

Chapter 12

Postwar Japan-China Relations



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Abstract Postwar relations between Japan and China is the subject of this lengthy chapter, from the process of normalizing relations, through a period of Sino-Japanese “amity” toward special relations, and then again to ongoing issues of “perceptions of history” in the post-Cold War era. Taiwan figures as an important factor, and there is a danger of amity between the two nations turning again to enmity.

The Path to Normalizing Relations

“Abnormal” Japan-China Relations

Mainland China was a constant subject of interest for Japanese policymakers throughout the history of early modern Japan. This remained the case after World War II, too. Founded in 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC; hereafter, China) was a country with a political system that differed from Japan’s, possessing an expansive territory, and having the world’s largest population. An important task for the Japanese government was how to construct a relationship of some kind with its vast neighbor, a developing economy then led by a dictator intent on revolution.

Japan and China did not have formal state-to-state relations until 1972. The Cold War structure in Asia prevented a rapprochement between the two countries. Immediately after its founding, China became quite close to the Soviet Union, giving rise to a vast Communist bloc on the Eurasian continent. The Korean War breaking out in June 1950 decisively established Sino-US confrontation in Asia.

The outbreak of the Korean War spurred a dramatic rise in the strategic value of the Japanese archipelago in America’s eyes. In tandem with that, Washington started the move to make peace with Japan, then under the occupation of Allied forces. To guarantee Japan’s national security after independence, the Yoshida Shigeru

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administration signed the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the Japan and the United States (the Japan-US Security Treaty) at the same time it signed the peace Treaty of San Francisco. The security treaty determined that US forces would remain stationed on the Japanese mainland after Japan regained its independence.

In addition, the Yoshida administration concluded the Treaty of Peace between the Republic of China (ROC) and Japan in April 1952 with the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek, which fled to Taiwan after its defeat in the Chinese Civil War. Japan concluded a peace treaty with the Nationalist government in Taiwan and not with the Chinese government at the request of John Foster Dulles, then the Consultant to the Secretary of State, who wanted to impede a Japanese rapprochement with Beijing.

The Chinese reaction was extremely negative to the choice that Japan had made. In April 1952 when the Treaty of San Francisco came into force and the Japan-ROC peace treaty was concluded, the Chinese government further hardened its firm opposition to both treaties. The period of the “abnormal state of affairs” between Japan and China had commenced.

Security Treaty Issue and the Taiwan Question

What were the points of dispute in postwar Japan-China relations? For China, the Japan-US Security Treaty was the most problematic. The US military bases situated on the Japanese mainland under the treaty were, to China, a military threat to its own existence. In order to have these US military bases removed from Japan, it would be necessary to separate Japan from the United States and make it neutral. To that end, China emphasized that it was a “peaceful power” that did not welcome war, increased pro-China forces led by revolutionaries inside of Japan, and tried to drive a wedge between Japan and the United States.

The Chinese side emphasized the role of private interactions and exchanges as a means to achieve its objectives. It sought to strengthen solidarity between the people of the two countries with a campaign of diplomatic invitations to members in all sectors of Japanese society. It attempted to expand its relations with Japan in practical aspects, by moving forward to conclude private agreements on trade and fisheries. This policy called *yimin cuguan* (private sector leading the public) became China’s basic policy line for its diplomacy toward Japan in the period before diplomatic relations were normalized (Ö 2013).

For its part, the United States was concerned about the wedge China was trying to drive into the Japan-US relationship. Washington severely restricted Japan-China trade in an attempt to hinder a political rapprochement between Tokyo and Beijing. The Japanese government, bolstered by public opinion favoring a reopening of trade with China, was considering its genuine desire for relations with China. It was not possible for Japan to draw closer to a China that was seeking to nullify the Japan-US security treaty, which Japan had made the cornerstone of its diplomacy. Japan thus found itself caught between the United States and China.

One issue troubling Japan, in addition to the security treaty with the United States, was the relationship Japan had with the ROC in Taiwan. After the end of World War II, the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek and the Communist Party of China led by Mao Zedong plunged into civil war, and as mentioned above, the defeated Chiang fled to Taiwan. Yet, the United States provided assistance to Taiwan, and the Nationalist government, which had lost the Chinese mainland, retained its seat in the United Nations. Until 1971, the “China” that was a permanent member of the UN Security Council was the ROC in Taiwan.

Having concluded a peace treaty with the ROC, Japan had to grapple with the issue of “two Chinas” (also known as the Taiwan question), or how to construct relations with China while continuing to have treaty relations with the Nationalist government. To thread this needle, Japan’s basic policy stance was *seikei bunri* (the separation of politics and economics), which promoted private trade and cultural exchanges without maintaining relations with the government of China, a desperate measure taken out of necessity.

The Nationalist government, however, was critical of this approach. When Ikeda Hayato’s administration decided to grant approval for a Japanese public financial institution to finance the export of a synthetic fiber plant to China, Taiwan strongly protested, making it a large diplomatic problem. In contrast, when the Satō Eisaku administration appeared ready to strengthen Japan-Taiwan ties, it was China this time that went on to fiercely attack the Satō government. Troubles arising from this “two Chinas” dilemma always beset Japanese policymakers up until the normalization of Japan-China diplomatic relations.

Normalization of Japan-China Relations

Rapid changes in the international situation in the early 1970s had a significant impact on Japan-China relations. The first of these was the Sino-Soviet split. What began as an ideological argument gradually worsened throughout the 1960s until erupting into armed skirmishes on the Sino-Soviet border in March 1969. For China, the Soviet Union had supplanted the United States as its greatest military threat.

Sino-Soviet skirmishes proved to be a key turning point for the United States, which was looking for a way to extricate itself from the Vietnam War. The Richard M. Nixon administration took the bold move of improving relations with China in order to gain strategic advantage over the Soviet Union. Sino-US Rapprochement in July 1971, which took place without Washington consulting Tokyo, is called the “Nixon shock” for the impact it had within Japan.

Sino-Soviet confrontation and Sino-US conciliation prompted a dramatic shift in China’s strategy toward Japan. China began to adopt a strategy of containing the Soviet Union, teaming up with the United States and other key countries in a single policy line (*yitiao xian*). Thus, incorporating Japan into this net encircling the Soviet Union became a more important diplomatic task than the issue of the Japan-US security treaty or the Taiwan question (Masuo 2010).

The situation began to move in Japan in response to the Nixon shock. There were a series of visits to China by Japanese business interests and the Japanese public was swept up in a "China boom." In October 1971, the ROC withdrew from the United Nations and the People's Republic of China became a member. In reaction, there were growing calls within the Japanese government supporting the normalization of relations with China, predicated on severing ties with Taiwan.

The Chinese side took the lead on normalization talks from start to finish. By the time the Tanaka Kakuei administration was established in July 1972 after the resignation of the Satō cabinet, the Chinese side had already started preparations for normalization. It took a soft position on the issues of the security treaty and Taiwan which had been key points of disputes until then. It also publicly indicated for the first time that it would formally waive its claims for war reparations. By limiting what it demanded from Japan to just cutting ties with Taiwan, China stimulated the Japanese side's resolve to normalize diplomatic relations.

Prime Minister Tanaka and Foreign Minister Ōhira Masayoshi, having learned of Beijing's intentions through Kōmeitō Chairman Takeiri Yoshikatsu's visit to China, overcame the opposition of the pro-Taiwan factions within in their Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and made the decision to normalize relations with China. First, Tanaka attended the Japan-US summit in Hawai'i in late August. After obtaining US understanding, Tanaka and his delegation flew to Beijing and entered normalization talks with China. The Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China was issued, and diplomatic relations normalized, on September 29, 1972.

That normalization talks were effectively settled in an unusually short period of 4 days suggests that the expectations of both countries were largely in alignment. The Chinese side hurried the talks, worried that the Soviet Union would attempt to draw closer to Japan. As for Japan, Tanaka sought to achieve normalization all at once, so as to not give the LDP's pro-Taiwan factions an opportunity to unravel the progress made.

There were also aspects of sharp disagreement in the negotiations on normalization, such as when the war ended, the legal issues concerning war reparations, and the legal status of Taiwan. But the two parties ultimately decided to tailor the wording of the joint communiqué so that it showed the position of both sides.

On the Taiwan question, they agreed that Foreign Minister Ōhira would make a statement concerning the "termination" of the Japan-ROC peace treaty after the signing of the joint communiqué. The Two Chinas issue that had troubled Japan was now settled, and the separation of politics and economics that hitherto had been applied to Japan-China ties was now used to maintain private relations with Taiwan, transformed by the termination of the Japan-ROC peace treaty.

The Era of Japan-China Amity

From Revolution to Economic Development

The 1972 normalization of diplomatic relations meant the establishment of an agreed framework concerning the issues that had long been contentious between Japan and China: the Japan-US security treaty and Taiwan. Yet, the sources of conflict had not been extinguished. In place of these issues, the new issue of the Soviet Union rose to the forefront. In the negotiations for a bilateral peace and friendship treaty that started with the normalization of ties, the Chinese side sought to include an anti-hegemony clause in the treaty notionally aimed at the Soviet Union. Negotiations lasted longer than expected because the Japanese side refused to include the clause. After the Tanaka administration stepped down, the administration of Miki Takeo that followed continued negotiations, but talks were suspended in part owing to confusion in the Chinese political situation with the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, and the arrests of the Gang of Four.

It was after the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping in July 1977 that both countries began to move toward signing a treaty of peace and friendship. Deng, who aimed to modernize China, hurried to introduce technologies and obtain economic cooperation from the West, beginning with Japan. Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo was in agreement with this push by the Chinese, and so the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China was signed on August 12, 1978.

The year 1978 was a landmark in Japan-China relations. After having declared the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution officially over the previous year, China's highest leadership began to turn its interest toward developing the economy. Believing Deng's modernization line to be their chance to expand into the Chinese market, Japanese business interests viewed the peace and friendship treaty as providing the institutional backing for a genuine advance into the Chinese economy.

Japan-China relations thus entered its most favorable era since the war. The period from the late 1970s into the 1980s was one where both countries had for the first time found a shared national goal of economic development. Foreign Minister Ōhira announced the first Yen Loans that would be provided to China during his visit there in December 1979. The major goal of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to China was to firmly tie Beijing's cooperative relationships with the Western world by assisting Chinese development under its modernization line. In contrast, even though there was a dispute over the line around economic policies within China, the introduction of the latest equipment and technologies from Japan meant that China was actively following a policy of opening to the outside world.

The international environment also provided tailwinds for expanding the Japan-China economic relationship. Fukuda tried to maintain ties with both China and the Soviet Union under his slogan, "omnidirectional peace diplomacy." The succeeding Ōhira Masayoshi administration, however, made clear its position as a member of the West as the rise of the Soviet military precipitated the remarkable

evidence of a renewed Cold War. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, the Ōhira administration imposed economic sanctions against Moscow, acting in concert with the United States. This gave rise to a situation in Asia that could be called a quasi-alliance between Japan, the United States, and China.

With this stronger encirclement of the Soviet Union, China found itself in a favorable position that facilitated the receipt of assistance from the West targeting its economic development. Japan, the first among Western countries to start ODA to China, provided over 3.6 trillion yen (\$32.4 billion) in total over the course of 40 years, making it the world's top provider of assistance to China.

Formation of Special Relations Between Japan and China

Another important point when considering Japan-China relations in this period is the existence of favorable Japanese public opinion toward China. Many Japanese then were eager to contribute to the modernization of China, in part owing to feelings of wanting to atone for the war. There were many pro-China groups, too, within Japanese politics and business that developed through the private exchanges that had continued since the 1950s.

The pro-China LDP factions came about during the time of the Kishi Nobusuke administration, fueled by Chinese maneuvers to invite the anti-mainstream factions within the party to visit China. Ishibashi Tanzan and Matsumura Kenzō visited China at Beijing's invitation; upon returning home, they began claiming within the party that they had achieved a breakthrough in Japan-China relations. Also, Takasaki Tatsunosuke, who before the war had served as the president of Manchurian Industrial Development Company, met with Premier Zhou Enlai, his first meeting with a sitting Japanese cabinet minister, at the First Asian-African Conference (the Bandung Conference) held in 1955. Takasaki was also working for a breakthrough in Japan-China relations during the same time.

The fruit born of the efforts of Matsumura and Takasaki was LT Trade.¹ LT trade was a system of trade, nominally viewed as private, that was actually half-government, half-private, as it had Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI) support in terms of human and financial resources. Tokyo and Beijing established liaison offices in each other's capitals and permitted the exchange of newspaper reporters, both of which played important roles in promoting private-level exchanges during an era without formal diplomatic ties.

Okazaki Kaheita, the president of All Nippon Airways, was the man in charge of the practical aspects of LT trade. LT trade was distinguished from other Japan-China friendship groups because it sought to maintain its stance of separating politics from economics by keeping a distance from the Chinese side's political tenets. Okazaki

¹The letters L and T derive from the names of Liao Chengzhi and Takasaki Tatsunosuke, the men who signed the comprehensive trade agreement.

and others involved in the trade were placed in a difficult situation by the radicalization of China under the Cultural Revolution in the latter half of the 1960s. But they earned an immense degree of trust from the Chinese side because they maintained Japan-China trade, refusing to allow the flame of exchange to die out. Even after diplomatic normalization, Okazaki continued to act as a key conduit between China and the Japanese business world as an advisor to the Japan-China Economic Association.

In addition to these men who “dug the well” before diplomatic normalization, the Chinese government also had great respect for the new LDP pro-China faction members who emerged on the stage at the time of normalization: Tanaka and Ōhira. These men were leaders of mainstream factions, the Tanaka faction (*nanoka-kai*) and the Kōchi-kai, respectively, in contrast to the pro-China politicians until then who had weak bases within the party. Tanaka withdrew from the center stage of politics after the Lockheed scandal, and Ōhira died in 1980, but their factions’ connections to China were carried on by influential politicians, Gotōda Masaharu and Itō Masayoshi (Inoue 2016).

The Chinese side made active use of these friendly personages whom they held in great esteem. Every time some conflict arose in bilateral relations, Beijing would seek to resolve the issue through behind-the-scenes negotiations with the business interests or influential LDP factions, separate from the formal diplomatic avenue. While such special relations between Japan and China contributed to the stable development of bilateral ties, they also retarded the institutionalization of Japan-China relations, unable to free itself from being forever reliant on a limited set of people.

The Issue of Perceptions of History

The Origin of the Perceptions of History Issue

Perceptions of history emerged as a new point of contention in relations between Japan and China beginning in the 1980s. The issue of how to perceive the past war had already appeared during the normalization of diplomatic ties. One famous episode indicating the divergence in perceptions of history of both parties in the normalization talks may be Prime Minister Tanaka’s speech where he used the expression, “[Japan] caused the people of China much trouble (*tianle mafan*, in Chinese)” to refer to their past history. For the Chinese, who had suffered an enormous degree of damage and loss from the war, the decision to renounce demands for war reparations at the time of normalization was not taken lightly. In fact, the Chinese government held meetings throughout the country ahead of Tanaka’s visit to soften the people’s discontent about normalizing ties with Japan. That is why the Chinese side reacted so negatively to Tanaka’s casual use of the expression “*meiwaku*” (trouble or inconvenience) for Japan’s war responsibility (NHK 1993).

A thorough investigation of the Chinese government's position indicated that its magnanimous stance toward the damage from the past war such as waiving reparations was taken as a package with Japan's soul-searching reflection and remorse (*hansei*) for its war of aggression. Underlying the Chinese thinking was *erfenlun* (militarist/people dichotomy), a concept which divided the Japanese people in two groups, making a distinction between a group of militarists and the general populace, and concluded that the Japanese populace should not be forced to bear responsibility for the war. The opening paragraphs of their Joint Communiqué even emphasized that Japan was aware of and "deeply reproaches itself" for its "responsibility" for the "serious damage" it caused to the Chinese people through the war. Moreover, wording was added that the Chinese government, "in the interest of the friendship between the Chinese and the Japanese peoples" renounced its demands for war reparations from Japan.

It is hard to say that this same logic was shared by the Chinese and Japanese peoples to a sufficient degree at the time of normalization, however. Many Japanese were unaware that the Chinese people's displeasure toward Japan had been suppressed. A general accounting for the past war was supposed to be the most important point of the normalization talks. Regardless, the two sides failed to adequately close the gap between their perceptions, which was left vague amid the subsequent atmosphere of Japan-China amity. China's waiving of reparations contributed to a large improvement in Japanese public opinion of China in the short-term, whereas in the long term it left kinks in the two countries' perceptions of history.

This malalignment in their perceptions of history surfaced in the 1980s. The first problem to occur was the first history textbook issue in 1982 surrounding the approval of a history textbook for Japanese high schoolers. Then, in reaction to the official visit by Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro to the Yasukuni Shrine in 1985, student protests erupted all over China in opposition to "the revival of Japanese militarism."

The Chinese domestic political situation of the time was a related factor behind the Chinese side starting a flap over the history issue. As recent research has made clear, the Chinese government pursued a "patriotic united front" to foster patriots to defend socialism even as it aimed to develop its economy. The goal was to lay the foundation for a national unity-centered nationalism in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. For China, the history of the "Anti-Japanese War of Resistance" was a source of national unity. In addition, aspects of criticizing Japan over its perception of history have been used as a means to increase Chinese patriotism (Etō 2014).

Yet, both Japan and China have tried to keep the history issue from decisively harming the bilateral relationship. Regarding the first textbook issue, Chief Cabinet Secretary Miyazawa Kiichi issued a statement on history textbooks, and a "neighboring countries clause" was later added as a criterion for textbook approval. Regarding the issue of Yasukuni visits, Nakasone voluntarily refrained from paying a visit to the shrine the following August. It is said that Nakasone canceled his visit because he feared it would weaken the domestic position of General Secretary Hu Yaobang, with whom he had been building a close partnership (Hattori 2015).

Japan-China Relations in the Post-Cold War Era

The favorable period in relations between Japan and China reached its zenith with the Japanese emperor's visit to China in October 1992. The Chinese side had been pushing strongly for a visit from the emperor since the 1970s, and the Japanese side had hoped the visit would help to bring the history issue to a close.

Contrary to expectations, the dispute over perceptions of history became more severe in the 1990s. The collapse of the 1955 system caused by the LDP's breakup in 1993 brought about new changes in the Japanese government's position on the history issue. In a press conference after assuming office, Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro, head of a non-LDP coalition government, became the first in a succession of prime ministers to publicly use the term "war of aggression" in a press conference. Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi of the Japan Socialist Party issued the "Murayama Statement" in August 1995, "on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war's end," in which he expressed his "heartfelt apology" concerning Japan's past "colonial rule and aggression" (Murayama 1995).

However, this series of corrections of Japan's perception of history generated a backlash from conservative forces. Feeling increasingly beleaguered, the Japan War-Bereaved Families Association, a vote-gathering organization for the LDP, began protest movements through its nationwide branches and its ties to LDP Diet members. Around the same time, cabinet members in the coalition government made a string of inappropriate remarks concerning the history issue. The disappearance of the confrontation between conservatives and progressives brought about by the Cold War's conclusion paradoxically served to sharpen the ideological claims within the conservative camp (Hatano 2011).

Meanwhile, China under Jiang Zemin, who took up his post as the head of state in 1993, was moving forward with patriotic education aimed at preventing a recurrence of the Tiananmen Incident. Consequently, the Chinese side, appearing very alarmed at Japanese conduct that clouded its stance on war responsibility, took a posture firmly seeking Japan to "draw lessons from history and repent deeply the acts of aggression it committed." And so Japan-China relations fell into a vicious circle, with Chinese criticism of Japan over its perception of history inciting a backlash from Japan against this criticism (Shimizu 2003).

Added to the history issue, concerns over the rise of China's military were stoked by the Third Taiwan Straits Crisis in 1995–1996. The dispute surfaced once more within the LDP over its policy line regarding the Taiwan question. Conservative pundits emerged, arguing the "China threat" and objecting publicly to Tokyo's long-standing policy of providing economic assistance to China. It was almost as if these critics had stepped up to replace the key people, whose numbers were now dwindling, who had constructed amicable ties with China since diplomatic normalization.

Thus, the agreed framework for Japan-China relations established by normalization of diplomatic ties started to show signs of strain from the 1990s onward. As a shadow enveloped the slogan of Japan-China friendship, a major shift occurred in the general attitude of each nation's people toward bilateral relations, turning from amity toward enmity.

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