁷⁾ The case of permitting scarce Kyushu coal to be shipped to Hong Kong is evidence indeed of goodwill on the supreme commander's behalf. Despite fuel shortages in occupied Japan, MacArthur instructed Hong Kong's agent in Tokyo to work out arrangements with General Marquat. MacArthur, clearly well briefed on the coal issue for his interviews with Sir Alvary Gascoigne and his UKLIM staff, was correct to claim that his generosity seemingly went against 'all commonsense and reason.' Hong Kong's governor rightly termed relations between his colony and SCAP 'excellent.'

The same could hardly be said of Hong Kong's discussions with London over Japan. Hong Kong and SCAP GHQ wished to maximise private trade at the earliest possible date without concerning themselves over much with currency issues. The British Treasury, however, had wider concerns. It was wary of permitting Hong Kong to be incorporated into the proposed Sterling area agreement and disliked the American scheme whereby any accrued Sterling surplus in Japan had to be converted into dollars at regular intervals. Hong Kong generally sided with Tokyo against Whitehall and was apparently kept in the dark over the details of interdepartmental discussions in London on Japanese trade.⁽¹⁸⁾ Hong Kong officials felt that the first requirement was to get trade moving and financed, since the colony badly needed Japanese yarn and cotton textiles, and doubted whether London wished to expand Sterling area trade with Japan until the convertibility problem had been solved.

Despite these handicaps Hong Kong and Japan did restore their trading links. Japan has remained since the early postwar years the principal source of Hong Kong's imports and the holder of a continually favourable balance of payments position. The eventual peace treaty between the Allies and Japan contained little of direct concern to the territory and did nothing to impede the commercial relationship. The issues, however, of compensation for POWs and holders of Japanese currency left the Hong Kong authorities with little more than a few crumbs from Japan in the form of small per capita sums dispensed by the Red Cross under article 16 of the San Francisco treaty. The question of the return of Japanese officials and commercial representatives was equally unsatisfactory from the Japanese point of view. Hong Kong, in line with other British territories in Asia, was eager for trade but reluctant to permit Japanese nationals to reside in the country. The Consul-General came back, of course, once the peace treaty had been signed and JETRO officials arrived in 1956, but progress over relaxing the rules to permit any large-scale influx of other citizens was slow. The Foreign Office in London, with a singular lack of sensitivity, argued that this was attributable to the wartime experiences of colonial officials at the hands of their Japanese captors, but the issue was certainly deeper than this and also concerned Chinese and Indian residents of Hong Kong. Recollections of the Japanese occupation could not be blotted out and persist in diluted form forty five years after the fall of Hong Kong.⁽¹⁹⁾ Questions of local collaboration and resistance still reappear.⁽²⁰⁾

Despite such legacies the 1950s provide the watershed in Hong Kong-Japanese postwar relations. It was during this decade that both sides reassessed their positions and strengthened economic and political ties. The rapid reconstruction of the Japanese economy was the key element in the improvement, since it enabled the two economies to gain greater complementarity and prevent frequent clashes between competing, labour-intensive industries as Japan shed its past. The advent of Japan's hyper-growth years gradually reduced

Hong Kong's anxieties over Japanese competition. Substantial investment and enviable annual productivity gains by Japan quickly put it into a different league. It was at this juncture that the Hong Kong government quietly intervened to take advantage of Japan's advance, while watching cautiously for the opportune moment to begin altering the political relationship.

From 1946 until 1960 the Hong Kong government staffed and funded a small section in the British embassy in Tokyo to monitor and direct trade links between the colony and Japan. From here many Japanese who wished to enter Hong Kong were interviewed and vetted. Links were gradually restored; oiled by some preliminary ping pong diplomacy, though the authorities forbade Japanese football teams from entering the colony on the grounds that such spectator sports might inflame rather than mend ties. The shift from a general policy of restricting entry in 1953—not even a circus troupe was then allowed short period visas because of its supposed Communist leanings—to the Governor's approval in 1960 for a large number of permits to let Japanese restaurant owners and department stores land was remarkable. Executive Council in November 1960 reviewed policy to allow Japanese entrants to gain employment in industry 'on a selective basis and for reasonable periods,' provided that they possessed specialist skills and arrangements were made for their 'eventual replacement by local staff.'⁽²¹⁾ The Director of Commerce and Industry minuted with a greater display of enthusiasm than Exco that 'with facilities for technical education in the Colony so limited, we can also be grateful for the minor and temporary contribution of these qualified technicians'. He held that Japanese 'quality standards, marketing techniques, [and] organization methods' were needed in Hong Kong.⁽²²⁾ Japanese citizens by 1960 could usually gain visas for import/export trade, shipping, air, banking and insurance work more or less automatically.⁽²³⁾ Even in the textiles field Hong Kong could hardly welcome Japanese investment and refuse the entry of Japanese managerial and technical staffs, though the government had to order an *ex gratia* payment to The Chinese

Manufacturers' Association in 1964 to mollify their concern over a JETRO-sponsored Japan industrial exhibition on a site developed by the Association.⁽²⁴⁾

Any beginnings of widespread public understanding of the two Asian societies had to wait until 1970. Hong Kong's decision to participate in Expo 70 forms a convenient date to close the postwar era, though it would be safe to imagine that the current interest within Hong Kong over the contemporary achievements of Japan has not been matched by similar Japanese awareness of Hong Kong's record. (Those many Japanese who complain of Western ignorance of their nation might recall that others in Asia feel much the same irritation at Japanese condescension). Yet Expo may have contributed to bringing a more accurate vision of Hong Kong to a wider Japanese audience. The Hong Kong pavilion, itself a subject of controversy over its allegedly anachronistic batwing sail design, was visited by some nine million people.⁽²⁵⁾ It was a public relations exercise intended to portray social and industrial progress. It wished, as the statement at the ground-breaking ceremony put it, to recall that 'Hong Kong is Japan's second largest export market and Japan has a very favourable balance of trade with Hong Kong.' The theme throughout was to stress the *laissez faire* approach behind Hong Kong's transformation and to conveniently ignore the uncomfortable realities of the bureaucratic nature of the pavilion's inception and the social infrastructure that underpinned the territory's postwar changes.

The first and most important section of the pavilion, at least in the eyes of the planner, was devoted to a fictitious refugee family in the twenty years since its members had arrived from China in the expectation that the Japanese public would appreciate that residents had 'been able to take advantage of Hong Kong's free enterprise society and through hard work have achieved independence and security.'⁽²⁶⁾ The second section wished to present evidence that 'in twenty years Hong Kong has changed from a centre for the entrepot trade to a modern industrialised community.' Attention was placed

on the colony's trading links with Japan and, more particularly, the textile ties.⁽²⁷⁾ Some visitors were presumably more taken by reminders of Hong Kong's cultural heritage (a euphemism for tourism that conjured up bargain hunting and nights on the town) than the laudable social engineering.

Still, Hong Kong had attempted to put itself on the Japanese map in what had been the first occasion that the territory had been represented at a major international exposition. It may have improved the colony's visibility, though it could hardly expect any very tangible returns from its presence at Osaka. Trade was to remain hopelessly imbalanced and plainer speaking on that score would arise in the 1970s. Yet it was apparent by 1970 that relations between Hong Kong and Japan were being given more attention by both sides.

Two conclusions may be permissible. First, that the role of the Hong Kong administration in appreciating the paramountcy of quickly restoring trading links, while exercising considerable caution in the face of public antipathy towards Japan, has been unfairly neglected by those who would believe that market forces alone have driven Hong Kong forward. Secondly that the commercial and financial nexus has yet to be supplemented by adequate cultural ties. Trading partnerships without sentiment risk coming unstuck. Economic mutuality ought not to preclude a Japanese attempt to reduce its yawning cultural divide and see Hong Kong as something more than a lucrative market. It is time for Japan to take its alternative diplomacy more seriously.

Notes

- (1) Frank Gimson, 28 August 1945, HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/26A. Similar citations are also from the Hong Kong Public Records Office.
- (2) On Chinese diplomacy during the war see Chan Lau Kit-Ching 'The Hong Kong Question during the Pacific War (1941-45),' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, October 1973. Explanations as to why China reduced its efforts to alter the status of Hong Kong as the surrender neared may be linked to Chiang's increasing vulnerability to Communist challenge and the subsequent need for Western postwar credits.
- (3) See comments by Harcourt in Buckley *Occupation Diplomacy* (Cambridge, 1982) p.210. Looters made the most of their opportunities in both December 1941 and August 1945.
- (4) 'Report of Preliminary Negotiations with Japanese Representatives Held by Rear Admiral C. J. H. Harcourt, CB, CBE, On Board HMS Indomitable at Hong Kong on Friday, 31 August, 1945,' HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/26A.
- (5) *Ibid.*
- (6) Sino-British memorandum communicated by Brigadier Cartwright, HQ British Troops China, from Chiefs of Staff to Chinese and American personnel Chungking, 10 September 1945, HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/214. The Hong Kong Secretariat appears not to have had a copy of the "agreement" in mid October. The final point of the memorandum stated that in the case of Sino-British disagreements General MacArthur would act as umpire.
- (7) Churchill's position on Hong Kong was clear cut. Attlee's interest may have been based on having had to get up and speak to the Commons over Japanese aggression in January 1942. Washington's wish to retain Japanese Pacific territories let Britain off the hook over Hong Kong.
- (8) Colonel F. C. Lew, for Major General H.K. Pan, GOC Chinese Military Delegation, Hongkong Area to Rear Admiral Harcourt 16 September 1945. In addition to merely having his officers attend the ceremonies Chiang Kai-shek ordered 'that the surrender to Admiral Harcourt is limited to Japanese Forces on Hongkong Island; Kowloon not being included.' HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/214. The senior Japanese officers who signed the Instrument of Surrender were Major General Okada and Vice Admiral Fujita. See also Louis Allen *The End of the War in Asia* (London, 1976) pp. 251-4 and G. B. Endacott *A History of Hong Kong* (Oxford, 1973) pp. 305-307.
- (9) 'Report on the Effect of the Pacific War on Local Industry. The Destruction which Occurred during the Japanese Occupation, the Degree of Rehabilitation of Industry Achieved at Date: 12th April, 1947,' HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/212. See also *Hong Kong Annual Report, 1947* pp. 4-5.

- (10) Hong Kong intended to pick itself up by its own bootstraps, though it had its eye on new factory installations and machine tool plants from Japan if these could be acquired. The colony was only entitled to a small share of a modest overall British reparations claim. Competition from Japanese textile firms was a more pressing issue.
- (11) Reply by David MacDougall to question from Dr Chau Sik-nin, Legislative Council meeting, 20 June 1946, *Hong Kong Government Gazette, 1946* (Hong Kong, 1946) p. 166.
- (12) Nanking attempted to put pressure on the Hong Kong government to gain compensation for the holders of the scrip. In July 1947 the Treasury in London was informed that this was a piece of 'Chinese skullduggery' in what by then had become 'very largely a speculators racket.' H. H. Thomas to N. E. Young, 23 July 1947, HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/193. For earlier correspondence to the Chinese ambassador in London see G. V. Kitson to Dr Cheng Tien-hui, 30 July 1946, copy *ibid.*
- (13) The CinC Far Eastern Land Forces stated that as of 14 January 1950 there had been sentences passed on 753 war criminals of whom 220 had been executed, 102 had by then been released and of the remainder 57 were due for remission. For a detailed analysis see R. John Pritchard 'The Nature and Significance of British Post-War Trials of Japanese War Criminals, 1945-1948' in Gordon Daniels and Peter Lowe (eds.) *Proceedings of the British Association for Japanese Studies Vol 2: 1977* (Sheffield, 1977). In the particular case of Hong Kong, evidence of mitigation at certain trials (one capital sentence was reduced on the testimony of Dr Selwyn Clarke) and discussion over Japanese government appeals for clemency in the 1950s can be seen.
- (14) R. G. Hersey (Asst. Adj. Gen, SCAP GHQ) to John A. Galvin, 30 October 1946, on 'Exports to the Government of Hong Kong.' Galvin dealt largely with ESS and pushed his Chamber of Commerce contacts.
- (15) J. J. Cowperthwaite, 29 July 1947, HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/648.
- (16) J. J. Cowperthwaite to Colonial Secretary, 2 December 1947, *ibid.* James Ewing, the UKLIM trade representative, however, was described as 'most helpful and has co-operated with us wherever possible.'
- (17) See correspondence on coal supplies from Japan, 1946-7, in HKRS No. 163, D & S 1/219. MacArthur tried unsuccessfully to persuade Hong Kong to barter its food for his coal. Since the colony was entirely dependent on imported food it could hardly gain its 9,000 monthly tons of Japanese coal through this suggestion.
- (18) UKLIM may also have been less than fully aware of British thinking.
- (19) See *South China Morning Post*, December 1986, for articles on the sinking of the POW vessel *Lisbon Maru* in October 1942 and reminiscences of former residents

- involved in the defence of the colony in December 1941. Fictional accounts, such as Martin Booth's recent work *Hiroshima Joe* (London, 1986) ensure that the subject does not disappear.
- (20) For an instance of Indian resistance and torture see correspondence from J. H. Ruttonjee on behalf of D. S. Dinga to Colonial Secretary, 7 March 1949, HKRS No. 163, D & S 1/1098.
 - (21) Executive Council meeting, 29 November 1960.
 - (22) P. V. Dodge, Director of Commerce and Industry, 1 November 1960, HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/1496.
 - (23) cf. Cowperthwaite's remarks to the Colonial Secretary, 26 June 1956, saying that his department had no objection to Japanese businessmen coming in, since 'all visits contribute to our entrepot trade and should therefore be encouraged.'
 - (24) For correspondence between the government and CMA see HKRS No. 163, D & S No. 1/2914.
 - (25) *The Far Eastern Economic Review* for 25 June 1970 described the scene as 'thirteen diaphonous sails flutter prettily in the breeze looking for all the world as if a Chinese fisherman in trouble had done some swift repair work on his rigging, making clever use of his wife's underwear.'
 - (26) Working group meeting, social progress section, 2 November 1968, HK Expo 26/151(GR).
 - (27) Hong Kong's first official trade mission to Japan arrived in October 1970, where its leader Mr Fung Ping-fan described the colony as 'in effect one big factory'. The aim was to attempt to begin to reduce the vast trade gap and show Japanese buyers that Hong Kong could offer both a diversified and increasingly sophisticated range of products. On the trade imbalance cf. *Hong Kong Annual Report 1952* (Hong Kong, 1953) and *Hong Kong, 1970* (Hong Kong, 1971). By 1970 Japan was by far the largest source of Hong Kong's imports, gaining 24% of the territory's total.

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(A sequel based on the British Public Record Office collection for the immediate postwar years is forthcoming in *International University of Japan Annual Review*, vol VI)

占領からエクスポへ

—ホンコンと日本の関係, 1945-1970—

〈要 約〉

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本稿は、ホンコンにとって重要な日本との戦後関係の発展を考察したものであり、太平洋戦争の終結から大阪におけるエクスポ70までの年月を論じ、以下の諸点を提示する。

- (i) ホンコンに対する日本の影響は、ホンコンの輸出主導経済の再建にとってきわめて重要であった。
- (ii) 日本に対するホンコン社会全体の根強い反感にもかかわらず、ホンコン当局は、日本との良好な関係を発展させ、早急に戦時中の領土占領（1941-1945）の記憶をぬぐい去るべき必要の上に立ち現実を見据えていた。
- (iii) ホンコンと日本の間において、通商、産業、財政の各方面での結びつきに注目しなければならないことは言うまでもないが、さらに両者の関係がより広範な政治的・文化的関心を組み入れたものに拡大していくことが必要である。