

China–Japan Relations

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Introduction

Academic studies of China–Japan relations since the end of World War II have covered all aspects of the relationship, reflecting the varied, and intermittently troubled, nature of interaction. While the 1950s and 1960s were marked by a lack of diplomatic links between the two sides, the nature of informal contacts, the separation of politics from economics, the conclusion of private trade agreements, and the environment of the Cold War provided scholars with considerable material to help shed light on the emerging structures and processes of the post-conflict relationship.

After diplomatic normalization took place in 1972, academic studies reflected the honeymoon period of revived economic and cultural relations, but in the 1980s, in the wake of the emergence of clashes over widely different understandings of the 1931–45 conflict, attention turned increasingly to the problem of history and the failure to reconcile the past. As China opened up in the 1980s and began to show signs of rapid economic growth, interest in Sino-Japanese economic complementarity and/or competition also grew. By the 1990s, the field of security studies also began to turn its gaze towards Sino-Japanese relations, looking at the potential for conflict between the two East Asian giants, particularly in light of China’s rise, and its military modernization programme. Moving into the 21st century, the field of Sino-Japanese relations has flourished still further, benefitting from a new generation of scholars

who combine disciplinary and area studies approaches to offer nuanced analyses of economic, political, cultural, sociological, and historical aspects of China-Japan relations.

Given the vast amount of Chinese and international scholarship on China–Japan relations, this chapter focuses only on the major areas of study, and the key debates. The chapter begins by considering Chinese academic works on Sino-Japanese relations (mainly in the field of IR), followed by an overview of the key international scholarship which encompasses such areas as diplomatic history, economic relations, traditional and non-traditional security issues, and social/cultural relations. It then presents two case studies: the so-called ‘History Issue’, which continues to attract much academic attention, not least because of ongoing debates about interpretations of the past; and the Diaoyu/Senkaku issue which has escalated since 2010 and continues to be a source of tension between the two sides. Throughout, we take note of the recurring themes in the scholarship, which largely revolve around two key topics: the binary of competition versus cooperation; and the history problem. The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of recent and emerging scholarship on China–Japan relations.

Chinese Academic Works on Sino-Japanese Relations

Although Japanese Studies centres were established in China in the 1950s, serious academic research only began in earnest in the late 1970s, having been stifled by the Cultural Revolution as well as an adherence to an ideological position on Japan and a tendency to exploit the relationship’s problems for the purposes of propaganda. One of the key features of the now expansive Chinese scholarship on China–Japan relations is the large number of volumes devoted to sweeping overviews of the post-war relationship, in addition to collections of source documents and dictionaries (see Tian, 1996; Tian, 1997; and Xia & Dong, 1991). Chen Jinhua (2015) divides the relationship into four eras that are notably defined entirely in terms of China’s own experiences. In a similar vein, Song Zhiyong’s modern and contemporary history of Sino-Japanese relations (2010) is dominated by the two Sino-Japanese wars. While detailed and thorough, the work exemplifies the trend of considering Japan’s actions towards China. Such volumes tend to appear with more frequency during anniversary years, be it anniversaries

of the signing of the 1972 Joint Statement, the 1978 Peace and Friendship Treaty, or the end of the war (see for example Jiang, 2002 and Liu, 2007). Studies of Sino-Japanese friendship are a common feature (for example, Huang and Zhou's three-volume study of cultural and people-to-people exchange published on the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the 1978 Peace and Friendship Treaty).

Although the subject of Sino-Japanese relations attracts a great deal of attention from academics, much of what is published follows a formulaic approach designed to satisfy the accepted political line of the moment. Some Chinese analyses seem to suggest that the mere existence of mutual interests guarantees an improved relationship (for example Xu, 2002), while many offer suggestions of ways in which the relationship could be improved – almost invariably these suggestions involve a ‘correction’ of attitude or action on Japan’s part, particularly in the wake of periods of tensions (for example, after Koizumi’s premiership – see Sun, 2008). It is not uncommon to find articles that merely outline some of the issues facing the bilateral relationship and conclude with a prediction of improved ties, usually with the added proviso that Japan adopts the ‘correct’ attitude toward history (for example Zhang, 2004; and Lu & Zhong, 2009). Periods of tension, for example the rift of the early 2000s prompted by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro’s visits to the Yasukuni Shrine,¹ or the deterioration after the 2010 fishing boat collision tend to generate much discussion about the need ‘redefine the foundation’ of the relationship or improve relations by [Japan] ‘facing the past squarely’ (Zhu, 2006). Similarly, the work of Yao Jin (2011) is also typical in the way that it explores the Sino-Japanese relationship by examining the difficulties deemed to have been caused *by* Japan, rather than considering the relationship as a whole.

China’s ‘rise’ is a theme that has emerged in the Chinese literature on Sino-Japanese relations in the last two decades (Zhu, 2006), and Ma Junwei identifies it as key to the strategy pursued by Japan, in cohort with the US, to ‘contain’ China (Ma, 2006). Shi Yinhong, one of China’s most well-known IR specialists, issued a warning during Koizumi’s tenure that the tensions in Sino-Japanese relations were a risk to China’s interests (Shi, 2003b: 10). Shi’s

writing is notable for his advocacy of China adopting a pragmatic approach to the relationship, though this should be conditional on Japan not reneging on its previous statements of war responsibility (Shi, 2003b: 11).

Challenges to the mainstream view about the nature of China's Japan policy are few and far between, as illustrated by the furore that erupted over an article written by Ma Licheng, in which he lambasted the attitude of many Chinese nationalists towards Japan and called for the 'history issue' to be considered closed (Ma, 2002). Ma's article met with strong academic criticism as well as in an internet campaign that included death threats and culminated in his early retirement and a move to Hong Kong (Gries, 2005). Despite this opposition, Ma's views did have some support, most notably from Shi Yinhong. Writing in the same journal as Ma in the aftermath of the controversy Shi specifically advocated greater rapprochement with Japan and praised Ma's bravery (Shi, 2003a) and later called for the governments on both sides to prevent popular feeling from colouring the bilateral relationship (Shi, 2006).

Jin Xide suggested that to improve Sino-Japanese relations will necessarily involve better non-governmental interaction, which is a relatively uncontroversial point, but Jin makes clear that this would be in order to 'isolate the right wing' in Japan (Jin, 2006: 38), showing again that the Chinese academic view of the problems in Sino-Japanese relations is that they stem from within Japan. Jin's work placed great importance on the adherence to the joint statements and treaties between the two countries, and Jin later emphasized the potential impact the leadership of Japan can have on the course of Sino-Japanese relations (Jin, 2008), a view which echoed that of Jiang Lifeng (2005).

Academic works on Sino-Japanese relations are virtually entirely non-critical of the Chinese government, and sometimes take a slightly sycophantic tone. Liu Jianguo's appraisal of the domestic background for China's Japan policy cited the response of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao to the Japanese earthquake and tsunami of 2011 as evidence that the policy is always grounded in building 'friendship' between the two countries (Liu, 2012: 4). Liu typifies Chinese works on the relationship by grouping together the issues over history to include Taiwan and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute, with the clear implication that it is Japan's failure to

address these problems that is at the root of Sino-Japanese tension when it arises (Liu, 2012: 5–7).

There is a tendency among Chinese academic work to focus on prospects for future relations rather than to analyse events or trends that have already occurred. A good example of this is Jiang Lifeng's article, which seeks to explore 'Sino-Japanese Relations over the next decade' (Jiang, 2009). Similarly, Pang Zhongying posited during Koizumi's tenure Sino-Japanese relations were 'at a crossroads' with opportunities for greater cooperation, but risks of confrontation (Pang, 2003: 14). Pang's recommendations for ensuring that the relationship follows the former rather than the latter are typically formulaic and abstract, including achieving 'reconciliation, understanding, and mutual respect' (Pang, 2003: 15). One of the rare exceptions to this argued that a concrete way of improving mutual trust and cooperation would be to enhance exchanges between the militaries of the two countries (Yu, 2008).

Overall, Chinese scholarship on Sino-Japanese relations faces the same challenges as many other areas of academia in that it must operate within the confines of the politically acceptable discourse of the contemporary climate. It is notable that during periods of heightened bilateral tension substantive works are even rarer. Nevertheless, the tendency to produce sweeping histories of the relationship rather than critically assessing specific issues should not disguise the significant levels of attention that this relationship receives in China's academic community.

International Scholarship on Sino-Japanese Relations

Japan and the United States have tended to produce the bulk of the academic research on China-Japan relations, but there is also a growing community of scholars in Europe and Australia working on various aspects. Studies fall mainly into a few categories of overviews and diplomatic histories, economic relations, and security relations.

General overviews/diplomatic histories

There are some useful English-language studies which provide a macro-view of post-WWII Sino-Japanese relations, including Wan (2006), Yahuda (2013), Dreyer (2016) while in Japanese there are some richly detailed accounts, including a 4-volume collection by Takahara and Hattori (2012), Hattori and Marukawa (2012), and Sonoda (2012a, 2012b). In addition, there are some more compact overviews by Tanaka (1991) and Kokubun et al. (2013). Recent research has also focused on specific periods in post-war relations, such as Liu and Kawashima (2009) which offers an insight into immediate-post-WWII interactions, and King (2016) which is an in-depth study of China's economic foreign policy up to normalization based on a wealth of declassified Chinese sources.

Declassification of materials in US, Chinese and Japanese archives, in addition to the publication of memoirs of individuals involved in the negotiations for the signing of the Joint Statement and the Treaty of Peace and Friendship has also produced a mini-boom in this sub-field. In Japanese and Chinese see, for example, Ishii et al. (2003), Hattori (2011), Inoue (2010) and Luo (2000), while in English, the 'classic' studies by Bedeski (1983) and Ogata (1989) remain useful.

International relations

Much of the recent writing has focussed on the risk of conflict, particularly in light of the deterioration of political relations in the early 2000s. Mel Gurtov (2008) believes that the Sino-Japanese rift of the early 2000s, while serious, is manageable. He proposes a series of possible actions that could be taken at various levels, but considers 'Track I', the highest political and diplomatic level, to be the most important. Even in areas that are noted for having caused high levels of tensions, some find cause for optimism over the relationship. While both countries have expressed public and private concern about each other's military development and long term strategic intentions, it has been claimed that neither has viewed the other as a serious, imminent threat (Austin & Harris, 2001: 89–98). In particular, Manicom and O'Neil (2009) argue that the disputed area of the East China Sea, although a source of significant tension, has been addressed sensibly by both sides and the possibility of confrontation has been constrained

by policy making elites. Similarly, an analysis of the Chinese perceptions of Japan's security policy during the 1990s also concluded that, despite the rhetoric, the relationship is largely characterized by pragmatism (Li, 1999).

Not all analyses are so positive about the nature of the relationship. Elena Atanassova-Cornelis argues that even during times of apparent thawing in tensions, such as the post-Koizumi period, Sino-Japanese relations are characterized by an inherent fragility (Atanassova-Cornelis, 2011: 169–172). Christopher W. Hughes cautions that Japan needs to handle the rise of China as a major power in the region with care, or risk a military confrontation (Hughes, 2009). June Dreyer (2006) makes the point that behind thinly-veiled rhetoric of 'win-win' cooperation lies fierce competition and rivalry for both resources and political influence.

Analyses rooted in considerations of *realpolitik* continue to dominate the field. Pugliese (2016) considers how the Japanese political elite has utilized nationalism in order to legitimize its more assertive approach to China since the second tenure of Abe Shinzō.

As is common across IR writing in general, English language analyses can frequently be US-centric. An example of this is Bush (2010) which seeks to advise Washington policy makers on the importance of maintaining the US–Japan alliance, while highlighting the threats to regional peace and stability that are posed by China's emergence as a major power. Such pessimistic views of the prospects for the future relationship are rooted in traditional, realist IR approaches but are not unique to this school of thought. Jerdén and Hagström (2012) have challenged the commonly held view that Japan has consistently adopted a realist position of balancing against China's rise, positing that it has, on the whole, accommodated the phenomenon (Jerdén and Hagström, 2012: 241).

Further areas for potential conflict or competition are identified by Sun (2012), although his focus on soft power rivalry, mainly across Southeast Asia, points less to the risk of direct military conflict. Similarly, Claude Meyer (2011) considers the attempts by both countries to position themselves as regional leaders while not ruling out the possibility of cooperation. An example of how this might work provided by Elizabeth Wishnick (2009) who argues that joint

management of common risks could help to engender cooperative practices and mitigate some of the conflictual tendencies of the relationship, but that such cooperation appears elusive due to deep-rooted distrust. This argument is supported by Chris Wirth (2010) who identified the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (which also includes South Korea) as a mechanism through which some progress has been made.

The emergence of constructivist approaches to IR has influenced analyses of Sino-Japanese relations in common with wider writings in the discipline. Notably, the influence of domestic factors, such as public opinion, on policy-making has received attention (Sinkkonen, 2013).

Difficulties with the issue of identity have also been considered in the context of the bilateral relationship. Chris Wirth (2009) shows that elite perceptions no longer correlate with the realities of the relationship, leading to inevitable tensions.

Taiwan

The status of Taiwan and the PRC's frequent criticisms of the nature of Tokyo's relationship with Taipei were a common refrain prior to diplomatic normalization and the Taiwan problem has continued to be an intermittent thorn in the side of Sino-Japanese relations. The relatively friendly relationship between Japan and Taiwan, stemming from a pro-Japan sentiment amongst a certain sector of Taiwanese as a result of Japan's relatively benign colonization was reinforced by the early post-war reestablishment of business and cultural ties and continued even after the Taiwan–Japan Peace Treaty was rescinded. A high level of trade has been maintained, and the pro-Taiwan advocates in the Japanese government has been keen to maintain links, albeit on a non-official basis, with counterparts in Taipei. While problems have occasionally flared up between China and Japan over Taiwan, particularly in the 1990s, they have not escalated beyond control (Deans 2002). While Sun (2007) describes relations between Japan and Taiwan in the twenty years from Japan's de-recognition of Taiwan in 1972 as tepid, he argues that relations improved in the 1990s due to a combination of a re-imagining of colonial ties, the common bond of democracy and a Japan boom amongst young Taiwanese.

Economic relations

Before 1972, trade relations between the two countries were conducted through private, informal channels, though with tacit support of both governments. Soeya (1998) describes this process and highlights the continuity in trade relations despite political upheavals. Hilpert and Haak's edited volume (2002) considers trade, aid and investment in the 1990s and 2000s, with the various essays taking up the 'cooperation, competition and conflict' debate. The prevailing view of the authors is that cooperation, complementarity and dynamism best characterized China–Japan economic relations. One of the major pillars of Sino-Japanese economic relations has been Japan's aid (or economic cooperation) to China, and much has been written on this topic. Takamine (2005) shows how, and why, Japan became China's main aid donor from 1979 with a series of long-term, low-interest loans, often considered to be quasi-reparations. Shifts in Japan's aid policy from the late 1990s towards a more strategic approach are noted by Katada (2001), and Drifte (2006) explains why the loan aid programme was stopped in 2008.

The high level of economic interdependence between the two countries is, for many, both a causative factor in the absence of military conflict and also a reason to work to ensure that this remains the case (Sun, 2003; Heazle, 2007). However, Michael Yahuda has been a consistent dissenting voice on this, arguing that not only does a high level of economic interdependence fail to mitigate the problems in Sino-Japanese relations, it is actually the source of many of the strains (Yahuda, 2006).

Case Study: The 'History Issue'

It comes as no surprise to find that studies of the Anti-Japanese War (*kangRi zhanzheng*) or the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan (*Zhongguo renmin kangRi zhanzheng*) form a dominant sub-field of the literature on Sino-Japanese relations overall. Over seventy years after the end of the war, academic studies continue to shed fresh light on the conflict from multiple perspectives, and there are ongoing, and often acrimonious debates both between China and Japan, and within Japanese academic circles, on how to understand and retell the

events of 1931–7 to 1945. The release of classified documents and discovery of new evidence (for example in the form of diaries or oral histories) in the last decade or so has resulted in a recent boom in the literature. This section combines both the Chinese and international scholarship, partly reflecting the recent trend in collaborative studies of the war.

Studies of the war are categorized here according to: general overviews; the outbreak of war and its subsequent development, including resistance and collaboration; social and cultural histories of the war, including urban and rural experiences, personal experiences (including of women, refugees, soldiers and children) and visual representations of the war. The legacy of the war represents another important area of study, encompassing the end of the conflict and early attempts at reconciliation; reconciliation and commemoration; the politics of memory and the history problem.

In terms of *general overviews*, Chinese scholars such as the late Bu Ping and Rong Weimu have provided an accessible and systematic overview based on multi-archival and multi-lingual sources (Bu & Rong, 2011). There is one Chinese-language journal devoted specifically to the study of the AJW, *KangRi zhanzheng yanjiu (The Journal of Studies of China's Resistance War Against Japan)*, which is produced by the Institute of Modern China, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The journal covers not just the period of the war itself, but also issues relating to the interpretation of history since the end of the war. A number of recent English-language volumes stand out for their depth and breadth of coverage of the war as a whole. Rana Mitter (2013) covers the origins of the war from the 1920s and narrates the chaos, suffering and domestic political complexities as events unfolded. Peattie, Drea and van de Ven (2011) offer a richly detailed military history of the war by a team of international scholars, and is of particular importance for presenting the work of some key Chinese scholars in English for the first time. Hsiung and Levine's (1992) collection of essays encompasses not only the military dimensions of the war, but also domestic divisions, and the impact of the war on foreign policy, science, art and literature.

The outbreak of war and subsequent development

Explanations of the *origins of war* dating back to the late nineteenth century are well covered by Duus, Myers and Peattie (1991). Assessments of the role of the Nationalists (Kuomintang, KMT) have altered over time in both Western and Chinese narratives, from rather negative descriptions to more positive accounts of the KMT's contribution. Eastman (1984) emphasizes the flaws of the Nationalist regime, while van de Ven (2003) considers the Nationalist contribution to the war of resistance in a more positive light based on a shift in Chinese historiography in the 1980s.

The themes of Chinese resistance and collaboration feature heavily in the literature, though Chinese scholarship remains reluctant to deal with the sensitive nature of the latter. Resistance took numerous forms during the war. Hung (1994) looks at resistance through various cultural media, while Smith (2007) highlights the endeavours of Chinese women writers in Manchukuo. Fu (1993) and Mitter (2005) deal with both resistance and collaboration in their studies of Shanghai and Manchuria respectively. The extensive work on collaboration (see for example, Boyle, 1972; Brook, 2005; and Barrett & Shyu, 2001) highlights the complex relationships between occupiers and the occupied.

The atrocities of war

The Nanjing Massacre has become the most symbolic and contested example of Japanese atrocities in China and continues to be a major area of study, but Japan's war crimes extended far beyond this one event. Drea et al. (2006) provides an overview of the nature of the war crimes based on US archival holdings. The experiences of Chinese women who were forced into military sexual slavery have been the focus of Su Zhiliang's painstaking work (1999), some of which has been translated into English in Qiu, Su and Chen (2014). Yoshida (2006) and Fogel (2000) explore the post-war historiography of the Nanjing Massacre from various perspectives. Japanese journalist Honda Katsuichi's 1999 collection of first-hand accounts of Nanjing survivors caused a backlash from the right-wing in Japan in the 1980s, while Chang (1997) brought the events of the Nanjing Massacre to a larger public and reignited academic debates on the subject (see for example, Wakabayashi, 2007). There are a number of multi-

volume collections of documentary sources relating to the Nanjing Massacre in Chinese. Representative of these is Zhang's three-volume collection (2007), while in English Brook (2000) has produced an important volume, particularly useful for its reprinting of Hsü Shuhsi's 1939 Documents of the Nanjing Safety Zone and records of the International Military Tribunal of the Far East.

Social and cultural histories of the war

Given the intensity, scale and length of the war, Chinese experiences of Japan's invasion varied by city and village. A number of studies focus on the impact in some of the major urban centres, such as MacKinnon's work on Wuhan (2008), Yeh (1998) on Shanghai, and Tow (2011) on Chongqing. A comparison of urban and rural life in Wuxi county is presented by Lincoln (2012), while MacKinnon, Lary and Vogel (2008) cover a number of localities from Manchuria to Yunnan. Personal experiences also varied greatly, and Lary's 2010 study provides a thoughtful overview of the sweeping transformations that took place in ordinary Chinese people's lives during the war. Studies based on oral testimony or primary sources have shed light on such specific groups and individuals as soldiers (Moore, 2013), reporters (Coble, 2015), women (Li, 2010), armaments industry workers in Chongqing (Howard, 2004), and refugees in Zhejiang (Schoppa, 2012).

Another relatively new sub-category is the focus on cultural representations of the war. Gunn (1992) considers the role of writers and artists, while Chen (2016) explores Chinese and US representations of the war in youth literature. Reprints of wartime propaganda cartoons are collected in Shen (2005), and analysed by Edwards (2013). Ward (2004), Yau (2013) and Tam, Tsu and Wilson (2014) consider the changing representations and narratives of the Anti-Japanese War through analysis of post-war films.

The legacy of war: the history problem

The war continues to cast a shadow over China's relations with Japan over seventy years after its end. Contested and politicized interpretations of the past are at the root of this, and have led

to the failure of both sides to fully reconcile. The reconciliation problem has been tackled by a number of scholars, and various ‘instalments’ of the history problem, manifested for example in controversies about Japanese school textbooks, Yasukuni Shrine visits, and the apology issue, have received a great deal of academic attention (see for example, Rose, 1998). A longer-term view of bilateral disputes over history is offered by Yang et al. (2012) which is a valuable collection of essays including those by leading Chinese and Japanese historians in this field.

For Rose (2005) the failure to address mutual misperceptions of shared history lies at the root of what has come to be termed ‘the history issue’. Similarly, Yinan He’s thorough examination of the legacy of the war in Sino-Japanese relations supports Rose’s premise that reconciliation has not been achieved because of missed opportunities to address historical misperceptions (He, 2009). He identifies the 1970s as a golden – perhaps unique – opportunity to address the divergence of historiography between the two societies but opines that it was shunned in order to pursue the normalization of diplomatic relations. She agrees with others that the tensions of the 1980s came about because of the domestic exploitation, and reinterpretation, of the history issue by factions seeking to maximize their own interests (Rose, 1998; Mitter, 2000).

The reaction of China to Japanese actions with regard to the ‘history issue’ is frequently assessed as having more to do with domestic considerations than any actual feeling of injustice on the part of the Chinese leadership. Hidenori Ijiri declared that the emergence of Yasukuni Shrine as a bilateral issue in the 1980s was driven by domestic factors in China. Furthermore, that this was not clearly understood by Japan led to ‘unnecessary’ backtracking over the issue and laid the foundations for a structural pattern of Sino-Japanese interaction whereby the Chinese side always expected concessions over the ‘history issue’, and the Japanese felt compelled to provide them (Ijiri, 1990). Such exploitation of history in the relationship by the Chinese was identified much earlier by Chalmers Johnson, though he considered the Japanese to be in much stronger control of their own response (Johnson, 1986). Whiting’s (1989) study of Chinese perceptions of Japan is also essential reading for those wishing to understand the

sources of tensions between the two sides as they evolved in the 1980s. More recently, Gustafsson (2014a) has analysed the content of Chinese museum exhibitions about the Anti-Japanese War to demonstrate how the Communist Party has tried to use memory for ontological security purposes.

New directions in the study of the AJW in China?

The 70th anniversary of the end of the war in 2015 saw the publication (and re-issuing) of a wealth of material relating to the war, including a 3-volume history produced by China's Academy of Military Science (Junshi Kexueyuan, 2015) and a re-print of a 50-volume collection of materials edited by The Institute of Modern History at CASS (Bu, 2015).

The anniversary also prompted a number of reflections on the state of the field in China and a focus on emerging research from young scholars. The trend is towards much greater use of archival sources, not only in China, but in Taiwan, Japan and the US. The dominant areas of interest continue to cover the military, politics, foreign policy, economics and so on, but of particular note is the perceived importance of this new research in the 'internationalization' of Anti-Japanese War studies (Pan, Zhao & Lu, 2015: 155).

Case Study 2: The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands Dispute

The Diaoyu/Senkaku Dispute

Referred to in mainland China as *Diaoyu Dao* and in Japan as *Senkaku Shotō*, the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands are a collection of uninhabited islands, islets and rocks over which both countries (as well as Taiwan) claim sovereignty. The dispute, which dates back to the publication of a UN survey that was conducted in 1968 which suggested the possibility of vast reserves of oil and gas in the area, has emerged as one of the most contentious issues in the bilateral relationship. In English language academic works the islands have occasionally been referred to as the Pinnacle Islands, a translation of the Japanese name, but generally the transliterations of either one or both of the Chinese and Japanese names are preferred.

Japan considers the islands to have been part of its territory since it incorporated them into Okinawa Prefecture in January 1895, more than ten years after it claims to have discovered them. They were administered by the US from 1945 until 1972, as part of the occupation of Okinawa. China's claim on the islands is complicated by the situation with Taiwan, which also claims sovereignty over them. Nevertheless, both China and Taiwan agree that the islands were used by Chinese fishermen as far back as the Ming Dynasty in the fourteenth century. China thus considers the islands to have been a part of the province of Taiwan and accepts that they were, therefore, ceded to Japan under the treaty of Shimonoseki which was signed at the end of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the same year that Japan claims to have formally incorporated the islands into Okinawa Prefecture. Given that, under this interpretation of the islands' history, they were a part of one of Japan's concessions that it gained during its imperial history, China considers that the islands were legally returned to it under the terms of Japan's surrender at the end of World War II. When the PRC and Japan established diplomatic relations in 1972 it has been reported that the issue of the islands was raised in negotiations and that Zhou Enlai suggested that the issue be dealt with later (for a full discussion on this process see Suganuma, 2000), though this is officially denied by Japan.

Common explanations of the dispute

Employing a neo-liberal approach to assess the dispute, Min Gyo Koo highlighted the tendency of both parties to de-escalate tensions whenever they arise driven almost solely by considerations of economic interdependence (Koo, 2009). In contrast, a neoclassical realist framework can be employed in order to expose the domestic considerations of both parties, including the use of the islands issue to reinstate Japan as a 'normal' state, with the right and ability to build, maintain and deploy its own military power (Lai, 2013: 134). As with so many areas of IR, realist interpretations that rely on alliance formation, bandwagoning and balancing continue to dominate the field. For example, although China strongly opposes any formal multilateralization of this issue, some scholars have argued that it has begun to internationalize its own position through the development of a nascent alliance with Russia (Brown, 2015).

Nevertheless, it is increasingly common for analyses to go beyond the binary assessments of state-to-state relations and to consider multiple contributory factors (for example O'Shea, 2015). Many other scholarly assessments seem to agree that China's response to Japan's nationalization of the islands in 2012 to have been a deliberate attempt to 'change the status quo' as part of its 'more assertive' foreign policy (Takahara, 2013; Heberer, 2014).

A constructivist approach to the dispute has revealed that the continuous development of 'threat perceptions' on both sides has contributed to the apparently inexorable rise of the dispute as a key source of bilateral tension (Nakano, 2016). Another challenge to the traditional IR interpretations of the dispute is that the roots of the tensions are cultural. Specifically, the concept of face has been deployed to explain why neither side is able to reach conventionally interpreted rational resolutions (Moore, 2014). The concept of face-saving or face-giving has further been suggested as a mechanism that can be deployed in order to reach a solution to the dispute (Togo, 2014).

Nationalism and face

Analyses of the dispute over the Diaoyu, or Senkaku, islands show that nationalism plays a significant role in constraining policy options (Deans, 2000) and has seriously 'complicated China's diplomacy' (Zhao, 2013: 537) though it is also argued that economic considerations ultimately take priority, and that China's foreign policy does not necessarily have to be forced down an aggressively nationalistic path as a result (Downs and Saunders, 1998: 116). Nationalism has been shown to be an important driver of China's policy over the islands with increasing avenues through which popular sentiment can be channelled, forcing the government to take a harder line with Japan than it otherwise might (Gries et al., 2016).

Suisheng Zhao' notes that during anti-Japanese protests in the 1990s over the issue of the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute, the protests were most severe in Taiwan and Hong Kong, implying that the feelings invoked by this dispute run deeper than mere communist propaganda

(Zhao, 2004: 209). The importance of media coverage throughout the various outbreaks of tension has also received increasing attention (for example Hollihan, 2014).

Nationalism is not just a driver in Chinese policy-making. In April 2012, Tokyo's then-Governor Ishihara Shintaro announced his intention to use Tokyo governmental funds to purchase three of the islands from their private owner, despite them already being part of Okinawa Prefecture under Japanese law. Opinion polls suggested that as much as 70% of the population supported his plan, though Tanaka noted that such a high level of support may indicate a 'simplistic understanding' of the issue, given that some of the responses cited concerns that the owner might sell the islands to China, despite the private owner seeking a sale to the government specifically to prevent the islands from ever falling into foreign hands (Tanaka, 2012: 2). Although no public statement was made to the effect, it was widely understood that the rationale behind the Noda administration's decision to nationalize the islands was to prevent Ishihara from succeeding and to bring about a conclusion that would be the least provocative to China (Tseng, 2013: 115; Wang, 2013: 11). Several other scholars have noted similar behavioural responses from successive Japanese governments in this regard. When the Japanese governments leased several of the islands in 2002, Reinhard Drifte argued that this was an attempt to prevent any third parties becoming involved either in terms of ownership of the islands or in any potential development of them (Drifte, 2008: 8–9).

Possible resolutions

A number of scholars have attempted to provide frameworks for resolving the dispute, or enhancing the mechanisms through which the two sides handle it. Mark Valencia (2014) expertly exposed the technicalities and complexities of the dispute and considered that the likelihood of joint cooperation rested on joint exploration and exploitation of the resources in the area. Other scholars have looked for comparable cases in which resolutions have been achieved in order to find a model that could be applied to the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute. Shunji Cui (2014) suggests that lessons can be learned from the Peru-Ecuador border dispute that was resolved in 1998. An illustration of the kind of creativity that might be required is provided by

Reinhard Drifte, who draws on the example of Pheasant Island, which switches sovereignty between Spain and France every six months (Drifte, 2014). While the potential solutions put forward are diverse, they share the need for creativity and foresight on the part of leadership on both sides. The continued ‘shelving’ of the issue remains the most convincing ‘solution’ (Baldacchino, 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an insight into the extent and rigour of the academic study of Sino-Japanese relations. Research in this field continues very much apace, and is benefitting from the release of hitherto restricted material, an expansion of collaborative scholarly exchange, greater inter-disciplinarity, and an enthusiasm to understand more fully the dynamics of the relationship between the second and third largest economic powers.

Reflecting current developments on the bilateral agenda, themes relating to energy and environmental issues, the potential evolution of a Northeast Asian regional community, and Sino-Japanese strategic rivalry will continue to draw academic attention. Chinese and Japanese activities beyond the Asia Pacific are also being monitored (for example in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, for the latter see Evron, 2016), with a view to exploring whether there is any evidence of an extended rivalry for power. Soft power has become another popular theme (see Vyas, 2011; and Sun, 2012) and will no doubt continue to offer rich academic pickings as both countries develop their public diplomacy programmes.

The role of media, public opinion and popular protest forms a relatively new sub-field, with work by Stockmann (2010), Sinkkonen (2013), Chen Weiss (2014), and Reilly (2011) exploring, variously, the influence of different interest groups on foreign policy-making in China. Another growing area focuses on debates about the changing nature of Japan’s foreign policy identity, and its impact on China policy (Jerdén and Hagström, 2012; Gustafsson, 2014b; Hagström and Gustafsson’ 2015; Suzuki, 2015; Pugliese, 2016).

Finally, research is also expanding into new areas of migration studies, again reflecting the changing dynamics of China–Japan interaction. Given that the Chinese migrant community now outnumbers that of Koreans in Japan, the challenges and opportunities that this development brings has started to be studied in depth (see Liu-Farrer, 2011), benefitting from ethnographic approaches the study of ‘everyday practice’ (Coates, 2013).

In sum, the study of China–Japan relations remains a vibrant, innovative field offering rich and nuanced insights into the mechanics of this important bilateral relationship.

Note

[TS: Insert Endnote here.]

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¹ Yasukuni Shrine is a site of commemoration for Japan's war dead. It is considered controversial in particular because of the enshrinement of a number of convicted war criminals, including some of those most closely associated with Japan's aggression towards China in the 1930s and 1940s.