

From 'Japan-bashing' to 'Japan-surpassing'?
– Australia, Japan and the Rise of China in the Early Twenty-First Century

While Western views of Japan in Western countries were often described as 'Japan-bashing' in the 1980s and 1990s, the negative views of Japan that had prompted such an expression had largely tapered off by the end of the 1990s. In the place of 'Japan-bashing', some Western observers hailed the rise of a new, positive age of discourse on Japan, one in which Japan is generally not viewed as inexorably 'different' from some sort of 'Western' norm. Rather, it is again perceived by many commentators as a natural, inevitable and necessary partner of the West. Indeed, for some observers, Japan has been described as 'Japan-surpassing', an expression which has been used to applaud Japan's successful transformation into a strong international power and a reliable ally to a degree surpassing Western expectations.

In Australia, the rhetoric of natural friendship and partnership with Japan is not at all new, as demonstrated by the thirtieth anniversary this year of the 1976 Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Australia and Japan. However, the positive rhetoric associated with Australia's relationship with Japan has noticeably intensified since the late 1990s. Moreover, while Australia's relations with Japan have traditionally been influenced by triangular diplomacy with more powerful countries, such as Britain and the United States, the intensification of the partnership rhetoric towards Japan has noticeably paralleled widespread concerns, if not outright fears, about the military and economic rise of China. In promoting Australia and Japan as natural partners, commentators have thus typically emphasised the similarities and commonalities that are alleged to exist between Japan and 'the West' and not, presumably, China. Ultimately, while 'Japan-bashing' may no longer influence Western relations with Japan as it once did, it seems that 'China-bashing' of a sort has ironically become just as influential on discourse about Japan.