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Japan-China Relations

Rìběn hé Zhōngguó de wàijiāo guānxì
日本和中国的外交关系

Relations between China and Japan extend back to ancient times, with frequent cultural borrowings travelling in both directions across the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. Scholars divide writings about Japan from pre-Ming years (pre-1368) up to the present into eight phases, within which are four periods described as "high tides," often brought on by war, when the volume of literature swelled.

Ancient China is better understood today than ever before, thanks to archaeological finds of the past fifty years. Ancient *maritime* China, however, is less well understood, although studies underway are yielding insights into the early relations centered around the geographic triangle of northeastern China, Korea, and Japan. Recent writings discuss patterns of trade and migration, the distribution of artifacts and their meaning, the spread of peoples, goods, and ideas, funerary practices across the region, and early state formation.

A long written record precedes and complements the archaeological finds. The earliest Chinese account of Japan appears in the classic *Shanhai jing* (Classic of Mountains and Waters). A work of lively imagination, *Shanhai jing* refers to Japan metaphorically as "Fusang" (intertwining mulberry tree, like two lovers embracing each other). China's unifier, Shi Huangdi of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), was so captivated by the magical "Eastern Seas" that he dispatched Xu Fu (255 BCE–?) in 219 BCE and again in 210 to search for elixirs of immortality, sending with him a reported three thousand virgin boys and girls and sailors and craftsmen in the thousands. In Japan to this day shrines and monuments to Xu Fu abound. A native of the state of Qi in modern Shandong Province, Xu Fu was born not far from Penglai, itself shrouded in legend. Chinese and Japanese scholars pursue studies of Xu Fu and this maritime region with vigor.

A less mythological and more objective early Chinese account of Japan is the data on *Woren* (Japanese) in the Chinese dynastic history, *San'guo zhi* (Treatises of the Three Kingdoms [289 CE]), by Chen Shou (223–297 CE). From this account forward most *zhengshi* (Chinese official histories) include an entry on Japan. (See table 1.) Beginning with the *Jiu Tang shu* (Old Tang history) of 945 CE, Chinese refer to Japan by its own preferred name of "Riben" (in Japanese, *Nihon* or *Nippon*) which translated as "Land of the Rising Sun," that is, land to the east where the sun rises. For the next one thousand years all Chinese standard histories used *Riben* as the primary term for Japan. This practice shows a Chinese knowledge of and formal respect for Japan that was significant. However, many entries on Japan before the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) include materials that are sinocentric and contain data that are unscientific and thus must be used with care.

These official histories and other Chinese writings reflect the ups and downs of China-Japan relations to the present. The eight phases of writing and interactions include four "high tides" (*gaochao*). The four high tides are the Ming dynasty, the late Qing dynasty (1895–1912), the

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period of the War of Resistance against Japan (1931–1945), and from 1979 to the present. (See table 2.)

Phase 1, the long period before 1368 and the Ming dynasty, covered writings of more than a thousand years. In this period of loose if steady Chinese awareness of Japan, Japan for its part underwent episodes of transformative borrowings from China after 600 CE, well known to students of Japanese history.

Phase 2 was the Ming dynasty itself. The Ming faced enormous pressures from the outside world, summarized in the phrase *"bei Lu nan Wo"* or "Lu [nomad enemies] to the north, and Wo [Japanese pirates] to the south." During much of the Ming dynasty Japanese pirates or *Wokou* (in Japanese, *wakō*) devastated coastal east Asia from Korea down China's long eastern shore on into Southeast Asia. This piracy created a rift within China, pitting hawks—those wanting to ban ocean travel—against doves, those favoring state protection for China's lucrative maritime trade. China's *Wokou* problem spurred an unprecedented need for knowledge about Japan among Chinese. This need resulted in the first "high tide" of Chinese writings on Japan. Ming studies of Japan are distinguished from previous writings by several features: their range of authorship (by officials but also by nonofficials); by the nature of their writings, not just brief notes in official histories but also comprehensive monographic works; and by the variety of specialized new topics—among them Japanese terminology of Chinese origin, Japanese systems of governance, famous people, household utensils, Japanese "gods and ghosts" (*guishen*), and information from Japanese primary sources collected in Japan itself. Among the most important writers and works of this first high tide are: Xue Jun (flourished 1523–1530); *Riben kaolue* (Brief Reference Materials on Japan); Zheng Shun'gong (sixteenth century); *Riben yijian* (An Account of Japan), based partly on six months in 1556 collecting data in Japan itself; and Zheng Ruozeng (1503–1570), *Chouhai tubian* (Atlas for Coastal Defense) (1562), a groundbreaking work in eight parts including chapters relating to Japanese pirate raids and Chinese defense against them.

Phase 3 occurred during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) up to Japan's Meiji Restoration of 1868. Here Chinese writings virtually vanished as a result of Japanese

TABLE 1 **Japan in Chinese Standard Histories**

Name of Work	Author	Year of Formal Adoption	Entry Name	Term for Japan	Notes
San'guo zhi	Chen Shou	289 C.E.	*Dong Yi zhuan*	*Woren*	
Hou Han shu	Fan Ye	445 C.E.	*Dong Yi zhuan*	*Wo*	
Song Shu	Shen Yue	488 C.E.	*Yi Man liezhuan*	*Woguo*	
Nan Ji shu	Xiao Zixian	514	*Dongnan Yi zhuan*	*Woguo*	
Liang shu	Yao Silian, et al.	635	*Dong Yi zhuan*	*Wo*	
Sui shu	Wei Zhi, et al.	636	*Dong Yi zhuan*	*Woguo*	
Jin shu	Fang Xuanling, et al.	646	*Si Yi liezhuan*	*Woren*	
Nan shi	Li Yanshou	659	*Yi Mo zhuan*	*Woguo*	
Bei shi	Li Yanshou	659	*Si Yi zhuan*	*Wo*	
Jiu Tang shu	Liu Xu	945	*Dong Yi zhuan*	*Woguo, Riben*	both terms used
Xin Tang shu	Ouyang Xiu, et al.	1061	*Dong Yi zhuan*	*Riben*	
Song shi	Tuo Tuo, et al.	1345	*Waiguo zhuan*	*Riben*	
Ming shi	Zhang Tingyu, et al.	1739	*Waiguo liezhuan*	*Riben*	
Xin Yuan shi	Ke Shaomin	1920	*Waiguo zhuan*	*Riben*	
Qing shi gao	Zhao Erxuan, et al.	1927	*Bangjiao zhi*	*Riben*	

Source: Wu Anhong & Xiong Dayun. (1989), p.13.

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TABLE 2 **Chinese Writings on Japan: Eight Phases with Four High Tides**

Phase	Subphase	Time	Dynasty or Political Period	Notes
1		Pre-1368	Pre-Ming dynasty	Chiefly in dynastic histories
2		1368–1644	Ming dynasty	High tide 1
3		1644–1868	Qing dynasty, 1644–1912; Edo or Tokugawa Japan, 1600/1603–1868	Japan "closed"
4		1868–1894	Early Meiji Japan, 1868–1912	Japan opened
5		1895–1912	Post Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895	High tide 2
6		1912–1949	Republic of China, 1912–1949	
	6 (1)	1912–1930	Yuan Shikai and warlord era	Translations from Japanese
	6 (2)	1931–1945	War of Resistance against Japan	High tide 3
	6 (3)	1945–1949	Chinese Civil War	
7		1949–1978	People's Republic of China	
	7 (1)	1949–1966	Early revolutionary period	Political analyses
	7 (2)	1966–1976	Cultural Revolution	
	7 (2) (1)	1966–1972	Cultural Revolution, phase 1	A halt in writings
	7 (2) (2)	1972–1976	Diplomatic relations restored	Language "fever"
8		1979–present	Unprecedented efforts and initiatives	High tide 4

Source: Adapted from Wu Anlong and Xiong Dayun (1989); Li Yu (2001, 4–25); and Wang Baoping (2001–2003, 1–5).

government policies. Well before 1644 the Tokugawa shogunate or *bakufu* (1600/1603–1868) for internal security reasons had sealed Japan's borders and forbidden its people from leaving Japan on penalty of death. By this unilateral action Japanese authorities solved China's "*wakō* problem." As for non-Japanese coming to Japan, the Tokugawa created a system of regulated foreign contact at the one port of Nagasaki, with access limited to the Dutch, Chinese, and Koreans. China's new Manchu conquerors after 1644, free of Japanese pirates, were able to pacify China's coast and in 1683 bring Taiwan under direct Chinese administration. Taiwan emerged as an object of Chinese curiosity and of rich firsthand reports, motivated by trade and security interests. Because writers lacked similar access to Japan, Chinese writings on Japan floundered. Writings on Nagasaki by Chinese focused narrowly on trade issues, while the more comprehensive study by Weng Guangping, *Wuqi jing bu* (Supplement to the *Azuma kagami* [History of Japan]) (1814), remained unpublished and little known. In short, Qing writings are undistinguished when compared with writings of the Ming dynasty or with Chinese writings after 1877.

The last 140 years, from the Meiji period in Japan (1868–1912) to the present, have been a period of accelerated writings that reflects interactions both constructive and destructive. Phase 4, 1868–1894, a period of just twenty-six years, ushered in Phase 5, 1895–1912, a high tide of seventeen years. From the latter part of Phase 4, in 1877 when China established its first modern diplomatic mission in Japan, Chinese recorded impressions of a rapidly modernizing Japan in the form of diaries, collected poems, and high-quality reference materials. Chinese diplomat Huang Zunxian launched this era with his collected poems, *Riben zashi shi* (Poems on Japan Topics) (1879), themselves a springboard to his magnificent *Ribenguo zhi* (Treatises on Japan) (1890/1895). Other notable works were Wang Tao's *Fusang youji* (A Record of Travels in Japan) (1879), the breakthrough mini-encyclopedia of diplomat Chen Jialin, *Dong cha wenjian lu* (Records of Things Heard and Seen in Japan) (1887), and the ambitious compilation by China travel mission reporter Fu Yunlong, *Youli Riben tujing* (Japan, with Maps and Tables) (1889). Behind many of these reports hovered the injunction of Qing dynasty statesman Li Hongzhang "to investigate other people's

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activities in hopes of both connecting with and containing them, so as to minimize future troubles" (quoted in Wang Baoping 2001–2003, 2). These authors, unlike earlier writers of the Qing period, based their knowledge on firsthand data, observation, and experience.

In the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 and China's humiliating military defeat, Chinese study missions "rushed to Japan like clouds chased by the winds" (Wang Baoping 2001–2003, 4). Phase 5, 1895–1912, included China's second great wave or high tide of Chinese writings about Japan. For the previous fifteen hundred years Japan had essentially borrowed from China. Now, in a great reversal, China borrowed deliberately and profusely from Japan. Kang Youwei, the noted reformer, declared in 1897 in an audience with China's Guangxu emperor, "The Japanese did in thirty years what took the west three hundred years. China with its great size and large population should be able to do it in three" (quoted in Wang Xiaoqiu 1992, 2000, 321). Thanks to Meiji Japan as a model and helpmate, what followed from 1898 to 1912 was revolutionary for China, with intellectual and institutional transformations under the label of *xinzheng,* or modernization, that brought China into the twentieth century.

Phase 6, the nearly forty years from 1912 to 1949, had three subphases. Subphase 1, 1912–1930, included growing Chinese disillusionment with Japan after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 but especially after Japan's Twenty-One Demands of 1915. Unlike in Phase 5, Chinese writings of this period were dominated by translations rather than original reporting, with 665 titles published between 1912 and 1931, averaging thirty-two titles per year. Subphase 2, 1931–1945, featured accelerating Japanese aggression against China, highlighted by Japan's occupation of northeast China (Manchuria) in 1931 and its steady thrust into north China. These actions culminated in Japan's "total war" with China after 1937, including the infamous "Rape of Nanking" of December 1937 and other atrocities. Chinese, driven to understand this recent helpmate-turned-relentless enemy, produced a third high tide of writings on Japan that featured journals (nearly thirty titles in the 1930s and 1940s alone) and multivolume collectanea (collected writings, *congshu*). Fresh inquiries addressed the complex issues of "Japanism" *(Riben zhuyi),* Shinto and Japanese imperialism, and militarism and fascism in Japan. One-time Japanophile and Chinese military strategist Zhang Baili (1882–1938)—the

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Japanese Military Academy (Shikan Gakkō) top graduate in the class of 1904—wrote a probing article, "The Japanese: One Foreigner's Analysis" (*Ribenren: Yige waiguoren de yanjiu*) (1938), that was guarded toward Japan. Like Zhang Baili, his superior, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek—trained also at Shikan Gakkō and a sometime Japanophile—was not allowed the option of a mutually beneficial relationship because of Japan's brutal aggression. Both Zhang and Chiang—and a host of others, including Guo Moruo (1892–1978), who, like Zhang Baili, was married to a Japanese woman—are symbolic of the failure of military aggression as a policy in contrast to the cooperation of the second high tide period of 1895–1912. The third subphase, 1945–1948, included a number of writings on postwar Japan, but China's civil war prevented any systematic advance of Japanese studies in China.

The period after 1949, under the People's Republic of China, constituted Phases 7 and 8. Phase 7, 1949–1978, passed through two subphases. In the period from 1949 to 1966 some writers from subphases 6 (2) and 6 (3) published new works and remained active, but more typically the studies of this period were government driven and focused on politics, particularly Japan's cozy relationship with the United States. A few Chinese university-based Japan Studies Centers came into being, and research activities began to pick up just when the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) erupted and brought most academic endeavors to a standstill.

Subphase 7 (2), 1966–1978, included two further subperiods: 7 (2) (1) (1966–1972) and 7 (2) (2) (1972–1978). During the height of the Cultural Revolution Japanese studies and writings basically came to a halt. Then, in 1972 Japan and China restored diplomatic relations, and the People's Republic of China resumed its membership in the United Nations, replacing the Republic of China (Taiwan) as the legitimate representative of China. Immediately the study of the Japanese language took off in a kind of "craze" (*rechao*), with dozens of Chinese universities establishing Japanese language departments or centers, more than one hundred institutions of higher learning offering Japanese as a second language, and major Chinese cities broadcasting Japanese-language study programs and correspondence courses. All this, along with the reopening of former Japan Studies Centers, laid the foundation for the next high tide of Chinese writings on Japan.

Phase 8, the current high tide, follows the 1978 call by the Chinese Communist Party and central government for "emancipation of the mind" (*jiefang sixiang*) and "opening and reform" (*gaige kaifang*). The field of Japanese studies has grown spectacularly. Serial publications on Japan have soared, numbering nearly sixty titles just since 1979. These serials have played a vital role in nurturing the more mature scholarship of the present.

Most distinctive today are the numerous academic exchanges and joint projects between Chinese and Japanese academicians, often independent of Chinese government direction. Scholars from Japan travel to China by invitation, and Chinese scholars travel to Japan to study (and increasingly remain to teach), give guest lectures, participate in academic conferences, and conduct research and investigations. These exchanges, in the words of Li Yu, are "most direct, most effective, and most conducive of deeper understandings" (Li Yu 2001, 22). In depth, scope, and sophistication, current researches and exchange are unparalleled in Chinese history.

Although marked by these many positive exchanges, relations today are far from untroubled. On the positive side, besides the academic exchanges one can point to the large and mutually beneficial trade relationship that has led China to surpass the United States as Japan's number one trading partner, while Japan remains China's number three trading partner after the European Union and the United States.

However, at the popular level Chinese seethe at certain Japanese actions and attitudes. These actions include repeated visits by prominent politicians such as Jun'ichiro Koizumi, prime minister from 2001 to 2006, to Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, which enshrines "war dead," including perpetrators of wartime atrocities in China; repeated authorization by the Japanese Ministry of Education of textbooks that label Japan's invasion of China as an "advance" rather than "aggression" or expansion or militarism; trade disputes that come and go; territorial issues such as conflicting claims to the Diaoyutai or Senkaku Islands; persistent signs of Japanese sympathy for the independence of Taiwan, a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945; positive responses by Japan to pressures from the United States to enhance its armed forces under U.S.-Japan military agreements and in support of the George W. Bush administration's "sole superpower" designs; and Japanese activists agitating for a boycott of the Beijing Olympics of 2008 on human rights and other grounds.

The seventieth anniversary of the Rape of Nanking was 13 December 2007, and China remembered. For a

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host of reasons Chinese seem unable to forget. These reasons include frequent reminders from ever-popular reruns of anti-Japanese war films on TV and reminders from ever-popular anti-Japanese war and revolutionary "Mao songs" (with music delightful to dance to). Then there are the stories of victims and their families and the tourist industry to popular wartime and revolutionary sites, with battlefield re-enactments. Many Chinese to this day refer to Japanese routinely as "Japanese devils" (*Riben guizi*). Such actions and reactions only exacerbate tense relations; both sides must work to repair them.

Not to be overlooked, finally, is an emerging Sino-Japanese rivalry. Will China and Japan be able to come together in mutually beneficial cooperation and "reconciliation," an issue carefully explored by Caroline Rose (2005)? Or will relations be dominated by conflict? Only time will tell.

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