

Forty Years in Paradox

Post-normalisation Sino-Japanese relations

YINAN HE

ABSTRACT: Post-normalisation Sino-Japanese relations have been fraught with contradictions. In particular, three paradoxes stand out over the past 40 years. First, despite many shared geopolitical and economic interests, China and Japan have never developed genuine strategic cooperation, and since the 2000s have even evinced a trend towards thinly-veiled or open rivalry. Second, time, rather than healing the wounds of past wars, has since the mid-1980s yielded only a more vivid and bitter recollection of history that has bedevilled both official and popular relations. Third, diplomatic and commercial ties as well as “thick” societal contacts developed since normalisation have failed to bridge a significant gap in values. This article reviews Sino-Japanese relations since 1972, with a special focus on internal politics on both sides. It considers the influence of their conflicting historical narratives and political systems, and of the broader international geopolitical context, on the evolution of their delicate, paradoxical bilateral relationship. It concludes that a healthier bilateral relationship may depend on the development in both countries of a genuine, robust civil society that is relatively free from political interference.

KEYWORDS: Sino-Japanese relations, Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands disputes, historical memory and nationalism.

Neighbouring countries with long-standing, rich historical and cultural connections, China and Japan fought two full-scale wars in modern times, first in 1894-1895 and later in 1937-1945 (though some historians date the onset of the second conflict as early as 1931). These wars, especially the second one, left immense physical and psychological trauma on both sides. After World War II, China and Japan allied themselves with the Soviet Union and United States respectively, thus acting as strategic adversaries for the initial two decades of the Cold War until diplomatic normalisation in 1972. This complex history set the stage for an extremely delicate bilateral relationship. Each country has treated the other as one of its most significant others, and over time their mutual attitudes have oscillated between emulation, envy, competition, and even hatred. As a result, in the 40 years since normalisation, Sino-Japanese relations have experienced a number of dramatic twists and turns, from the “honeymoon” of the 1970s, to renewed friction in the 1980s, and a period of volatility and downward spiral beginning from the mid-1990s. Entering the 2010s, in the context of repeated escalations of offshore islands disputes, their relationship has sunk to its lowest point since 1972.

Post-normalisation Sino-Japanese relations have not only followed a tortuous trajectory, but have also been fraught with contradictions. Students of this relationship are particularly puzzled by three outstanding paradoxes. First, why have China and Japan never developed a genuine strategic cooperation despite their many shared geopolitical and economic interests, instead (since the turn of the century) pursuing a thinly-veiled rivalry? Second, why has time not healed the wounds of past conflicts, with the period since the mid-1980s instead witnessing an increasingly vivid and bitter recollection of history that bedevils both official and popular relations? Third, why have conventional bilateral ties as well as “people-to-people” contacts developed since normalisation signally failed to bridge the significant divisions between the two societies in terms of values, trust, and mutual understanding?

This article is devoted to an overview of post-normalisation Sino-Japanese relations. I first provide a brief chronology of their bilateral relations from 1972 to the present day, before focusing on the three puzzles noted above. The analysis shows that the international geopolitical context and the contrasting political systems of the two countries have indeed significantly obstructed Sino-Japanese cooperation over the past 40 years. Nevertheless, the deterioration of their relationship actually began well before there appeared to be any prospect of China challenging Japan economically and militarily, and followed decades during which Japanese people had blithely ignored China’s authoritarianism. I therefore argue that emotions and biases deeply engrained in the two societies, reinforced by the machinations of insecure political elites, and largely unchallenged by the rather superficial nature of most bilateral interaction at the popular level, have contributed to the persistent recurrence of instability and tension in Sino-Japanese relations since 1972.

The bumpy path of post-normalisation relations

Soon after World War II, China and Japan were drawn into opposing strategic camps of the emerging Cold War in Asia. Antagonism reached a point of no return when Mao Zedong declared in June 1949 that China would lean to one side, the socialist side. For its part, Japan signed a security treaty with the United States, or *Anpo*, in September 1951 – in the midst of the Korean conflict, in which Chinese troops had intervened on the Communist side. Thereafter Japan recognised the Nationalist government in Taiwan as the sole legitimate representative of China. The freeze in Sino-Japanese relations lasted until normalisation in 1972, which inaugurated four decades (so far) of bilateral ties marked by many ups and downs.

Initially Sino-Japanese relations experienced a honeymoon-like period, largely propelled by a common Soviet threat. From the early 1980s, how-

ever, the overall cordial atmosphere in the 1970s was replaced by frequent intergovernmental frictions and simmering popular antipathy. Bilateral relations enjoyed temporary serenity in the early 1990s, only to deteriorate again from the mid-1990s, marked by renewed political disputes over sovereignty and a downward spiral in mutual popular perceptions. During 2001-2006, top-level diplomacy was paralysed due to Beijing's protests over Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's annual worship at the Yasukuni Shrine, a Shinto temple in Tokyo commemorating Japanese war dead, including Class-A war criminals from World War II. Beijing and Tokyo gradually mended the fence after 2006, although a strong undercurrent of mutual distrust persisted. From 2010, tensions over offshore islands resumed, culminating in massive anti-Japanese demonstrations in September 2012 and suspension of state meetings thereafter. Ironically, September 2012 marked the 40th anniversary of Sino-Japanese normalisation, yet represented an unprecedented low in bilateral relations over that period.

The key events in the development of Sino-Japanese relations since the 1970s summarised below provide the necessary scaffolding for the analysis in the subsequent sections.

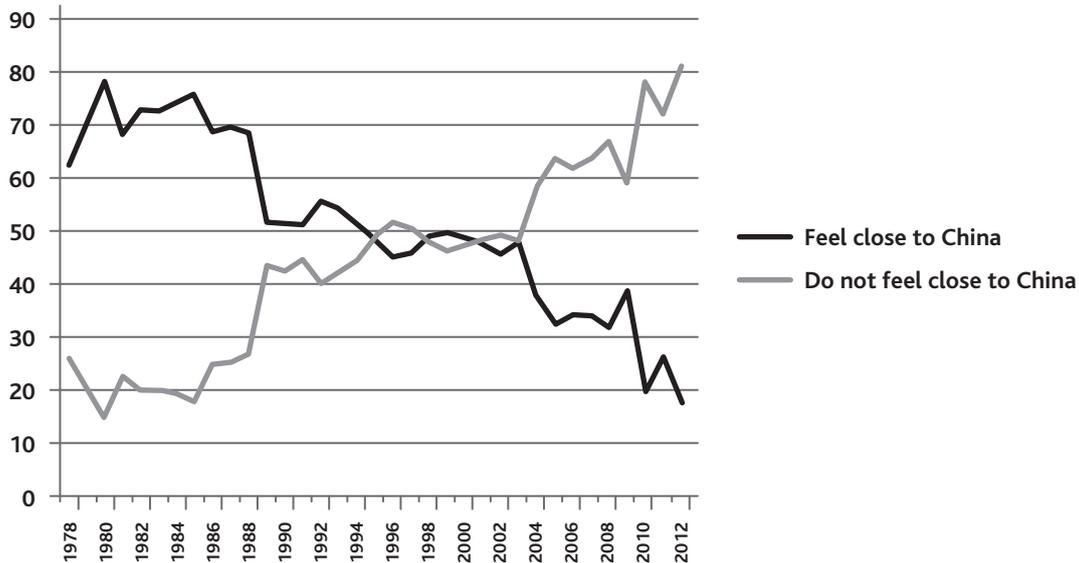
- The Sino-Japanese Joint Communiqué was signed in September 1972, terminating the state of war technically existing between Japan and the People's Republic.
- The Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty (PFT) was signed in August 1978.
- From 1979 Japan began to extend Official Development Aid (ODA) to China.
- During the negotiations over normalisation and the PFT, both Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping shelved the island disputes. Deng also proposed in 1979 to jointly explore with Japan the oil resources thought to surround the disputed islands.⁽¹⁾
- The first Japanese textbook controversy erupted in summer 1982. On 15 August 1985, Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro paid an official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. Anti-Japanese student demonstrations took place in China in fall 1985, and Japanese opinion polls around 1986 showed that public sentiment towards China worsened for the first time since 1982 (Graph 1). The Kokaryo Incident in 1987 revealed bilateral friction over Taiwan's legal status.
- In 1989, Japan joined Western sanctions against China after the Tiananmen Incident. In August 1991, Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki visited Beijing and agreed to resume Japanese ODA to China. In 1992, President Jiang Zemin and Emperor Akihito exchanged visits.
- While economic interdependence deepened, political relations deteriorated from the mid-1990s onwards. Chinese popular protests against Japan were largely suppressed in the 1990s, such as during the two controversies over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in 1990 and 1996.
- In 1995, Japan suspended grant assistance to China in protest at its continued nuclear tests. In 1996 Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro visited the Yasukuni Shrine, and new disputes over Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands took place. In 1998, President Jiang Zemin harshly criticised Japan's wartime conduct during a formal visit to Japan.
- During 2002-2006 Beijing suspended mutual state visits. Japan began to cut ODA to China from 2001, and later decided to phase out new loans by 2008. Bilateral disputes over gas and oil resources in the East China Sea escalated in 2004-2005.
- In April 2005, anti-Japanese demonstrations were held in many Chinese cities.
- From October 2006 to May 2008, Japan's new prime ministers Abe Shinzo and Fukuda exchanged visits with Chinese premier Wen Jiabao and president Hu Jintao. However, the apparent warming of Sino-Japanese ties between 2006 and 2009 proved to be superficial and short-lived.
- Controversies over poisoned *gyoza* imported from China occurred in 2008. In September 2010, a Chinese fishing boat collided with two Japanese Coast Guard vessels near the disputed islands, causing a diplomatic row.
- On September 13, 2012, the Japanese Diet (parliament) approved a deal to nationalise the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. China sent government ships to patrol the islands and suspended top-level bilateral meetings. Massive anti-Japanese protests engulfed Chinese cities across coastal and inland regions, particularly on 18 September, the anniversary of the Mukden Incident of 1931 (which heralded the Japanese invasion of Manchuria). Meanwhile, Japanese popular feelings of affinity with China dropped to a historic low (Graph 1). The economic cost of the strife surrounding these islands has been huge. By the end of September 2012, Japan was running a trade deficit of \$7 billion, unprecedented in 31 years, thanks to the economic weakness of Europe and strained relations with China. In 2011, China absorbed 22% of Japan's exports and 20% of its imports. But in 2012 total Sino-Japanese trade registered a 3.9% decrease from 2011, the first decline in the three years following the global financial crisis.

Minimal strategic cooperation despite common interests

The dramatic rise and decline in post-normalisation Sino-Japanese relations reveals the fragility and shallowness of their friendship. The fundamental mistrust that has underlain the relationship even during periods of apparent harmony is indicated by the absence of substantial strategic cooperation between the two, notwithstanding their close economic interdependence, the common threat facing them during the Cold War, and their many shared geopolitical interests in the years since the fall of the USSR. In the absence of the sort of active, structured partnership that builds bilateral trust, the two countries have in recent years allowed themselves to drift into a pattern of growing rivalry.

The profound transformation of US-China-USSR trilateral relations in the 1970s generated strong strategic incentives for China and Japan to forsake hostility. In particular, the Peace and Friendship Treaty included an anti-hegemony clause that was unmistakably directed at the Soviet Union. China also accepted the US-Japan alliance and Japanese defence build-up, something that it had previously resolutely opposed. Thus China joined a loose strategic alignment with Japan and the US against the common Soviet enemy. However, the two countries consistently refrained from substantial cooperation in the field of national security. During these years, China tried to pull Japan closer through military-to-military contacts, but the Japan Defence Agency refused to engage in formal, regular contacts with the People's

1. According to a veteran Japan hand in China, Zhang Xiangshan, who was involved in the normalisation talks, Prime Minister Tanaka and Premier Zhou agreed in September 1972 to put the issue on the backburner. This testimony was recently confirmed by Japanese politician Nonaka Hiromu, who cited Tanaka's report to his own faction in the LDP after normalisation. But no published diplomatic documents in either country contain the Japanese response to China's proposal, and Tokyo recognises no agreement to shelve the problem lest it be construed as an admission of the existence of a territorial dispute, something Japan officially rejects. For Zhang Xiangshan's memoir, see Zhang Xiangshan, "Zhongri fujiao tanpan huigu," *Riben xuekan*, No. 1, 1998. For Nonaka's remarks, see "Nonaka remarks riled the Senkaku waters," *Japan Times*, 12 June 2013.

Graph 1 – Japanese public feelings of closeness toward China, 1978-2012

Source: Annual polls by the Public Relations Office, Cabinet Office of Japan.

Liberation Army (PLA), and Tokyo prohibited economic aid to China for military purposes. Although Tokyo reluctantly accepted the insertion into the PFT of the Chinese-drafted anti-hegemony clause, Beijing also had to agree to the inclusion of a clause proposed by Japan to the effect that the treaty was not aimed at a third country. In short, the Sino-Japanese honeymoon of the 1970s was so tenuous as to constitute merely a “fragile entente.”⁽²⁾

Sino-Japanese rhetoric about strategic solidarity further cooled in the 1980s despite the continuing presence of the Soviet threat. From the second half of 1982, visits to China by Japanese military delegations decreased sharply.⁽³⁾ When Nakasone proposed to the visiting Hu Yaobang in November 1983 that the two countries should exchange information on the Soviet SS-20 missiles deployed in the Far East and jointly press Moscow to reduce them, he got no response. China also retracted its official support for the US-Japan alliance.⁽⁴⁾ Reversing its earlier encouragement of Japan’s defence build-up, Beijing now voiced concerns about a militarily strong Japan, especially when Nakasone announced the decision to break the one percent GNP ceiling for annual defence spending in fiscal year 1987.

The Cold War rationale for Sino-Japanese cooperation dissipated after the Soviet Union collapsed. Now the traditional strategic interaction – balance of power between regional powers in a multipolar setting – resumed its dominance in East Asia. The uneven growth of the Chinese and Japanese economies injected further uncertainty into their relationship. The two decades since the end of the Cold War have witnessed an extraordinary take-off of the Chinese economy, which quickly closed the gap with Japan and eventually surpassed it in 2010. China’s double-digit increases in annual military spending over the same period, and the upgrading of its defensive and offensive capabilities, have alarmed Japan, whose sense of insecurity has been exacerbated by the relative decline of its American ally. In response, Japan has since the mid-2000s engaged in a “quiet arms race” with China to counter its growing air, naval, and missile capabilities.⁽⁵⁾

Nevertheless, following the post-Cold War changes in the international system, no detectable deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations occurred until the mid-1990s, which was well before China could pose a credible economic

or military threat to Japan. Neither was the shift in the bilateral balance of power, which has taken place since the early 2000s, the sole determinant of Sino-Japanese relations. Even during the stalemate of the Koizumi years, China was not perceived as an imminent military threat by mainstream Japanese policymakers and strategic analysts.⁽⁶⁾ It was not until 2010 and after, with sharply rising tensions over the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute in particular, that mutual threat perceptions significantly escalated.⁽⁷⁾ Reflecting a heightened vigilance against China, in 2013 Japan’s defence budget increased for the first time in nearly a decade.⁽⁸⁾

Moreover, even today China and Japan continue to share many geostrategic goals. First of all, their economies are not only highly interdependent but also mutually complementary. It used to be that Japan exported manufactured goods to China and imported Chinese primary goods and, since the 1990s, cheap, labour-intensive manufactured goods. The bilateral trade structure became less asymmetrical from the early 2000s, when machinery made up China’s main exports to Japan (by value). The two nations have also competed as exporters to ASEAN and elsewhere. But the fact that Japanese exports still consist largely of capital intensive, high value-added goods while China’s are mostly low-priced, less complex goods shows that “China is well integrated in the web of Japanese production networks that

- Robert E. Bedeski, *The Fragile Entente*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1983; William T. Tow, “Sino-Japanese Security Cooperation: Evolution and Prospects,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 1, Spring 1983.
- Joachim Glaubitz, “Japan,” in Gerald Segal and William T. Tow (eds), *Chinese Defense Policy*, London, Macmillan, 1984, p. 231.
- Joseph Y. S. Cheng, “China’s Japan Policy in the 1980s,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 1984/1985, p. 96.
- Christopher W. Hughes, “Japan’s Military Modernisation: A Quiet Japan-China Arms Race and Global Power Projection,” *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2009, p. 96.
- Tsukasa Takamine, “A New Dynamism in Sino-Japanese Security Relations,” *Pacific Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4, December 2005, p. 433; Yinan He, “Ripe for Cooperation or Rivalry? Commerce, Realpolitik, and War Memory in Contemporary Sino-Japanese Relations,” *Asian Security*, Vol. 4, No. 2, May 2008, p. 170.
- For a Japanese commentary on the island disputes as a game changer for Japanese threat perception of China, see “A View from Tokyo on Regional Politico-Military Developments,” *CIGS East Asian Security Quarterly*, August-September 2012. Available at www.canon-igs.org/en/column/security/20130118_1716.html (accessed on 23 January 2013).
- Daily Yomiuri Online*, 29 January 2013.

exist in East and South-East Asia.”⁽⁹⁾ Some call this “vertical intra-industry trade,” where the increase of one party’s exports should not undermine the exports of the other.⁽¹⁰⁾

Meanwhile, both countries desire a stable, peaceful Pacific Rim for sea-lane safety and overseas market access, which is of far greater economic and strategic significance to either than the disputed offshore islands. They also have a common interest in keeping the Korean Peninsula denuclearised. Additionally, there remains considerable room for bilateral cooperation on various global issues “ranging from energy security, environmental protection, climate change, prevention and control of diseases to counter-terrorism, combating transnational crimes and the prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.”⁽¹¹⁾ Post-Cold War changes in the regional balance of power have undoubtedly contributed to the worsening climate for bilateral ties. However, such external shifts are insufficient to explain the timing and intensity of Sino-Japanese security rivalry, especially given the considerable benefits that both sides still stand to derive from continued cooperation. The fact that after 40 years Sino-Japanese relations are now back to square one, or even worse, speaks to the limits of material factors, or “rational” cost-benefit analysis, in shaping the relationship.

Intensifying memory contestation: Time fails to heal the wounds of war

Conventional wisdom might seem to suggest that the passage of time will reduce the vividness and emotional intensity of memories of violence. But in Sino-Japanese relations, the more time elapses, the more bitterly the two countries have quarrelled over the memory of their wartime history. As Okabe Tatsumi, a veteran Japanese scholar of Sino-Japanese relations, laments, if considered from the point of view of interest, major powers such as China and Japan must maintain a friendly relationship, so that it is “mysterious” and “unfortunate” that this relationship has been heavily influenced by emotions based on their WWII history.⁽¹²⁾

As I have argued elsewhere, after 1949 China initially downplayed the war history in order to court Japan diplomatically, as part of its balancing strategy first against the United States, and later against the Soviet Union.⁽¹³⁾ At that time, the Chinese official narrative drew a distinction between “the small handful of Japanese militarists” and ordinary Japanese people, who were treated as fellow victims of militarism. Such a moderate tone on Japanese war responsibility was designed to promote a favourable impression of Communist China in Japanese society and facilitate diplomatic normalisation with Japan. Moreover, the distinction between the many good Japanese and the few bad Japanese coincided with the class-based ideology of communism, which was then the primary foundation of the Beijing regime’s legitimacy.

Ironically, this view of history overlapped with that of Japanese conservative elites, who preferred to remember Japan as a victim, not the perpetrator, of the war, and blamed only a few Japanese military leaders for starting it. While much conservative historiography held Japan responsible for embarking on a foolhardy war with the Western powers, it sought to defend the attempt to extend Japanese control over much of Asia, honouring the “heroic sacrifice” of Japanese imperial soldiers and covering up their war atrocities. These national myths were perpetuated by a range of practices such as the Tokyo War Crimes Trial (which assigned war responsibility to a very restricted group of wartime leaders), textbook distortions of war history, generous state compensation to imperial soldiers and their families,

and formal visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by prominent political leaders. Some of these issues would later loom large in relations with China. However, before the 1980s Beijing did not confront Japan over its history textbooks, even though the school texts of the 1960s and 1970s arguably went further in their whitewashing of the wartime past than did those published later.⁽¹⁴⁾ Nor did Chinese media at the time pay attention to the fact that all Japanese prime ministers between 1972 and 1981 – Tanaka, Miki, Fukuda, Ohira, and Suzuki – worshiped at the Yasukuni Shrine while in office, even after Class-A war criminals were enshrined there in 1978. History was simply swept under the carpet so that other more pressing strategic and economic issues could be dealt with.

History was never forgotten despite the superficial tranquillity of bilateral diplomatic relations. The Chinese public would not later have proved so receptive to the patriotic propaganda of the government had it not been for folk memories associated with the trauma of war. Before the 1980s, private memories of the war were largely excluded from official discourse, but persisted as a source of latent grievance and mistrust towards Japan. This explains why the government went to such lengths to explain to the population the necessity of diplomatic normalisation with Japan in 1972.⁽¹⁵⁾ And even though Beijing joined the anti-Soviet alignment with Japan and the US, Chinese political elites remained alert to potential Japanese militarism and were torn when it came to supporting *Anpo* and Japanese military power.⁽¹⁶⁾

The reasons for the subsequent politicisation of the past stemmed largely from domestic factors within both societies. By the 1980s, Japan had become an economic giant and was ready to assert international political influence commensurate with its economic power. In the view of the conservative elites, however, the prevalence of a “self-torturing belief” about Japan’s war history deprived the younger generation of a strong sense of national purpose. Conservatives believed that Japan must restore national confidence and pride through reinterpreting its recent history. One step toward this goal was seen as a tightening of the textbook authorisation process so as to reverse a recent moderate increase in textbook coverage of the wartime suffering of Asian peoples. More broadly, conservative establishment figures hoped to permanently dispel the shadow of the past over Japan’s contemporary politics. Thus Prime Minister Nakasone paid official homage at the Yasukuni Shrine on 15 August 1985 as a symbolic gesture renouncing notions of the war as “shameful” and embracing a “positive” national identity.

9. Claes G. Alvstam et al., “On the economic interdependence between China and Japan: Challenges and possibilities,” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2009, p. 206.
10. Tomoo Marukawa, “Bilateral Trade and Trade Frictions between China and Japan, 1972–2012,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 53, No. 4, 2012, p. 445.
11. Quoted from Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao’s speech at the Japanese Diet, 12 April 2007. Available at www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t311544.htm (accessed on 23 January 2013).
12. Okabe Tatsumi, *Nitchu kankei no kako to shorai: gokai o koete*, Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 2006, pp. 222–229.
13. Yinan He, *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009, Chapters 3–4.
14. Japanese history textbooks markedly improved from the 1970s, thanks to some small but historic victories won by Japanese progressive forces in the “history battle” against the conservatives, such as the lawsuits of the left-wing historian Ienaga Saburo in which he won rulings against the conservative Monbusho.
15. Ming Wan documents Zhou Enlai’s personal revision of an “Internal Propaganda Outline for Receiving Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka to China” drafted by the Chinese Foreign Ministry in August 1972, and circulated to the party organisations above the county level and verbally explained to every family in about 20 cities before or shortly after Tanaka’s visit. Ming Wan, *Sino-Japanese Relations: Interaction, Logic, and Transformation*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 100.
16. Yinan He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 190–191.

This conservative perspective on history was criticised not only by domestic left-wing forces but also by the outside world. The unusual stir in the international media created by Japan's textbook and Yasukuni controversies put pressure on China to respond. But Beijing's reactions were not impulsive; domestic political calculations, not genuine concerns about Japanese national myths constructed since the war, supplied the main motivation. After the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s prestige seriously declined, exacerbated by the negative side effects of economic reform, such as increases in inflation, unemployment, corruption, and crime. In order to build a broad reform coalition, Deng Xiaoping made a compromise at the 12th Party Congress held in September 1982 with party conservatives in exchange for their endorsement of the reform and open-door policy. The first Japanese textbook incident, which came shortly before the Party Congress, provided a good opportunity for Deng to shore up domestic political unity. A tough stance on Japan could appease party hard-liners who were alarmed by Western ideological influences that had entered China since the onset of reform. Bashing Japan on the history issue could also boost patriotism and salvage the declining legitimacy of the Communist regime.

In fact, after the 1982 textbook controversy, Chinese official propaganda began to shift from communist ideology emphasising class struggle to nationalism stimulated by the conflicts between the Chinese nation and those foreign nations that had invaded China in the past, especially Japan. War movies, state-sponsored historical research, and war commemoration now focused on Japanese wartime atrocities and heroic Chinese resistance. The Chinese public was so preoccupied with Chinese victimhood that it refused to distinguish Japanese militarists from ordinary Japanese people. Anti-Japanese student demonstrations in turn elicited frustration among the Japanese public, who remembered the war as a miserable experience for themselves, and were largely unaware of Japan's victimisation of others. Thus, from very early on, Sino-Japanese disputes over history have involved not just government friction but also intense popular animosity.

Domestic politics continued to motivate national mythmaking after the Cold War. The so-called lost decade of the 1990s saw not only the worst economic recession in post-war Japan but also a dramatic fall in national morale and social vitality as the nation was haunted by a series of thorny problems, including rampant political corruption, public disasters, an aging society, surging crime and suicide rates, a widening income gap, and declining living standards.⁽¹⁷⁾ All these problems posed unprecedented political challenges for the conservative ruling bloc. After temporarily losing office in 1993, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) found itself in coalition with smaller parties, and facing a more powerful opposition camp led by the Democratic Party of Japan (launched in 1996). This prompted some centre-right LDP politicians to engage in nationalist populism in the hope of bolstering support.

Pressure from the domestic right meant that when confronted with new revelations of Japan's wartime atrocities (for example relating to the comfort women issue), officials typically issued apologies accompanied by considerable hedging and prevarication.⁽¹⁸⁾ Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi's August 1995 statement marking the 50th anniversary of the end of WWII is considered the most unequivocal, unconditional, and complete expression of contrition offered by Japan to date. It admitted that Japan's colonial rule and aggression "caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations," and offered "feelings of deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology."⁽¹⁹⁾ Officially all subsequent Japan-

ese cabinets have endorsed the Murayama statement. Although serving as the foundation for relations with Asian countries formerly colonised or invaded by Japan, the statement by no means commands a national consensus at home. In fact, the official position has been constantly challenged by the Right, who accuses the government of capitulating to foreign pressure and adopting a "masochistic" view of the past, as well as by the Left, who blamed Murayama for sidestepping the bigger issues of morality and individual responsibility, and for failing to develop a long-term, concrete strategy for reconciliation.⁽²⁰⁾

The 1990s also saw an upsurge of Japanese historical revisionism refuting depictions of Japan as the aggressor. Various conservative organisations tried to advance the view by organising symposiums, publishing cartoons and popular readings, and even preparing textbooks of their own, including the controversial *New History Textbook* compiled by the Tsukuru Kai, which has been approved for use since 2001. Also, a number of LDP politicians at the national and local levels joined the Tsukuru Kai, giving it disproportionately strong influence.⁽²¹⁾ In fact, Japan's neo-nationalism since the 1990s has been aided and abetted by New Right politicians within the LDP who espouse an ideological outlook reminiscent of pre-war ultra-nationalism in Japan. First formed in the 1970s in protest at Prime Minister Tanaka's diplomatic normalisation with China, the group called Seirankai had declined in political influence by the 1990s, but some of its prominent members, including Mori Yoshiro (former prime minister), Kamei Shizuka (former head of LDP Policy Research Council), and Ishihara Shintaro, remained powerful voices pushing for a rightward shift in the LDP's education policy.⁽²²⁾ Although few Japanese people have actively supported historical revisionism, the intertwining of this movement with conservative politics has heightened foreign perceptions of a concerted establishment plot to rewrite the historical record, rendering such revisionism an incendiary factor in Japan's relations with China.

But the provocation from the Japanese side was only one reason for the re-ignition of history disputes. The CCP's credibility tumbled after its violent crackdown on the 1989 democracy movement. Post-Tiananmen Western sanctions also accentuated a siege mentality amongst the Chinese ruling class. Amidst worries over the regime's survival, and with Communist ideology seeming increasingly irrelevant, the government redoubled its efforts to promote a nationalist ideology to maintain public support. A patriotic education campaign was not immediately implemented, however, largely due to Deng's lying-low strategy after Tiananmen, until 1993-1994 when China had regained international confidence. The new history curriculum highlighted the 1937-45 Sino-Japanese War, which had previously been treated as merely one of many episodes in Chinese revolutionary history. The patriotic education campaign peaked in 1995, when Beijing launched a vigorous commemorative campaign for the 50th anniversary of China's victory in the war.

17. Mindy L. Kotler et al., "Chinese and Japanese Public Opinion: Searching for Moral Security," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2007.

18. Alex Dudden, *Troubled Apologies among Japan, Korea, and the United States*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2008; Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2008.

19. Statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama "On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war's end (15 August 1995)," available at the website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan at www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/pm/murayama/9508.html (accessed on 25 September 2013).

20. Kazuhiko Togo, *Japan and Reconciliation in Post-war Asia: The Murayama Statement and Its Implications*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

21. Sven Saaler, *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion*, Munich, Iudicium Verlag GmbH, 2005.

22. James Babb, "The Seirankai and the Fate of Its Members: The Rise and Fall of the New Right Politicians in Japan," *Japan Forum*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2012.

In the early 1990s, Beijing held fire on the history issue and instead approached Japan in order to break out of its post-Tiananmen diplomatic isolation. But this new friendship diplomacy was driven by expediency rather than a long-term goal of reconciliation. Little progress toward historical settlement was actually made. When Beijing stepped up patriotic education in the mid-1990s, historical polemics against Japan were resumed. A major escalation happened during the Koizumi administration. When Koizumi came to power in 2001, "Japan was literally bankrupt, in currency and in spirit," and "the ruling LDP was desperate for a saviour."⁽²³⁾ He defied domestic pressure by introducing daring reform measures, such as cleaning up the Japanese banking system, privatising the postal system, and centralising power within the government and the LDP. Externally, he adopted a muscular foreign policy to strengthen US-Japan security cooperation, maintain pressure on North Korea, and vie with China for regional leadership. To attain these goals Koizumi employed a strategy combining "populism and bullheadedness."⁽²⁴⁾ His insistence on visiting Yasukuni every year was one tool of his electoral strategy and populist politics to rally public support and advance his policy agenda.

The new Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administration initially sought to shed the ideological baggage of its LDP predecessors with respect to history and nationalism. It attempted instead to promote Asian regionalism to find a better balance between Japan's alliance with the US and cooperation with China. But this seemingly realistic foreign policy vision was thwarted by the "near-relentless strategic pressure" exerted by a rising, assertive China. It was also sabotaged by rightwing Japanese figures such as Ishihara Shintaro, whose bid to purchase the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in April 2012 forced the national government to step in and provoked a still (as of autumn 2013) unresolved diplomatic crisis with China. As a result, the DPJ ended up simply "defaulting back into a strategy in the style of the LDP."⁽²⁵⁾

In the meantime, the long-time patriotic education in China generated visceral anti-foreign sentiments, of which Japan was the main target. This happened against the backdrop of a more vibrant and pluralistic Chinese society since the 1990s, where media commercialisation greatly diversified information sources and provided more public space for discussions of various political issues, including those relating to foreign affairs. The pursuit of sensational impact by non-official media contributed to a polarisation of public opinion and an intensification of narrow-minded nationalism. Extreme nationalist views flourished also because in authoritarian China liberal criticism of the Communist regime remains subject to strict censorship, so nationalist rhetoric directed at external "enemies" has become a relatively safe, effective way for intellectuals and various social actors to advance their political goals. Thus a half-open but still closely monitored media system has tacitly sanctioned the rise of patriotism as the consensual ideology of the nation.⁽²⁶⁾

Although appeals to patriotism can help boost national morale, placing too much emphasis on it spreads a mass ideology of self-glorification and xenophobia. While preferring to restrain popular nationalism when it jeopardised important national interests, such as economic cooperation with Japan, Beijing realised that a crude clampdown would incur criticism against "soft-kneed" government diplomacy and weaken its patriotic credentials. So even though Hu Jintao and the Foreign Ministry contemplated new thinking on Japan policy in 2002-2003, their plan was rejected in both popular and elite debates.⁽²⁷⁾ Additionally, Hu, who took over power only at the end of 2002, needed support from Jiang to consolidate his authority, so had

to uphold his predecessor's hard-line policy towards Japan. It was not until around 2006, when Hu had better consolidated his power and Koizumi had left office, that he felt confident enough to seek a rapprochement with Japan. But domestic political factors again intervened during the two island disputes of 2010 and 2012. Preparing for the pending leadership transition at the end of 2012, neither the outgoing Hu, concerned to preserve his influence over the new party leadership, nor the incoming Xi Jinping, keen on demonstrating his patriotic credentials, could afford to appear weak in dealing with Japan. They therefore had to co-opt rather than suppress popular anti-Japanese sentiment.

This carried clear international costs. Beijing's failure to restrain the extreme "patriots" made outside observers, including those in Japan, suspect the regime was intentionally manipulating popular nationalism. It also reinforced objections among those on the right of Japanese politics to continued expressions of contrition and efforts at reconciliation vis-à-vis an authoritarian China whose government they believed to have placed regime legitimacy and regional domination above good-neighbourly relations.⁽²⁸⁾ To quote the comments on the Murayama Statement of Murata Ryohei, former vice minister of foreign affairs, "The Japanese Prime Minister might have stated it as his expression of sincerity, but the Chinese and Korean Governments had no intention to receive it as intended. They were just ready to utilise this Japanese stupidity for the benefit of achieving their future foreign policy objectives."⁽²⁹⁾

This second major paradox in post-normalisation Sino-Japanese relations – the fact that history has become more rather than less problematic with the passage of time – serves as an excellent footnote to the first paradox discussed above. A major reason why China and Japan could not develop strategic solidarity in the 1970s-80s was their failure to settle old historical scores. Since the end of the Cold War, a combination of uncertain geopolitical context and unmitigated clash of memories has rendered the bilateral relationship increasingly hard to manage. Although moments of intense bilateral crisis have typically witnessed feverish fence-mending efforts, the sort of mutual understanding and trust that would prevent further crises remain weak. The paradox of persistent antipathy and a widening values gap despite frequent bilateral exchanges is what I turn to now.

Growing inter-societal connections and increasing alienation

Separated merely by "a narrow strip of water" (*yiyi daishui*), China and Japan historically had close interactions. Official emissaries sent from Japan to China date back to the Han Dynasty, becoming frequent and routinised during the Tang Dynasty of the seventh to tenth century. Pre-modern China exerted a strong influence, often via Korea, on Japan's writing system, reli-

23. "Honest Abe," *Wall Street Journal*, 29 August 2006.

24. "Koizumi's Success Charts the Path to Japan's Future," *Wall Street Journal*, 28 April 2006.

25. Christopher W. Hughes, "The Democratic Party of Japan's New (but Failing) Grand Security Strategy: From 'Reluctant Realism' to 'Resentful Realism'?", *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, Winter 2012. The quotation is on page 131.

26. For a lengthy discussion of the radicalisation of Chinese public opinion about Japan since the 1990s, see Yinan He, "Remembering and Forgetting: Elite Mythmaking, Mass Reaction, and Sino-Japanese Relations, 1950-2006," *History and Memory*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Fall 2007.

27. Peter Gries, "China's 'New Thinking' on Japan," *The China Quarterly*, No. 184, December 2005.

28. See, for instance, Nakajima Mineo, "ODA o toriyame/taichugoku gaiko no arikata mo minaose," *Chuo Koron*, March 2005, Noda Nobuo. "Chugoku 'teikoku chitsujo kochiku' ni Nihon wa taiko senryaku o mochiuru no ka?," *Chuo Koron*, November 2004.

29. Quoted in Kazuhiko Togo, *Japan and Reconciliation in Post-war Asia*, op. cit., p. 15.

gion, customs, agriculture, and government, amongst others. China also borrowed heavily from Japanese culture, especially its modern political and economic thoughts starting from the Meiji period. Moreover, at the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese elites such as Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen looked to Japan for inspiration and material assistance to fulfil their nationalist dreams.⁽³⁰⁾ The curricula vitae of the early leadership of both the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the CCP, the two major forces in twentieth-century Chinese politics, also show that studying in Japan was an important part of their formative experiences.⁽³¹⁾

After diplomatic normalisation in 1972, regular exchange of commercial flights between Tokyo and Beijing began in September 1974. The Japan Foundation, a Japanese government agency, funded exchanges of Japanese *Kabuki* and Chinese Peking Opera performances,⁽³²⁾ while visits by other Chinese art troupes to Japan were sponsored by the non-governmental Japan-China Friendship Association (JCFA).⁽³³⁾ Two further types of non-official exchanges also began in the 1970s. One was youth exchange programs. In the form of “youth ships (by sea)” or “youth wings (by air),” numerous locally-organised Japanese youth groups came to China, and Chinese youth groups paid return visits. The other type involved the “twinning” of Chinese and Japanese cities. Beginning with the Kobe-Tianjin and Yokohama-Shanghai links in 1973, these sorts of relationships rapidly increased between Chinese and Japanese cities and provinces. In 2010 China accounted for 21% of Japan’s total links with foreign local governments, only slightly lower than that of the US, and in terms of financial expenses, Japanese cities’ relationships with their Chinese “twins” cost more than those with any other countries.⁽³⁴⁾

A new wave of Chinese learning from Japan further spurred societal contacts in the reform years, when China rediscovered Japan as a role model for pursuing modernisation. As Allen Whiting observes, in the mid-1980s the Chinese media projected a distinctly favourable image of Japan.⁽³⁵⁾ Admiring Japan’s accomplishments in economic development, science and technology, and her educational system, many Chinese people were eager to reproduce Japan’s success. In 1985, the Chinese government relaxed the restrictions on self-financed education abroad. For its part, Japan opened up further to foreign students from the mid-1980s by launching the “Plan to Accept 100,000 Foreign Students before the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century,” as well as through simplifying application procedures for student visas. Soon Chinese students flocked to Japan. From 1984 to 2004, more than 250,000 Chinese citizens obtained student visas for university education or pre-university language training. As of 2009, Chinese students were the largest group of foreign students in Japan.⁽³⁶⁾

As of 1980, there were only 52,896 Chinese residents in Japan,⁽³⁷⁾ but at the end of 2007, Chinese citizens with legal status in Japan reached 606,899, constituting 28.2% of the officially registered foreign population and overtaking the Koreans as the largest group of foreign residents.⁽³⁸⁾ This increased Chinese population consists primarily of Chinese students who arrived since the 1980s and chose to stay in Japan after graduation. Therefore, most people in the new Chinese community are well-educated, enjoy high socioeconomic status, and are better integrated into Japanese society.⁽³⁹⁾ Many of them have been hired by Japanese companies seeking to expand their business in China, or have become “transnational entrepreneurs” with their own business operations in China. Employing their language skills and cultural/ethnic networks, they often serve as bridges between the two societies.⁽⁴⁰⁾

As Japan became more open to Chinese student immigration, interest in Japanese language and society boomed. Although Chinese respect for the

Japanese model has been dented since the “bubble” burst in the 1990s, Japanese language remains a popular subject amongst Chinese students. The number of Chinese entrants for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test increased 20-fold from 1993 to 2003.⁽⁴¹⁾ In 2013, despite the fact that official relations with Japan were at a forty-year nadir, the number of Chinese people studying the Japanese language reached 1.05 million, topping all countries outside of Japan.⁽⁴²⁾

In addition to attracting more Chinese students for formal education, in 1990 the Japanese Ministry of Justice also revised the immigration law so that more Japanese firms would be qualified to accept foreign students for technical training, or *kenshusei*. Thereafter the number of Chinese *kenshusei* surged, reaching nearly 40% of all foreign *kenshusei* in 1996. Most of these *kenshusei* entered Japanese manufacturing industries, helping to ease the labour shortages of Japan’s rapidly aging society.⁽⁴³⁾ In addition, most language students and many self-funded university students from China undertake employment, often in low-wage, part-time jobs, to pay for their tuition and living expenses. For these students, the experience of working in Japan often does not contribute to a positive image of the country. Meanwhile, even though Japan is highly dependent on undocumented migrants for its irregular low-wage labour market, fear of crimes thought to be committed by an influx of foreigners, and a conservative ideology about Japanese ethnic homogeneity, have generated suspicion and hostility towards Chinese immigration.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Another issue besides illegal immigration that has caused apprehension among Japanese towards China is food safety. Because Japan’s food self-sufficiency is low, it relies on imported food from countries such as China.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The *gyoza* controversy is a case where closer interaction revealed the divergence of the two countries’ political cultures. The Chinese government’s

30. Joshua A. Fogel, *The Role of Japan in Liang Qichao’s Introduction of Modern Western Civilisation to China*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Berkeley, 2004; Marius B. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1954; Ernest P. Young, “Chinese Leaders and Japanese Aid in the Early Republic,” in Akira Iriye and Madeleine Chi (eds), *The Chinese and the Japanese: Essays in Political and Cultural Interactions*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1980.
31. Yoda Yoshiie and Wang Yuan, *Nitchu kankei no rekishi to genzai*, Tokyo, Hakuteisha, 2007, pp. 135-147.
32. Japan Foundation, *Kokusai koryu kikin 15 nen no ayumi*, Tokyo, Kokusai Koryu Kikin, 1990, p. 37.
33. National Headquarters of the Japan-China Friendship Association, *Nitchu yuko undo shi*, Tokyo, Seinen Shuppansha, 1980, pp. 186-188.
34. Utpal Vyas, *Soft Power in Japan-China Relations: State, Sub-state and Non-state Relations*, New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 112-113.
35. Allen Whiting, *China Eyes Japan*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989, p. 91.
36. Gracia Liu-Farrer, “Educationally Channeled International Labor Mobility: Contemporary Student Migration from China to Japan,” *International Migration Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2009, pp. 184-185.
37. Hélène Le Bail, “The New Chinese Immigration to Japan: Between Mobility and Integration,” *China Perspectives*, No. 61, September-October 2005, pp. 10-21.
38. “Chinese become Japan’s largest foreign community,” *China Daily*, 5 June 2008.
39. The naturalisation number of the Chinese was second only to the Koreans and much higher than other foreign populations in Japan. See Hélène Le Bail, “The New Chinese Immigration to Japan,” *art. cit.*, p. 11.
40. Gracia Liu-Farrer, “Educationally Channeled International Labor Mobility,” *art. cit.*
41. Utpal Vyas, *Soft Power in Japan-China Relations*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
42. *Kyodo News*, 8 July 2013.
43. Satoshi Amako and Sonoda Shigeto (eds), *Nitchu koryu no shihanseki*, Tokyo, Toyo Keizai Shinposha, 1998, Chapter 3.
44. Takeyuki Tsuda, “Reluctant Hosts: The Future of Japan as a Country of Immigration,” *Research & Seminars*, Vol. 7, No. 4, February 2001. In an Asahi Shimbun poll in 1998, for instance, an equal percentage of Japanese respondents (12%) believed that the government should facilitate Chinese student exchanges and ban illegal Chinese immigrants. Naikaku Sori Daijin Kanbo, *Seron chosa nenkan*, 1998, p. 497.
45. Japan’s food self-sufficiency in 2006 was 39% on a calorie basis and 68% in terms of the value of agricultural output. See *Japan Times*, 26 February 2008.

delay and cover-up of the incident, typical of responses to public safety issues within China, shocked and disgusted Japanese people. Food safety thus became the second most mentioned reason (61.8%), next to only the island disputes (64.6%), for dislike of China cited by respondents to a 2011 public opinion poll.⁽⁴⁶⁾

This odd phenomenon of more contact yielding more mutual antipathy has been well recognised in Sino-Japanese relations.⁽⁴⁷⁾ When relations were first normalised, the overall level of societal contact was rather low, and Japan's governing elite and the general public were generally optimistic about the future of China's market reforms and political liberalisation. Japanese self-confidence at the time also encouraged greater willingness to tolerate an economically backward China that was eager to learn from Japan. But the Tiananmen incident in 1989 suddenly demoted China "from a model student to a pariah" in the eyes of the Japanese. China's growing power and international assertiveness also alerted Japan to the possible threats that an illiberal China might pose to its neighbours.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The countries' clash of values on human rights, ethnic minorities, and sovereignty issues prompted the two governments to turn their human rights dialogue to an annual practice during 2008-2011, although this yielded little progress in narrowing the divide between them.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The frequent summit meetings of 2006-2008 also skirted sensitive political topics.⁽⁵⁰⁾

If official talks have been ineffective in fostering mutual understanding and feelings of affinity, might exchanges at local and non-governmental levels potentially fill the void? The friendship city programs mentioned above have a number of pitfalls. One is the financial burden they place on Japanese local governments and the volunteer groups that sponsor exchange activities. Another problem is the strong official colouring of the Chinese groups participating in these programs. While the Japanese side is dissatisfied with the lack of genuine "citizens' exchanges," the Chinese side blames Japanese official institutions for their inaction in facilitating exchanges (demonstrating a failure to comprehend the limited authority of the government in a democracy). Additionally, Chinese cities commonly take such programs as an opportunity to attract Japanese investment, which is perceived by the Japanese side as narrowly utilitarian.⁽⁵¹⁾ This shows the asymmetric expectations of a fast-growing nation prioritising commercial benefits versus a developed country interested more in building grassroots "people-to-people" bonds.

Some of these pitfalls are present in their NGO (non-governmental organisation) exchanges as well. Theoretically, NGOs should be free of official guidance and therefore more flexible. But in China's external exchange programs, Chinese participants often cannot breach an officially-determined "correct line" to engage in free communication with their Japanese counterparts. A similar problem, albeit to a lesser degree, also exists in Japan as Japanese "NPOs" are often smaller and much less resourceful than the NGOs of Western countries, and their activities are limited by the state.⁽⁵²⁾ Before the new Nonprofit Organisation Law came into effect in 1999, non-state activity was limited to so-called *koeki hojin* (public benefit judicial persons), the establishment of which required the completion of a time-consuming, hardly standardised, and stringent approval process. By 1994, only 28 groups managed to acquire NGO status.⁽⁵³⁾ Even though the new law simplified this process, thousands of Japanese NGOs still would rather not apply for legal status to avoid having to navigate the complicated regulatory framework.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Last but not least, bilateral exchange programs have so far hardly addressed a significant aspect of the bilateral values gap, historical memory,

which partially explains the second paradox discussed in this article. The 1982 textbook controversy did trigger a number of joint history research and education exchange projects, such as that between the China Education Union and left-wing Japan Teachers' Union (*Nikyoso*).⁽⁵⁵⁾ Since 1988, Chinese historians at the Institute of Curriculum and Teaching Materials Research of the People's Education Press and Japan's International Society for Educational Information have undertaken mutual textbook surveys and discussed textbook content.⁽⁵⁶⁾ More recently, in response to Monbusho's approval of the *Tsukuru Kai* textbook, historians from China, Japan, and South Korea launched a collaborative project in 2002 that resulted in simultaneous publication in the three countries of a volume of supplementary teaching materials on the modern history of all three.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Created mainly in reaction to textbook controversies in Japan, these exchange programs served as a vehicle for attacks by Chinese historians and progressive Japanese historians on Monbusho and Japanese right-wingers; criticism of historical distortions or omissions in Chinese textbooks was notably absent. Modern Chinese history is notoriously a political minefield within China, involving considerable potential risk for those intent on undertaking genuinely critical scholarship. Such political sensitivity also makes it all the more difficult for Chinese historians to engage in genuine dialogue with foreign historians, or to transcend any anti-Japanese sentiments they may personally harbour.⁽⁵⁸⁾

Government support for international historical dialogue was also long lacking. It was only after Prime Minister Murayama of the Japan Socialist Party took office in 1994 that Tokyo provided official sponsorship for collaborative research with Asian historians on the history of Japanese aggression and colonialism. Under an umbrella program called the Peace and Friendship Exchange Plan, several research institutions were established, one of which was the Centre for Chinese History Research. But Beijing considered the time unripe for joint historical research and agreed to support historians' meetings only if the topic was restricted to Japanese self-reflection. Beijing particularly informed Japan that "free exchanges with Chinese research in-

46. The 8th Joint Opinion Poll held by Genro NPO issued in June 2012, accessed at www.genron-npo.net/pdf/forum2012.pdf (accessed on 6 February 2013).

47. Satoshi Amako and Sonoda Shigeto (eds), *Nitchu koryu no shihanseki*, op. cit., p. 115.

48. Jing Sun, *Japan and China as Charm Rivals: Soft Power in Regional Diplomacy*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2012, pp. 39-43. The quotation is on page 42.

49. Source of the Japanese Foreign Ministry: www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2011/11/1124_03.html (accessed on 25 September 2013).

50. Gilbert Rozman, "Narrowing the Values Gap in Sino-Japanese Relations: Lessons from 2006-2008," in Gerrit Gong and Victor Teo (eds), *Reconceptualising the Divide: Identity, Memory and Nationalism in Sino-Japanese relations*, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, pp. 30-35.

51. Satoshi Amako and Sonoda Shigeto (eds), *Nitchu koryu no shihanseki*, op. cit., Chapter 5.

52. The attitude of Japanese officialdom on this score is illustrated by the refusal to countenance use of the term "NGO" in Japan – since this might imply something virtuous in dissociating oneself from the state. Instead, the term "NPO" (non-profit organisation) is used.

53. Uptal Vyas, *Soft Power in Japan-China Relations*, op. cit., p. 134.

54. Andrew Horvat, "A Strong State, Weak Civil Society, and Cold War Geopolitics: Why Japan Lags behind Europe in Confronting a Negative Past," in Gi-wook Shin et al. (eds), *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: The Korean Experience*, London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 223-225.

55. Hitaka Rokuro, *Nihon to Chugoku: Wakamono tachi no rekishi ninshiki*, Tokyo, Nashinokisha, 1995.

56. Wang Hongzhi, "Zhongri Lishi jiaokeshu de jiaoliu," *Lishi jiaoxue*, No. 1, 1999.

57. For Chinese and Japanese editions of the book, see Joint Compilation Committee of Dongya Sanguo de Jinxiandai Shi, *Dongya sanguo de jinxiandai shi*, Beijing, Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005; Nitchukan Sankoku Kyotsu Rekishi Kyozaikai, *Mirai o hiraku rekishi: Higashi Ajia sankoku no kingendai shi*, Tokyo, Kobunken, 2005.

58. See Guopeng Shi, "Epilogue: Some Reflections on the Annual Seminar for History Teachers from China, Japan, and South Korea," in Paul Morris, Naoko Shimazu and Edward Vickers (ed), *Imagining Japan in Contemporary East Asia*, Routledge, forthcoming 2013.

stitutes or scholars are not acceptable” and required scholars from the two countries to conduct research separately and exchange opinions only via CASS (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences).⁽⁵⁹⁾ In this way, Beijing ensured that no Chinese historians could independently conduct joint history projects with Japan and that these projects would comply with the CCP’s official stance on historical issues.

After the Koizumi administration ended in 2006, Beijing and Tokyo launched a joint programme of research involving historians from both sides, representing a significant step forward. But participants’ historical views were too far apart to be easily reconciled, so the two sides decided to write parallel articles on each of the selected historical topics. After four rounds of meetings, the project was concluded at the end of 2009. The reports released afterwards indeed reveal great divergences between interpretations, for example, of the number of victims of the Nanjing Massacre, the causes of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, and various aspects of post-war history. Nevertheless, both sides use the word “aggression” to describe Japan’s invasion, and explicitly acknowledge Japanese victimisation of China during the war.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Labelled as the first phase of bilateral historical cooperation, follow-up studies were anticipated. However, political tensions since 2010 have ruled out a second phase in the near future, indicating the vulnerability of societal exchanges in the face of political pressure.

Conclusion

When China and Japan normalised relations in 1972, they expressed a wish to maintain friendship “from generation to generation.” The reality is that relations have fluctuated dramatically over the past 40 years, with a slide into armed conflict recently beginning to seem a real possibility. On close examination, the high degree of shared interest and absence of critical strategic conflict between the two countries makes this deterioration in bilateral relations bewildering. In contrast to the situation in the 1930s, when economic dislocation, political dysfunction and the rise of militarism in Japan set the country on a collision course with China, or during the Cold War, when they were engulfed by a global superpower struggle, today strategic antagonism between the two countries appears far from predestined. Their emerging strategic rivalry, currently most visible in the mutual arms build-up and provocative behaviour in the East China Sea, has indeed stemmed from a visible power shift over the past five to ten years. But bilateral competition has been reinforced by cultural-ideational forces. In particular, mutual threat perceptions are frequently magnified and refracted through the prism of distorted historical narratives. Although the role of popular culture and folk memory have undoubtedly been significant in shaping visions of the other country, the manipulation of memory by opportunistic elements within the elites of both countries has poisoned an otherwise calm and rational atmosphere for bilateral relations. Moreover, although politicisation of history may be undertaken primarily with domestic ends in view, the fact that it is conducted under the gaze of the international media magnifies its potential for eliciting mutual antipathy and mistrust.

Nor does the democracy-authoritarianism dichotomy mark an entirely clear dividing line between the two societies. To be sure, the PRC has never been a democracy, although this fact was officially overlooked by Japan until the Tiananmen shock was compounded by concerns about an ever stronger and more assertive China. Today many Japanese citizens sincerely subscribe to democratic values and feel pessimistic about forging a genuine

harmony with a country where the government unabashedly represses its own people. To make things worse, some of Japan’s most vocal critics of China’s human rights records have been right-wing nationalists whose own commitment to democratic values is perhaps questionable at best.⁽⁶¹⁾ Moreover, those Japanese leaders most voluble in their calls for a “value-oriented” diplomacy have also tended to be ardent advocates of a strong and proud Japan, unapologetic about its past and dismissive of domestic debates over gender equality, minority rights, and other important civic values.⁽⁶²⁾ For the right-wing elite, “democracy” has been less an object of serious commitment than a convenient club with which to clobber China with the aim of fanning anti-China nationalism and boosting domestic support for its factional political agenda.

All these on-going trends – power redistribution in the economic and military arenas, combined with deep-seated historical biases, conflicting conceptions of national identity, and divergent political ideologies – bode ill for the future development of Sino-Japanese relations. One can imagine a continued downward trend where any conflict of interest is blown out of proportion rather than dealt with on the basis of rational and objective assessments, and overreaction becomes more and more the rule rather than the exception. The result is that secondary disputes increasingly crowd out mutually beneficial cooperation in areas concerning the larger national interests of the two countries and the daily lives of their peoples. If allowed to continue, this vicious cycle will become a huge source of security instability and jeopardise the economic prosperity not just of the two countries themselves but also of the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.

The national identities, historical perspectives, and socio-political values of China and Japan are so different as to render highly problematic the task of establishing a stable foundation for bilateral cooperation. If the foreign policies of the two governments are unable to break through the impasse because they are too subservient to domestic politics, non-state actors should be allowed to do what the governments cannot. Motivated by civic values rather than narrow nationalism or political calculations, non-state actors should be more likely to reject crude manipulation of ideas and perspectives.⁽⁶³⁾ With their local networks, volunteer projects, and other creative measures, NGOs are particularly suitable for the task of fostering intimate people-to-people ties at the grassroots level. Indeed, NGOs have tried to facilitate societal communication, for example through the historians’ dialogue promoted by the Asian Network for History Education, Japan, and the scholars and military officers’ exchanges funded by the Sasakawa Japan-China Friendship Fund. Also, in a gesture of friendship and reconciliation, in 1995-1998 the JCFA raised 4.7 million yen and attracted more than 2,000 volunteers to help the renovation of castle walls in Nanjing where the Nanjing Massacre took place. In 2004, when official relations were strained, the head of JCFA went to Heilongjiang Province to attend a ceremony commemorating the first anniversary of an incident in which the leaking of Japanese chemical

59. Satoshi Amako and Sonoda Shigeto (eds), *Nitchu koryu no shihanseki*, op. cit., pp. 122–26.

60. The Chinese and Japanese reports of the joint history project are available at: www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/rekishi_kk.html (accessed on 25 September 2013).

61. Tsuneo Akaha, “China’ in the Contemporary Nationalists’ Reconstruction of ‘Japan’,” in Gong and Teo (eds), *Reconceptualising the Divide*, op. cit.

62. For some evidence, see “Abe’s Sex Slave Stance Darkens Women’s Day,” *Japan Times*, 10 March 2007; “Japan’s Aso: Elderly Should Hurry up and Die,” *News.msn.com*, 23 January 2013.

63. Shogo Suzuki, “Overcoming Past Wrongs Committed by States: Can Non-state Actors Facilitate Reconciliation?,” *Social & Legal Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2012.

weapons left behind after WWII caused dozens of Chinese injuries there.⁽⁶⁴⁾

So far the activities of these grassroots programs have not been well publicised or acknowledged in either country, and – as noted above – their performance has been considerably hindered by insufficient resources and official restrictions. However, their actual and potential contribution to improving bilateral relations should not be ignored. Elsewhere I have argued that the non-governmental German-Polish Textbook Commission set up in the 1970s contributed significantly to harmonising historical understanding between those two nations, and societal groups in West Germany, including Catholic churches, private foundations, and youth exchange NGOs greatly complemented state efforts at reconciliation with Poland.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The fact that Poland was still ruled by a Communist state did not deter the democratic West Germany at that time from taking most of the initiative. In authoritarian Asia, civic social groups were able to develop in a context of rapid economic growth and social openness, such as existed in South Korea and Taiwan in the 1980s. Those societies bear comparison with the situation in China today. There has been a dramatic growth of bottom-up grassroots NGOs in China in the recent decade that are generally depoliticised and tolerated by the state because they help address various social needs. Although unlikely to lead quickly to democratisation of the kind seen in South Korea or Taiwan, these groups have nevertheless steadily gained in influence and independence.⁽⁶⁶⁾

So far, with the exception of nationalist groups such as the *Baodiao* (defending Diaoyu Islands) activists, China's grassroots NGOs have rarely extended their activities to international affairs. But there exists a potentially rich supply of social actors interested in deeper exchanges with Japan, particularly the large number of Chinese students who studied in Japan. They can function as the "link and medium" through which mutual understanding between the two nations may be fostered.⁽⁶⁷⁾ At the elite level, Chinese literary critic Sun Ge once advocated the establishment of a "Sino-Japanese Intellectual Community" where scholars of both countries could transcend the boundaries of national history and ideological constraints to engage in non-political, candid intellectual dialogue.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Although it offers no immediate fix to the problems that bedevil Sino-Japanese relations, such a development may constitute the best hope for a steady improvement over the longer term. Ultimately, a healthier bilateral relationship may depend on the development in both countries of a genuine, robust civil society that is relatively free from political interference.

■ **Yinan He is an associate professor at the School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University. She holds a Ph.D. in political science from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Yinan He, Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University, 400 South Orange Ave., South Orange, NJ 07079 (Yinan.he@shu.edu).**

64. Uptal Vyas, *Soft Power in Japan-China Relations*, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141 and pp. 148-149.

65. Yinan He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, *op. cit.*

66. Anthony J. Spiers, "Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China's Grassroots NGOs," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 117, No. 1, 2011.

67. Cai Jianguo, "Minjian jiaoliu shi zhongri guanxi de jizhou," 31 August 2010, http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/PublicDiplomacy/shidian/detail_2010_08/31/2371088_0.shtml, (accessed on 5 August 2013).

68. Goukou Xiongshan (Mizoguchi Yuza), "Guanyu 'zhongri zhishi gongtongti'," <http://old.cul-studies.com/asp/list3.asp?id=80&writer='sunge'> (accessed on 5 August 2013).