



Tension Is Rising in the East China Sea. Will Japan be Able to Defend Its Territories?

Dialogue on China's Dangerous and Unnerving Dream – Japan Needs Strategies from a Geopolitical Viewpoint

Discussion between IOKIBE Makoto and FUNABASHI Yoichi



IOKIBE Makoto

Chancellor, Prefectural University of Kumamoto



FUNABASHI Yoichi

Chairman, Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation

Senkaku Islands Represent the Beginning of a Long Struggle

Iokibe: China began insisting that the Senkaku Islands were its property after a survey found resources in the seabed around them in 1970. China then established its law on territorial waters and in 1992 declared islands in the South China and East China Seas, including the Senkaku Islands, as its own territories. However, China took an enduring position on real action over this issue, thinking it would be OK to stop short of actually taking action until it became possible. Deng Xiaoping used a famous phrase, *tao guang yang hui*. It was a teaching that asked people to sufficiently cultivate their abilities, rather than taking



the attitude of intimidating others by showing their claws, while their actual ability is insufficient. China's acts complied with this teaching.

However, China surpassed Japan in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010. It also probably overtook Japan in military power around that time. As China exceeded Japan in total national strength, with its two wheels of economic and military power, opinion grew stronger within the country that it was time to express its intentions firmly. Under these circumstances, a Chinese fishing boat rammed itself into Japan Coast Guard patrol boats in September 2010. There is no way to know the levels of state involvement and planning behind this incident, but China's reactions, when Japan arrested the boat's captain and put him into custody were vehement, including an embargo on rare earth exports to Japan, restraint of Japanese corporate employees in China, and anti-Japanese riots that caused destruction of Japanese stores and company premises.

These reactions shocked not only the Japanese but also people around the world. In response, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted that the Senkaku Islands were under the jurisdiction of the Japan-U.S. security arrangements. Hu Jintao must have thought the response in China was unfortunate because he visited the United States in January 2011, held talks with U.S. President Barack Obama, and secured Obama's understanding of his position that "China will seek to develop itself peacefully and in harmony with countries around the world." China maintained this policy for nearly two years after Hu's U.S. visit, but a fierce power struggle took place in China as the country moved into a period of power transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping in 2012. At that time, the Japanese government led by Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko nationalized, that is, bought several of the Senkaku Islands from a private Japanese citizen. Hu, who had been criticized as being closer to Japan, took the position that this could not be tolerated.

Chinese coastal guard ships repeated incursions into Japanese territorial waters to factually prove that China effectively controls the Senkaku Islands. Taking a further step, China set up an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the subsequent period. China is unlikely to take any action if U.S. B-52 bombers enter the ADIZ, but the country may one day send fighters and try to capture Japanese P3C patrol planes that regularly fly over the Senkaku Islands and the middle line between Japan and China in the East China Sea. Events like that are predictable.

China believes it used its own guns to restore its sovereignty from Japan and Western powers that had invaded the country. For China, military power is not something that must not be used, as in the case of postwar Japan, but a means it can use if and when doing so helps state policies. That is the Chinese position. China's territorial challenges have been extremely hard for neighboring countries to stomach because the country has been expanding its military capabilities at an intense pace.

Funabashi: In December 2008, two Chinese marine research ships entered Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands and stayed for nine hours. With this action, China started to Japan's effective control over the islands head-on. At that point, China had



significantly modified the peaceful line adopted by Deng Xiaoping. I take this view because the Deng line of *tao guang yang hui* included the policy of not having disputes over the right of possession over the Senkaku Islands.

China was thinking international politics were in a period of great reversal at the moment. The U.S. was declining and China was gathering strength. The Lehman Brothers collapse in 2008 was probably a major watershed in this respect. Obama says his country is rebalancing now with January 2012 as a pivot. His administration announced the policy of shifting diplomatic priority to Asia and the Pacific. From a Chinese viewpoint, this rebalancing represents a new U.S. attempt to contain the country. Provocative actions over the Senkaku Islands issue can be called China's challenges to such an attempt. Of course the main goal for China is to show that Japan's effective control over the Senkaku Islands is a paper tiger. Yet China is always conscious of the U.S. behind the islands. I think a new era has clearly started from a marine geopolitical perspective.

If battles between the U.S. and the Soviet Union for hegemony over Central and Eastern Europe characterized the second half of the twentieth century, struggles between the U.S. and China over a dominant position in the seas of Asia and the Pacific symbolize the first half of the twenty-first century. This is becoming increasingly evident. China maintained Deng Xiaoping's peaceful line for about thirty years from 1979 or 1980, but the country is now making a shift to the next stage. So what is this next stage? China has only explained it with an extremely vague expression — the Chinese dream. China has not been able to sufficiently define the type of order it aims to build in Asia and the Pacific.

Strengths and weaknesses coexist in China. Military buildups, such as the deployment of missiles and the launch of aircraft carriers, have been visible. However, China's missiles and carriers cannot match mobile U.S. troops. China is not confident about the level of its supremacy over the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), either. China is surpassing many other countries in economic power, but its military power is still inadequate. China presents a mottled pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

Looking at China's attitude toward territorial issues, the country tends to go on the offensive when its position and bargaining power are weak. China tried to use absolutely no power against opponents whose positions was overwhelmingly strong, as in the cases of Hong Kong and Macao. On top of this, China responds differently to territorial disputes on land and on sea. In many land-related cases, China compromises, but the country rarely makes efforts to compromise offshore.

Issues of ethnic minorities are involved in many territorial disputes China has on land. It needs to secure the cooperation of neighboring countries in those cases, but no such self-control works on the water. There is a risk of China overreacting to territorial disputes in the ocean. Will the Communist Party of China be able to control the country's armed forces in offshore territorial disputes as it has done in the past? Is there a new possibility for the Chinese navy to establish an agenda? Conditions including such domestic politics are extremely difficult to observe, but we must consider them risks. I believe an extremely long struggle with no simple exit in sight has begun.



Iokibe: I agree. China can only define its new global strategy with abstract expressions such as the Chinese dream. I think this is extremely eerie and dangerous. If the Chinese government says such a thing with no clear global strategy, this Chinese dream calls to mind the Sinocentric order Chinese people have been accustomed to in the course of the country's long history. All neighbors are barbarians. Resources around China belong to China if China wants them. Barbarians can enjoy reasonable benefits if and when they accept this rule and show their submission to China. Such an antiquated order will be extremely troublesome if that is really the substance of the Chinese dream.

In the nineteenth century, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck engaged in peaceful diplomacy and dealt with issues carefully after his country's victory in the Franco-Prussian War so that what Germany had won in the war would not be overturned. However, Wilhelm II (Kaiser) was not satisfied with his approach, and kicked out Bismarck, saying his country had no need to assume a humble attitude since it was strong. Concerned about Germany's rise, Britain tried to come to terms with the country, proposing something like a naval agreement. It could not persuade Germany, however. Germany ended up plunging into World War I by taking needless, provocative actions, including the Moroccan Crises.

The possibility for China to adopt an approach similar to that of Germany in those days worries me a great deal. I was a member of the New Japan-China Friendship Committee for the 21st Century for five years from 2003. During this period, I brought up this topic several times. I asked Chinese Committee members if their country would become a large power like Germany, which aims to change the status quo with force. The Chinese members told me, "We will not act foolishly like Germany and Japan did. Our approach will be different from that of the United States, too. China will pursue a course toward great power in its own way." However, they did not say much about the exact approach their country would take. I believe China will have to move into the center of the world with the United States at some stage. China says it will be there in a way different from Western models and not in accordance with the law of nations. So then what will this way be? China must develop an approach that could be a common platform for the world's countries, instead of creating something that can satisfy only itself. Unless China does this, the country's approach will not hold water in the twenty-first century.

China's Impatience and a Lack of Strategic Communication

Funabashi: China Central Television (CCTV) broadcast a series titled "The Rise and Fall of Great Powers" in 2006, which cleverly analyzed Rome, Imperial Germany and the military nation of Japan, and examined where their pitfalls existed. What the series tried to convey was that China would not repeat their foolish mistakes. So then why can China, a country that has used its media for this purpose, not wait? Where does the country's impatience come from? Are things this way because of a generation that has never known trouble, as Lee Kuan Yew warned? Is China ultimately trying to make up for internal contradictions



with economic development and nationalism? Is it relying more on nationalism because its economic growth has slowed?

Something like the ADIZ comes up all of a sudden while Xi Jinping is talking about China's good neighborly relations. The ADIZ is a unified state intention. In the meantime, a Chinese warship had earlier locked its weapons radar on an MSDF destroyer. I think that was an outpost choice. Both of these actions are frightening. How does China think the other party views them? The answer is extremely unclear. Unable to communicate, Japan and China are distrusting each other more and more.

Strategic communication with China was much clearer in the Cold War era. Such communication existed in the period of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai and in the era of Deng Xiaoping. However, no such communication exists between the United States and China and between Japan and China today. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden asked the Japanese government to build a process for managing crises with China when he visited Japan. My question is whether the United States has created such a process with China on its own part.

Iokibe: If China was wise, the country could have won Japan over to its side, saying, “You are absolutely right,” “We are brothers in Asia,” “We’ll keep supplying rare earth elements only to Japan,” and “Asia needs no more U.S. involvement,” when the Japanese government headed by then Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio put Japan-U.S. relations in danger by starting to propose an equal partnership with the United States and an East Asian community. China could take the Senkaku Islands easily by causing Japan to say it needs no military base in Okinawa, and thus lose its response capabilities. This approach served the medium- to long-term interests of China more, but the country ended up displaying immoral power politics by causing fishing boat collisions and through recurring anti-Japanese riots. China included the Senkaku Islands claimed by Japan, as well as reefs contended by South Korea, in its ADIZ. We can only think China is looking to pick a fight. It seems to me that China has internal difficulties and pressures that are too intense, and it tries to overpower them with an iron fist at home and abroad.

China may suddenly stage a landing and create a fait accompli, as it did at Mischief Reef in the Philippines, if it judges that Japan lacks response capabilities. Japan must respond resolutely, on the spot, for preventing such incidents.

At present, the Self-Defense Forces catch movements of Chinese public vessels from the sky and inform the Japan Coast Guard when they are traveling in the direction of the Senkaku Islands. In response, the Japan Coast Guard sends ships to the area and takes a position between the islands and the Chinese vessel. China thinks it can move to the next stage of effective control unless Japan keeps doing this day after day. Japan must take the stand that it does not allow the alteration of the status quo by force. At the same time, in cooperation with the global community, Japan must make China understand that the Sinocentric order, in which China takes whatever it wants, has no currency in the world today. After doing so, Japan should revitalize interdependence with China and return relationships with it to a mutually beneficial status because China must also sustain its development within a global economic system based on interdependence. This is a long-



range outlook.

Japan had wars with both China and the United States in the twentieth century. Japan of course collapsed as a result of those wars. I believe the combination of the Japan-U.S. alliance and Sino-Japanese entente will be the only choice left for Japan in the twenty-first century, even though Japan has to endure great hardship involved in returning its relationship with China to the level of an entente.

Forward Deployment of U.S. Armed Forces and the Importance of Okinawa

Funabashi: China's military power has not yet reached the level of controlling areas inside the first island chain, which stretches from the long string of islands between the Japanese archipelago, Okinawa, and Taiwan to the Philippines. However, there is a risk of the United States and Japan sending a wrong signal to China with their moves. We have to grasp the strategic importance of the forward deployment of U.S. armed forces. What is important is showing with actions the political determination to continue their forward deployment.

It is extremely difficult to pull back troops and return them to where they were once they are deployed forward. The United States will be viewed to have staged an escape, and become unable to enter the area again, depending on how it pulls back troops. The United States talks about staying power in the western Pacific. This is a specific power expression for deep engagement that Joseph Nye, a former U.S. assistant secretary of defense, once defined. Military deployment for coming in and out of the western Pacific is impossible as long as the United States seeks staying power. Politically, the United States must pull the Marine Corps back to Darwin and Guam because of the need to reduce the "footprint" of the marine forces in Okinawa. However, from a strategic viewpoint, the United States may send the wrong message to China with such action. Modulation is necessary in that respect.

Iokibe: China is extremely curious about points where the system of U.S. armed force superiority presents openings. Sending China the wrong message is frightening precisely for that reason. Japan must have self-control and wisdom that prevent it from overreacting and taking steps that give China an excuse. At the same time, the defense of the first island chain is wholly defensive for Japan. Japan should go all out to conduct self-help efforts, and never allow its relationships with the United States to break down. Demonstrating such a position is of basic important.

Funabashi: Why did this region stabilize after World War II? We find three reasons when we position Japan at its center. The first is Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan. The article declared that Japan renounces military capability as a means of settling disputes. Japan-U.S. security arrangements are the second reason for the stability. Article 9 and the arrangements have been two sides of the same coin. U.S. military bases in Okinawa are, in my opinion, the third reason. Japan should maintain this function of stability that consists of the three



integrated reasons.

Deterrent force results from the presence of the Japan-U.S. alliance in Okinawa. This deterrent works mainly against North Korea and in the Korean Peninsula, but I think it will be closely related to the security of all of Northeast Asia and the East China Sea, and the stability of the South China Sea, in the future. Rebalancing by the United States means a new U.S. presence in and commitment to Southeast Asia. It is aimed at guaranteeing stability on the oceans in particular. Okinawa occupies an extremely important spot in that respect. Closer cooperation between U.S. armed forces and the Self-Defense Forces and the optimization of U.S. bases are sought for stability in the East China Sea.

Iokibe: General MacArthur, Supreme Commander for Occupation Forces for Japan, contemplated as follow. Japan should become the Switzerland of the Far East. The country needs no armament. U.S. armed forces will be stationed on the Japanese mainland. However, the United States does not absolutely need to keep the forces, because U.S. will rule Okinawa, and Japan will be safe as long as the United States maintains solid strategic capabilities focused on naval and air forces in Okinawa. That was the vision Douglas MacArthur had for postwar Japan. I feel this MacArthur vision had surprising significance.

However, MacArthur overlooked problems involving the people of Okinawa. MacArthur appears to have thought it would be OK for the United States to cut Okinawa off from Japan and possess the islands because the people of Okinawa had mixed feelings about the Japanese mainland. But such an interpretation was incorrect. The Japanese government lacked sufficient consideration of this point, too. The government has not yet been able to secure the Okinawan people's trust of the Japanese mainland. Appropriate responses to this problem are essential for proper Japanese action in this region.

Funabashi: As I pointed out at the beginning of this dialogue, we should also have the perspective that the issue of the Senkaku Islands is a part of China's challenges to the United States. Thinking about the issue in a set with the Japan-U.S. alliance is decisively important for that reason.

According to the ICG (International Crisis Group) report (*Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks*, April 2013), China's basic scenario is to first provoke the other party and to cause it to overreact to the provocative action. China uses countermeasures prepared in advance to counter the overreaction and change the status quo at once when the other party overreacts. This process has already begun in the case of the Senkaku Islands. China has been trying to cause Japan to overreact by provoking it as much as possible. The United States entertains apprehensions that Japan may react in one way or another if China keeps provoking Japan. China creates a sense of uneasiness with the United States in Japan by visibly bringing out such U.S. apprehensions. By extension, China breeds distrust and causes cracks in the Japan-U.S. alliance. Japan could become a destabilizing factor. Pointing this out, China lures the United States into building new relations between themselves as global powers.

In this scenario, China will consider Okinawa as the weakest link for Japan (and the



Japan-U.S. alliance). China may work on Okinawa to distance itself from the Japanese government. Okinawa may be tempted to cooperate with China anew as one option given insufficient Japanese government response to the U.S. military base issue. This diagnosis came out in the course of discussions among researchers who work for the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation, for which I serve as the chairman. The Foundation researchers sought to sound an alarm in writing, “Losing the Senkaku Islands will mean losing Okinawa,” in *Japan in Peril? 9 crisis scenarios* (Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation, CLSA Books, 2014).

In the Senkaku Islands issue, matters down to the shape of Japan as a nation are being questioned. For that reason, Japan will lose something outrageously large if and when it is defeated militarily and diplomatically.

Iokibe: No one lives on the Senkaku Islands, but Japanese will, no doubt, feel a great sense of loss if China takes them. Adding momentum to attempts to break the status quo by force is frightening, too. We should not repeat the Munich appeasement.

The US Does Not Allow One Country to Dominate Asia

Funabashi: I think Chinese diplomacy fundamentally remains guerrilla warfare. Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* has been drummed into the heads of Chinese leaders. Terribly fraudulent schemes are permitted in these tactics. *The Art of War* might have been valid in the intra-cultural world of the Han Chinese people in the era when the *History of the Three Kingdoms* was written. However, *The Art of War* is not appreciated in an intercultural global community such as the one we have now. The contemporary international community does not recognize China with such tactics as a stakeholder state or respect it.

In the meantime, the United States is in the process of repeating trials and efforts for determining its strategy toward China, using a variety of expressions such as “rebalancing.” This is not a process limited to the United States. Diplomacy is basically the combination of engagement and hedging, the combination of assurance and discussion. Countries must work to combine these tactics from the perspectives of both economy and security as well. An optimal solution differs from one country to the next. Consolidating all these tactics into an integrated overall strategy is an extremely difficult task. Strategic communication among allies becomes more important than ever before for that reason.

The establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) in Japan at this point is extremely desirable in this regard. Japan must use the NSC skillfully for unwavering strategic communication with the United States. To give an example, Japan and the United States failed to act in concert when China established its ADIZ and asked Japan and the United States to present flight plans. They should not have acted in that way. The establishment of the NSC will not solve all problems, but we must use it effectively.

Iokibe: The Iraq War heavily damaged the United States. Obama pulled U.S. troops out of



Iraq as a result, but he is trying to leave hedges in Asia because of China's provocation. Obama is setting great value on the U.S. economic presence in Asia for the regrowth of his country. He wants to build good relations with China. Such economic benefits have been a constant focus of U.S. diplomacy.

There are, it seems to me, three principles for U.S. diplomacy. The first involves the economic benefits I just talked about. This principle says trade is the best means of friendly cooperation around the world. The second is the Woodrow Wilson school of diplomacy based on universal values. The third is geopolitical interest. Theodore Roosevelt's diplomacy at the beginning of the twentieth century epitomizes such interest.

When one nation rules the European Continent, the nation attacks Britain without exception, whether it is France under Napoleon Bonaparte or Germany under Adolf Hitler. For that reason, the important prerequisite for Britain's survival was for several countries in the European Continent to keep an appropriate balance and to prevent one ambitious nation from dominating the region. Roosevelt applied this thinking to U.S. policies on the Asian Continent. Russia's southward expansion in the early 20th Century could lead to the exclusive control of the Asian Continent by a single nation at that point. That is why the United States acted as a referee and stopped the Russo-Japanese War in Portsmouth at a point where Japan's loss in a last-minute reversal was certain with more land combat. In a pattern opposite from the Russo-Japanese War, the United States crushed Japan with ABCD encirclement when Japan marched into the Asian Continent and expanded territories under its exclusive control in the 1930s.

China will be the same as the former Russia and Japan if and when it starts doing what it wants beyond its territories, saying that territories and resources that it wants belong to it. The United States has diplomatic principles that do not allow such conduct. However, the United States does not want to go to war against China. Hence, it must respond strictly to China's actions through various forms of cooperation.

Funabashi: Of the three policies you just mentioned, the United States has practiced peace through economic interdependence continuously since the 1970s. It has done so, thinking that a more affluent, modernized China will be good for both China and the United States. However, interdependence comes across to China as the weakness of the other party with the strengthening of the country's economy. Countries whose largest trading partner is China have totaled 124, far exceeding the 76 whose largest trading partner is the United States. Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) in China increased 17% in 2012 when relations between Japan and China became extremely strained as a result of Japan's nationalization of the Senkaku Islands. The Japanese FDI in China rose that much in the year when global FDI in the country fell 3%. In other words, there is an increasing risk for China to think Japan is a country that must depend on it for survival.

As I explained, peace through interdependence is a way of thinking that no longer works in the way it used to. We must now think how to achieve a multilateral balance against China from a geopolitical viewpoint. Japan must make strategic decisions on its relations with South Korea. Japan must take a step toward a strategic partnership with Russia as well.



Japan cannot contain China with these actions, but it can achieve a balance with them. I believe Japan is now being asked to have such a new sense of balance.

A Touchstone for the Abe Administration's Diplomacy

Iokibe: I think the Abe administration's diplomacy has been going well up to this point with the exceptions of China and South Korea, which represent blank spots within it. The Hatoyama government led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) damaged the Japan-U.S. alliance bitterly and failed to build constructive bilateral relations with other countries. Under those circumstances, the Russian president visited the Northern Territories and the South Korean president landed on Takeshima. There was also the crash incident made by Chinese fishing boats to Japanese Coast Guard ships around the Senkaku Islands issue. Japan has never been an economic power underpinned by strength of its own. Japan has increased its economic presence by making the most of the United States through the Japan-U.S. alliance. Japan gives the impression that it commands no fear when its ties with the United States are regarded as uncertain, so it is important that it is now reconstructing deep ties with the United States and building constructive relations with concerned countries.

Can Japan and China have productive discussions by holding a summit? I think such an outcome is very difficult to foresee, but Japan cannot afford to keep neglecting China and South Korea, with which it has historical controversies. How will Japan be able to reconstruct relations with these two countries? Whether Prime Minister Abe Shinzo can mend those fences or not will be a substantial barometer of his abilities as a political leader.

I do not think Japan can easily solve the Senkaku Islands issue. Japan should build courteous relations with China on issues on which the two countries can cooperate more, instead of picking quarrels on that hard issue to solve. As I said earlier, Japan must cultivate the potential fields of two track foreign policy, the Japan-U.S. alliance and Sino-Japanese entente. Abe will be rated as the politician of the first rank if he can forge constructive relations by starting in areas where cooperation is possible, such as technology provision for environmental problems.

Funabashi: Problem solution in a big way through a single summit is an illusion. Problem solution through summits requires proper advance preparation. A problem becomes very difficult to solve when territorial and other issues are involved. However, matters will not advance unless a summit is held. The first country for Japan to approach could be China or South Korea. The Abe administration is now facing tests, which are how to improve relations with these two neighbors and how to stabilize the relations.

I think an established tactic for Japan will be to build a process for stabilizing relations by first setting a summit with South Korea by giving consideration to its strategic position and other factors. It will be good if Japan can realize a summit with China following the top-level conference with South Korea.



Japan needs to pursue “quiet difference.” And the essence of “quiet difference” must be to maintain strategic communications with China, carry out crisis management simultaneously, stabilize the bilateral relationship, and maintain peace.

Iokibe: In China’s case, the government can suppress domestic opinion on a relatively large scale once it decides on a matter. The situation is more complicated in South Korea, where emotional pains in society tend to hold sway over the state government. The South Korean government led by President Park Geun-hye is placing a great deal of importance on the country’s relations with China. Her government is taking a strategic position that can be considered as surpassing the South Korean-Chinese entente. Things are not easy for Japan because of this. However, Japan and South Korea must somehow clear up the controversies about their past and join hands as two nations that share positions on matters such as security, liberal democracy and free economy in the current environment of the two global powers that are the United States and China. Japan and South Korea should hold dialogue on a private level as well for stabilizing international relations in East Asia.

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IOKIBE Makoto

Born in Hyogo Prefecture in 1943, Iokibe graduated from Kyoto University’s Faculty of Law in 1967. Iokibe assumed his present post in 2012 after serving as a professor in Kobe University’s Faculty of Law, president of the Japanese Political Science Association, president of the National Defense Academy of Japan, and a director at the Hyogo Earthquake Memorial 21st Century Research Institute. Books he has authored include *Senryoki* [The occupied period], which won the Yoshino Sakuzo Award.

FUNABASHI Yoichi

Born in Beijing, China, in 1944, Funabashi joined the Asahi Shimbun Company after graduating from the University of Tokyo in 1968. He served successively as a Beijing correspondent, Washington correspondent, Bureau Chief of Asahi’s American General Bureau and editor-in-chief before leaving the company in 2010. He established an independent think tank, Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation in 2011. Books he has authored include *Kauntodaun merutodaun* [Countdown to meltdown] volumes 1 and 2, which won the Oya Soichi Non-Fiction Award.

