

## **3 lessons from China-Japan Asian Cup Final**

**By TOMMY KOH**

AFTER three weeks of competition, the football teams of China and Japan qualified for the Asian Cup final. The final was played in Beijing last Saturday.

The mostly Chinese crowd of 65,000 was hostile to the Japanese team. Inside the Workers' Stadium, the Chinese spectators booed the Japanese team throughout the match. Outside the stadium, the Japanese flag was burnt and many anti-Japan speeches were made. On the Internet, postings by Chinese nationals were even more nationalistic and critical of Japan's war-time record in China.

I wish to draw three lessons from these events.

Lesson No. 1: Need for historic reconciliation. The reason for the hostility which so many Chinese, including young Chinese, feel towards Japan is that the tragic events which Japan perpetrated against China during the 1930s and 1940s continue to haunt both countries. In the view of the Chinese people, Japan has not yet given a full and unqualified apology for the 'rape' of Nanjing and other atrocities committed by the Japanese armed forces in China. Therefore, the Chinese people have not yet forgiven Japan. One party must apologise. The other party must forgive. Only in this way will there be a historic reconciliation between these two great Asian countries and peoples.

Lesson No. 2: Reconciliation is achievable. I believe that reconciliation between China and Japan is achievable. France and Germany were enemies during both world wars. After World War II, the leaders of the two countries decided to put their bitter past behind them. In 1963, president Charles de Gaulle of France and chancellor Konrad Adenauer of West Germany signed a historic treaty which reconciled these historic enemies. Without this, it is doubtful whether the European Union (EU) could have been achieved.

In the case of Japan and South Korea, until a few years ago, the South Koreans would have behaved in the same way towards the Japanese team, if the final were between Japan and South Korea and the match were played in Seoul.

However, as a result of a historic agreement signed by the late Japanese prime minister Keizo Obuchi and former South Korean president Kim Dae Jung, relations between the two countries, and between their peoples, have greatly improved. It was remarkable that Japan and South Korea were able to co-host the last World Cup. It is also remarkable that a young Korean singer, BoA, is immensely popular in Japan.

Lesson No. 3: The future of Asia. It is very important for China and Japan to achieve a historic reconciliation. Japan is Asia's most developed and largest economy. China is growing rapidly and has the potential to become a complete superpower. The countries of North-east and South-east Asia are currently engaged in linking their economies to one another, through a series of free trade agreements as well as the Asean + 3 process. The vision is to create an East Asian Community.

The modality for achieving this vision is different from the journey travelled by the EU but the result will be equally spectacular. The journey will be smoother if the ill feelings between China and Japan were replaced by a growing bond of mutual trust and respect.

Reconciliation between China and Japan is also important for the future of peace in Asia. We must do everything possible to prevent these two Asian countries from taking up arms against each other. The lesson from Europe is clear. We must embed them in an East Asian community so that peace will be institutionalised and the danger of conflict made increasingly unthinkable.

*The writer is chairman of the Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore..*