Sino-Japanese Relations, From Strife to Strides

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Introduction

Although Japan had historically maintained a strict policy of isolationism, it did have some contact with its Pacific Rim neighbors prior to the Western infiltration during the Meiji Restoration. Because of its size and proximity, China, one of the oldest civilizations in the world, has influenced this island nation in all aspects of society, including politics, institutions, ideas, attitudes, and language. By the mid-late nineteenth century, the three main Asian kingdoms (Japan, China, and Korea) were weak and divided. In order to overcome this turmoil, Japan was forced to accept Western influence and to neglect its former respect for China. Consequently, as Japan's industrial and economic strength began to grow immensely, so did the need for more raw material and markets. Thus, Japan attempted on various occasions throughout the late 1800s and early to mid-1900s to assume power over many of its Asian counterparts so that it could reap the resources necessary to support its period of modernization. Its imperialist policy spawned an era of aggression in China, which lasted approximately eighty years and which ultimately destroyed their symbiotic relationship. Relations were finally normalized in 1972 with the Joint Communique. This agreement was the launching pad from which Japan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) began to once again cooperate effectively and peacefully and has lead to the bilateral partnership which serves as a sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific today.

Historical Background (1871-1972)

By 1871 Japan had not yet gained enough strength to impose an unfair commercial treaty over China and thus, it signed an accord which stipulated that consular jurisdiction was to operate in both nations, tariffs remain at fixed low rates, and there was no most-favored nation clause. However, China found it difficult to resolve diplomatic problems, as it had no consuls in Japan. This proved to be a major setback when dispute over the Ryukyu Islands, which lie southwest of Kyushu and include Okinawa, arose shortly thereafter. Tensions mounted as each sought control of the kingdom to which they both had legitimate claims. After a group of Ryukyuan fisherman shipwrecked on Formosa (Taiwan) and were killed by Formosan aborigines, the Japanese demanded compensation from the Chinese government in addition to the punishment of the aborigines. When China failed to comply with these demands, Japan sent a military expedition to the islands. China soon surrendered and Japan named the islands the Okinawa Prefecture in 1879; the outcome demonstrated China's weakness in foreign affairs, something which the victor would take advantage of in the ensuing years.¹

At this time, Korea was ruled by a conservative and authoritarian monarchy and was plagued with factional disunity, economic stagnation and Chinese dominance. After Japan had unsuccessfully attempted to attain international guarantees of Korean independence, it began to see Korea as "a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan;" the Russian empire was presently expanding and had clearly shown an interest in Northeast Asia. Thus, the two came to odds once again at the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 when China sent troops at the request of the Korean king to subdue domestic rebellion and Japan sent troops in accordance with an agreement from 1885 which

required it to contribute military aid. By the year-end, Japan had defeated the Chinese troops at sea and on land and was advancing through Manchuria. A peace agreement was signed one year later which liberated Korea and yielded to Japan the following: control over Formosa, the Pescadores Islands and the Liaodong Peninsula in Manchuria, the opening by China of four more treaty ports and the payment to Japan of a sizeable indemnity.²

This military victory encouraged Japan to advance further and secure more concessions, but such action would require the sanction of the other powers and the nature of China itself (i.e. the geographical size, its policies, and its disunity) was an obstacle. Yet, the Japanese had the advantage of controlling the South Manchurian Railway, which allowed them to influence the region and benefit economically. The Chinese revolution and the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, further convinced Japan that it could easily seize control over China's Manchuria. Chinese political strife and civil unrest were just the ammunition that Japan needed to secure the area full of soya beans and rich mineral deposits that would support the trend of modernization.³

Subsequently, World War I worked to Japan's advantage, as Japan followed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and fought against Germany. It seized all German territories in the Pacific and benefited from the 1915 "Twenty One Demands," which forced China to make economic, political and military concessions to Japan. The settlement validated Japan's dominance in Shandong, Manchuria and part of Mongolia, although, Japan returned Shandong to China at the 1921-22 Washington Conference in exchange for confirmation of its economic privileges there.⁴

By the mid-1920s however, it appeared as though Japan had lost some of its former ammunition to conquer China. Chinese anti-Japanese sentiment continued to brew in the aftermath of the Twenty One Demands. Moreover, not only had China recovered from its political and social disunity with the institution of the Nationalist Party, the Guomindang, but it had begun to strengthen its defense policy. Japan had stationed troops (the Guandong Army) in the Guandong Province of Manchuria. Thus, the political situation posed a severe threat to Japan's holdings in Chinese territories and the proximity of opposing military forces heightened the potential for conflict. Due to these conditions and sentiments, Japanese Prime Minister and Foreign Minister General Tanaka held a successful conference, at which he discussed the future of Japanese interests in Northeast Asia and stressed the importance of protecting its interests in China; the ensuing 1927 Tanaka Memorandum reaffirmed Japan's policy.⁵

During the epoch of Chinese political disunity that was previously mentioned,
Japan had secured a Chinese ally. The status of the powerful Manchurian warlord, Zhang
Zuolin, was threatened in the wave of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist movement. Japan
feared that its interests would be threatened should Zhang join forces with the
Nationalists or be replaced by them. It sent troops into China in 1927, hoping to protect
its interests there, hinder the Nationalist advance, and ultimately prevent the realization of
a unified-China. The following year, Japan even suggested Zhang retreat to Manchuria
and deem himself ruler of Manchuria under Japanese tutelage. Shortly after however,
some radicals of the Guandong (Japanese) Army killed him in a train explosion. His son
succeeded his rule and joined the Chinese Nationalists.⁶

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Hostility skyrocketed in Manchuria when the Guandong radicals launched a Japanese takeover. Japanese troops stationed in Korea crossed into Manchuria without official Japanese permission, and by 1932 the Guandong Army and its reinforcements had seized three of the four Manchurian provinces. In March 1932 Japan renamed Manchuria to Manchukuo. Although China appealed to the League of Nations, Manchukuo remained a Japanese puppet state with real power exercised by Japanese administrators responsible to the Guandong commander; the authority of Chinese administrators and head of state Pu Yi was minimal.⁷

Among the concessions, Japan had won a permanent enemy. There was simply no chance of harmonizing relations so long as Japan remained in Manchuria and maintained interests and troops in China. Consequently, mounting tensions and frequent clashes between opposing armies convinced the Japanese to invade China in July 1937. The war was actually never officially declared and has been named, by the Japanese, the "China Incident." The Japanese killed nearly 200,000 Chinese in the wave of seizing Beijing, Canton, Shanghai, and Nanjing; yet, their opponent refused to surrender. By the following year, China was able to gain the upper-hand; the strength of the combined army (Chiang joined forces with the communists), the size of China, the communists' guerilla war tactics and the fragmented Japanese army all worked to China's advantage.⁸

Japan's actions prompted the United States to impose sanctions, which lead to Pearl Harbor in December 1941. One year later, Japan seized Burma, hoping to block a major supply route, but the Chinese persevered. Unfortunately however, the conflict heightened with the outbreak of the Pacific War. Japan maintained troops in Occupied China to prevent internal conflicts and enforce strict military rule. Unlike Korea or

Manchuria, however, the Japanese did not economically exploit Occupied China; rather, they brutally tortured and executed thousands of innocent Chinese. The defeat of Japan in August 1945 halted the hostilities between Japan and China and gave birth to a new era.⁹

Because Japan's actions had soured many of its relations with its Asia-Pacific neighbors, the government focused on reestablishing its political, social and economic ties throughout the 1950s. Meanwhile the Chinese communists established the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the remaining Nationalists fled to Taiwan (a former Japanese colony). China, convinced that trade concessions were ineffective in achieving political goals, suspended trade with Japan in 1958. China resumed trade in 1960 with Japanese firms that supported the following three claims: "the Japanese government not be hostile toward it, not obstruct any effort to restore normal relations between itself and Japan, and not join in any conspiracy to create two Chinas." Relations were limited during the radical phases of the Cultural Revolution in China from 1966-69. Shortly thereafter, the two countries gradually began to resume relations, although Cold War hostilities lingered until Japan formally recognized the PRC when several government officials were invited to Beijing in 1972.

Normalization of Relations

After World-War II Japan concentrated on reestablishing its international relations, boosting economic growth, and maintaining a neutral position in foreign affairs. The next two decades brought about major international changes and national changes. With a booming economy, Japan's diplomacy policies became obsolete. The deepening Sino-Soviet split, the US-China harmonization, the rapid reduction of the US military

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power in the western Pacific all forced Japan to alter its security position and overall role in Asia. Likewise, the 1970s oil crises underscored Japan's vulnerability to cutoffs of raw material and energy supplies and reiterated the need to change its foreign policy. ¹²

As luck would have it, the People's Republic of China formally invited the Government of Japan to visit and hold peace negotiations. Between September 25 and September 30, 1972, Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka and Foreign Affairs Minister Ohira met with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai and Minister of Foreign Affairs Chi Peng-fei to discuss the normalization of relations, existing problems, and other matters of interest. As a result, they determined a set of common rules and goals which they hoped would dissuade the evolution of conditions similar to those of the past century, establish relations of peace and friendship, and improve bilateral trade relations. These ideas were expressed in an agreement, entitled the Joint Communique. Also, it is extremely significant that Japan accepted responsibility and reproached itself for its acts of aggression in China. The following are the nine tenets as outlined in the Joint Communique:

- The abnormal state of affairs that has hitherto existed between Japan and the People's Republic of China is terminated on the date on which this Joint Communique is issued.
- 2) The Government of Japan recognizes that Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China.
- 3) The Government of the People's Republic of China reiterates that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China. The Government of Japan fully understands and respects this stand of the Government of the People's Republic of China, and it firmly maintains its stand under Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation.
- 4) The Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China have decided to establish diplomatic relations as from September 29, 1972. The two Governments have decided to take all necessary measures for

the establishment and performance of the functions of each other's embassy in their respective capitals in accordance with international law and practice, and to exchange ambassadors as speedily as possible.

- 5) The Government of the People's Republic of China declares that in the interest of the friendship between the Chinese and the Japanese peoples, it renounces its demand for war reparation from Japan.
- 6) The Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China agree to establish relations of perpetual peace and friendship between the two countries on the basis of the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

The two Governments confirm that, in conformity with the foregoing principles and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, Japan and China shall in their mutual relations settle all disputes by peaceful means and shall refrain from use or threat of force.

- 7) The normalization of relations between Japan and China is not directed against any third country. Neither of the two countries should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony.
- 8) The Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China have agreed that, with a view to solidifying and developing the relations of peace and friendship between the two countries, the two Governments will enter into negotiations for the purpose of concluding a treaty of peace and friendship.
- 9) The Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China have agreed that, with a view to further promoting relations between the two countries and to expanding interchanges of people, the two Governments will, as necessary and taking account of the existing non-governmental arrangements, enter into negotiations for the purpose of concluding agreements concerning such matters as trade, shipping, aviation, and fisheries. ¹³

Thus, not only did the Joint Communique establish terms of peace between the two nations for the first time in over eighty years, but it set the foundation for and encouraged a profitable trade partnership. As Chinese policy makers essayed market-oriented reforms and increased foreign interaction, China's economic importance to

Japan skyrocketed and Sino-Japanese trade grew rapidly. Since the mid-1960s, Japan has been China's largest trading partner, accounting for approximately 20% of China's total trade. In 1974, they signed a three-year trade agreement which covered civil air transportation, shipping, fisheries, and trademarks. They also made provisions for technical cooperation, cultural exchange, and consular matters. Furthermore, they commenced negotiations for a peace and friendship treaty, but China insisted on including in the treaty an antihegemony clause, clearly directed at the Soviet Union. Since the Soviet Union stated that a Sino-Japanese treaty would prejudice Soviet-Japanese relations, Japan objected and the peace talks were broken off. 14

Negotiations resumed in 1976 when a new Chinese leadership dedicated to modernization took over and Japan became more willing to ignore the Soviet threats. The two signed an agreement in 1978 which would increase trade to a level of US\$20 billion by 1985, through exports from Japan of plants and equipment, technology, construction materials, and machine parts in return for coal and crude oil. Although the plan was extremely inflated and drastically reduced the following year, it signified the strong desire of both parties to resume and improve trade relations. Meanwhile, a dispute arose after armed Chinese fishing boats entered the waters off the Senkaku Islands, a cluster of barren islets north of Taiwan and south of the Ryukyu Islands, and threatened to delay peace negotiations. Controversy arose because the territory is claimed by Japan, China and Taiwan. Nonetheless, they resolved the issue and completed The Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1978.

Bilateral trade skyrocketed in the 1970s and early 1980s from US\$1 billion to more than US\$8 billion respectively. Furthermore, China became Japan's sixth largest

trading partner by 1982. Japan imported from China coal, oil, and various minerals to sustain its industries of steel, machinery plant equipment, chemical products, and synthetic textile fibers. Despite Chinese domestic political problems and a controversy over revision of Japanese textbooks dealing with the history of Japan's aggression in China, Sino-Japanese economic and diplomatic relations improved dramatically.

Security became an extremely important issue. China, threatened by the explosive expansion of the Soviet military, began to pursue similar foreign policies designed to check Soviet influence and encourage regional stability. The economic benefits that Japan reaped from its Sino-trade relations began to fluctuate in the 1980s due to Chinese economic instability. Furthermore, the two partners experienced some friction in both economic and political domains. The Chinese crackdown on prodemocracy demonstrations in 1989 (Tiananmen Incident) forced Japan to follow the US policy of limiting economic relations. In fact, Japan initially withheld YEN 810 billion in aid which it had promised to deliver between 1990-95. However, Japan reinstated the aid and made numerous visits to China to develop closer relations. Overall, Japan's involvement helped China to modernize its economy, realize peaceful domestic development, expand relations with the West, establish stable foreign policy, and reject any Sino-Soviet realignment against Japan.

By 1992, the twentieth anniversary of the normalization of relations, the two economies were said to even compliment each other. Yet Chinese memory and suspicion, heightened by a dispute over the Senkaku islands, lingered. Many problems still needed to be solved before the two nations could establish fully developed relations. China's grievances with prewar Japan remain deeply imbedded in the minds of many

Chinese. Efforts to promote understanding between the peoples of both countries and a framework for multinational security in Asia remained were considered an absolute necessity to maximize Sino-Japanese relations.¹⁷ Japan was buying Chinese agricultural products and consumer durables and exporting sophisticated products to China. Japanese investments had steadily been increasing as Japan recognized the strategic importance of promoting prosperity and stability in China. Nonetheless, Japanese investors remained a bit wary because of China's uneven economic reforms and inadequate infrastructural facilities.¹⁸ For the 1990s, both sought to go beyond bilateral ties to encourage global cooperation with greater emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁹

With this goal in mind, Japan protested in 1995 against China's testing of nuclear weapons by reducing its foreign aid. The amount was rather insignificant, approximately \$75 out of the \$1.6 billion in annual aid to China.²⁰ As this was the first time that Japan, China's primary source of aid, had used its economic assistance to demonstrate its disapproval, the sanction was for the most part symbolic.²¹ On a more positive note, China announced in November 1995, that it would cut 1996 tariffs on more than 4,000 items by an average 30%.²² This was one of the most significant efforts made by China to open its markets, an event that would surely affect the future of bilateral and multilateral trade relations.²³

The Past, the Present and the Future

1997 was an extremely important year for both China and Japan as they celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the normalization of relations. After analyzing the era of peace and development, government heads of state, foreign officials, economists and others held discussions and conferences and gave speeches to

commemorate the achievement and discuss the future of Sino-Japanese Relations. In September 1997 Prime Minister Hashimoto gave a landmark speech in Beijing entitled "Japan-China Relations in the New Age: New Developments in Dialogue and Cooperation." In his assessment of the normalization period, he emphasized the strides which had been made over the past twenty-five years. After eighty years of Japanese aggression in China, the two enemies made peace with the creation of the Joint Communique. They evolved from a time of having extremely limited diplomatic and trade relations to a point where China had become Japan's second largest trading partner, and Japan had become China's largest. Cumulative Japanese investment in China surpassed \$10 billion. Moreover, some 1.28 million people had travelled between the two countries, a 150-fold increase since 1972. Likewise, he reaffirmed the notion that bilateral economic cooperation has also made steady progress to support China's open and reform policy. Clearly the Joint Communique is responsible for their union today.²⁴

In a similar speech to the Yomiuri International Economic Society, Prime

Minister Hashimoto said the future course of Japan's foreign policy toward China, is of
pivotal importance in terms of stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region. China's
recent open reform policies have sponsored rapid economic development and greatly
enhanced China's presence in the international community, underscoring the need for
stable relations. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of the aftermath of the Cold
War. Sino-Soviet cooperation is finally taking place in economic and other spheres, but
there remains a lot of work to achieve political and military stability. He suggested
construction of a framework for stability and development like that of Europe has not
materialized because Asia, due to the divergent political systems and variations in levels

of economic development, has not made efforts to institutionalize or enhance any regional interdependence such as the European Common Market. However, as evidenced by the increased Sino-Japanese bilateral trade, the foundation for a common Asian economic forum has been emerging with successes in industrialization and economic interdependence. In other words, the countries of the Asia-Pacific have made enormous efforts since the end of the Cold War towards the creation of a new international order. He further attested that they must strive towards stability and development, which can be achieved through awareness of diversity in Asia, enhanced dialogue, expansion of cooperative relations, establishment of a common order. Asia common order.

As far as what lies on the horizons, both sides have obviously demonstrated an acute interest in maintaining and expanding economic and diplomatic bilateral relations. In an effort to strengthen the dialogue between the two countries, both parties have agreed that every year a leader of each country will alternately visit the other country and that a direct telephone line will be established between the two Governments.

Furthermore, China has offered to make efforts to promote further investments in China by Japanese corporations and Japan has offered to promote further development in the field of investment between Japan and China. Likewise, each has agreed that cooperation in scientific and industrial technology should be strengthened through both governmental and private channels and to support promotion of research cooperation and technology transfers between the industrial sectors. Moreover, both countries are going to use their industrial sectors to promote economic development in inland China. The Japanese have promised to help develop the Chinese industrial sector and the Chinese have stipulated that they will improve the infrastructure and investment environments. Environmental

protection, energy conservation, destruction of chemical weaponry, cultural exchange, cooperation in the development of telecommunications technology are also all part of the long-range goals.²⁷

Conclusion

As Prime Minister Hashimoto pointed out in his Beijing speech, both Japan and China have very different systems. Nonetheless, they have succeeded in establishing friendly relations and bilateral trade relations. The current challenge is to build on what has already been accomplished, to broaden and deepen their relations. The future of Sino-Japanese Relations rests primarily on trust. The era of aggression caused a strong feeling of resentment in China, one which may take decades or centuries to subside. Thus, the burden of conquering these attitudes weighs on Japan, for it was Japan that caused this strife.

It is clearly obvious that the People's Republic of China and the Government of Japan have made milestone achievements in the past three decades. After the eighty-year period of conflict, war, and aggression, both countries now share the view that, as a post-Cold War world continues to move towards creating a new international order, further Sino-Japanese economic and security dialogue cooperation will strengthen the bilateral partnership and work towards further Asia-Pacific interdependence. While Chinese feelings of hostility or resentment still emerge through issues such as the debate over the ownership of the Senkaku Islands and the international question over Taiwan, the two nations have for the most part gone from strife to strides. Although, each country maintains a different position on the ownership issue, both have agreed that the issue must not disturb their relationship. The Joint Communique stipulates that there is one

China, and Japan has respected this clause. Hashimoto reminded the crowd in his Dialogue and Cooperation speech, "To foster a relationship of trust among our people, it must not be only the government and business leaders that travel between our countries. We must expand exchanges and interaction between our politicians and also our youth at all levels." Since 1972, both countries have expanded cultural exchange activities both qualitatively and quantitatively (i.e. introduction of each country's culture and arts, the interchange of students and other persons, intellectual exchange), economic relations, and diplomatic relations. Thus, one could say that the Joint Communique is the tie that binds, as these two great nations continue to revive and expand the symbiotic partnership that had existed for many centuries prior to the era of aggression.

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⁷ Hunter, p. 56.

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