

Generational Perspectives on Sino-Japanese and Korean-Japanese Relations

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China, South Korea, and Japan; commonly seen as the dominant political powers of Eastern Asia these nations have hundreds of years of history and shared influence on each other between them. However, it is this shared history, particularly within the last century, that has led to a large amount of strain in the diplomatic relations between the 3 nations today. The complicated relations between Japan and its former WWII occupied territories have been explored numerous times in the year since the war's end, and it is well known that China and the Koreans are less than fond of their Japanese neighbors for numerous historical and territorial reasons. However, a new generation is coming to dominate the populations of these three countries, and this generational shift could bring the dawning of a new age of diplomacy between these nations, or continue with more of the same bitterness and apprehension.

The objective of this research is to examine the evolving relations between China and Japan, and Korea and Japan as are relevant to the younger generations of the three nations in comparison to their older generational counterparts, and to gauge to what extent just how much impact the historical atrocities committed by Japan against its neighbors have on society in those neighboring countries today. The viewpoints of younger generations of these countries have not yet been extensively studied, and a better understanding of these viewpoints, be them positive or negative, will be of great use to the international relations and political science community for examining the future of relations between these nations and how best to navigate them.

As these perspectives of study are political in nature it is necessary to examine the source of politics, people, in order to adequately measure them. To that end I have planned a research method that I believe will adequately achieve the research goals I seek in examining the personal perspectives at the root of the political relationship between these countries today. These methods include but are not limited to: the examination of existing scholarly research into Sino-Japanese and Korean Japanese

relations, the analysis of historical texts regarding the atrocities committed in the WWII era be them Japanese, Chinese, or Korean textbooks, or other works written about said atrocities, and in my opinion most important of all, interviews with people that have a connection to my topic of research, be that connection personal or occupation based.

First, there exists a large amount of scholarly study on Sino-Japanese and Korean-Japanese relations that is easily accessible and invaluable to my research, however it is mired by the very reason for my research, that being, much of it is out of date and focuses on the perspective of the older generations of these countries. Much of this research is accessible online or through George Mason's research databases. Second, translations of historical texts or government issued textbooks related to the WWII time period that is the source of much of the tension between these nations are available online, and my Korean knowledge will also allow me to examine at least some Korean historical texts in their unaltered forms. Third and finally, my involvement with many of the APAC (Asian Pacific American Coalition) organizations at GMU, as well as with the Schar School, affords me numerous interview opportunities with both students and faculty that have direct or occupational connections to my topic of research.

I am aware of the limitations to my research on this topic as well. There is not enough time in a single semester to acquire a sample size large enough for interview and study to assess the deepest impacts of generational mindset shift on the relations between China, Korea, and Japan. My study will also be hampered by the fact that a portion of those interviewed despite their ties to their home or ancestral countries would likely enter the interview from an American perspective, skewing results to a degree, but this is an issue that is not nearly as significant had it would have been at a university other than George Mason given our intense diversity and representation of students particularly from China, Korea, and Japan.

Despite these limitations, I believe that my research will be able to provide a base of as of yet unattained knowledge on just how much of a generational perspective shift has occurred in these countries that can be expanded upon in future research projects, and used as a tool to aid policy makers and diplomats in navigating relations between their own countries and these East Asian regional powers.

Throughout the course of my research for this project I have found numerous sources to be used. Each of these sources approaches the topic of Sino-Japanese and Korean-Japanese relations differently and provides greater insight into this, however there are some that rise above the rest in terms of relevance to my research.

To begin, Yinan He rights in their journal article *Forty Years in Paradox: Post-normalization Sino-Japanese relations*, “Post-normalization Sino-Japanese relations have been fraught with contradictions,” And continues “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 bedeviled both official and popular relations. Third, diplomatic and commercial ties as well as ‘thick’ societal contacts developed since normalization have failed to bridge a significant gap in values” (He, 2013). This paper characterizes well the existing knowledge on Sino-Japanese relations. It is a relationship that at the governmental level is often strained and at the personal level can even be qualified as outright hatred, mired by nationalistic sentiment and emphasis on wrongdoing on one side, and that same nationalistic sentiment and revisionist history on the other. This serves as a good introduction to the underlying theme of sources related to this topic and field of

research, and while this article specifically is on Sino-Japanese relations, the themes can be nearly equally applied to Korean-Japanese relations.

With this basis for knowledge on the topic we can begin to expand into the more specific issues surrounding the relations between these 3 nations. Sakaki in her article writes, “One of the most notorious issues haunting Japanese-South Korean relations is the controversy over textbook depictions of Japan's colonial rule and war atrocities in the early twentieth century. In recent years, a number of bilateral projects have been launched on both the non-governmental and governmental level, seeking to narrow divergences in historical perceptions” (Sakaki, 2012). Sakaki posits the effectiveness of a joint Japanese-Korean commission on textbook content to create a historically accurate textbook that could be approved for use in both countries, however, Sakaki continues in the article “In Japan, many books described the country’s early twentieth-century expansionism as a defensive act, paying little heed to the atrocities committed in Korea. Although depictions of the colonial and wartime past have been a subject of domestic and international debate since at least the early 1960s, Tokyo’s decision makers have taken a decidedly reluctant stance paying on government-backed textbook talks with Korea. Before suddenly shifting position in 2001, Japanese politicians failed to act upon at least four opportunities to establish a joint commission. Sakaki’s article takes on a hopeful tone as one is reading its descriptions of the joint commissions on textbook content that have been developed today, however, this commissions have been largely unsuccessful as conservative nationalist elements in Japan continue to push the country’s leaders away from acknowledgment of wrongdoing and further into historical revisionism, particularly during the Abe administration in Japan.

To address a more personal perspective rather than governmental and shifting from Sino-Japanese relations to Korean-Japanese relations, JooHwan Kim in his journal article entitled *Islands Adrift: Korean-Japanese Relations, National Identity, and the Zainichi states*, “In Korea, it’s difficult

for me to admit I was born and raised in Japan. Consider an incident from when I was much younger. My mother and I were in a taxi together in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, I spoke in English to my mother because I had observed my dad telling my mother things in different languages in order to hide what he was saying from the notoriously nosy Korean taxi drivers. Before she could respond to my query, the taxi driver took one look at me and asked, ‘Where is he from? Where was this kid born?’ My mother immediately replied, ‘Oh, he was born in America. The Taxi driver nodded toward my mother and then looked into the car mirror, as if to nod to himself in assent, as if to say, *yes, that’s okay...* My family and I discuss neither the lying nor the event in the taxicab because the lesson was learned the first time around, after the old man’s nod: *It’s okay to be Korean-American. It’s not okay to be Korean-Japanese*” (Kim, 2015). For those unaware, Zainichi is the term given to Koreans that opted to remain in Japan after WWII rather than return to an economically devastated and politically divided Korea. This article describes not only the continuing tense relations between the governments of Korea and Japan, but also the incredibly tense relations of the people.

The author of this same article goes on to explain rather bluntly how the Zainichi are viewed in both Japan and Korea. He states “discrimination against the Zainichi is rampant, and the only way to advance in society is to pass. Tei Taikin, a nationalized Zainichi who changed his name and passes as Japanese, writes, ‘In order to remove such uncertainty, you need to get your nationality closer to your identity – that is, acquire Japanese nationality and, hopefully . . . live as a Korean-Japanese’ (Onishi). Korea and Japan don’t want to claim the Zainichi or truly acknowledge them because they are reminders of the past. Most Koreans see them as traitors who refused to return to the motherland after three decades of fighting for independence, Most Japanese view them as Korean Nationals pretending to be Japanese citizens. In effect the only way for a Zainichi to escape is to disappear among the Japanese and deny historical ties to Korea, to never allow anyone to find out what they

really are. And when Zainichi ‘return’ to Korea, they usually find themselves in a foreign culture to which they are only connected on paper” (Kim, 2015). It cannot be understated just how much deep-seated hatred exists between Korea and Japan; a hatred that has long been ingrained into the mentality of the people as they have been raised in the post WWII era, and it cannot be understated of just how powerful this article is in describing the hatred from such a personal perspective. However, the existence of that same mentality remains to be adequately studied in modern younger generations.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not discuss the Japanese view on these issues. One cannot truly understand the complexities of a situation without looking at it from all angles. With regards again to textbook perceptions of history Kimura makes the argument that South Korea did not care about textbooks until China began to show dissatisfaction with the way Japanese history was being taught in Japan eventually releasing a public statement questioning the validity of said textbooks in use in Japan. Kimura states, “So, what happened after the reaction in South Korea to the Chinese statement? On July 24, 1982, *Choson ilbo* carried the following on the front page:

After new Japanese history textbooks distorted the historical facts about the Japanese invasion of Korea and justified their militarism and colonialism, a Japanese governmental examiner with the ministry of education made a comment about Korean forced laborers under Japanese rule. He said, “because Korea at the time had Japanese nationality, and their legal status was different from Chinese who were under Japanese military occupation, it is not suitable for Koreans to use words like ‘forced labor’, or ‘conscription,’” and argued that Korean forced laborers sacrificed for Japanese militarism were volunteers.

Kimura continues, “South Korean national sentiment was extremely agitated by this comment. The important point here is that the Chinese statement forced Japanese officials to make their historical perceptions public. Of course, China had no intention of calling for such a reaction in South Korea, but the Chinese statement gave the South Korean people an important opportunity to learn of

official Japanese historical perceptions. Once their perceptions were revealed, South Korean society had to face the fact that Japan had different historical perceptions, which Koreans could not accept.” Kimura in his article primarily makes the argument that Japan and Korea simply had different perceptions of history yet no true nationalistic drive yet existed within Japanese history, and that it was the Chinese statement forcing the Koreans to take notice of Japanese historical perception in 1982 that began the majority of the issues surrounding textbooks today and that while no nationalistic sentiment existed at the time of the Korean perspective shift despite Korean claims that there was one, the intense push back by Korean society against Japanese textbooks has created a true nationalistic sentiment in Japan in the modern day further fueling disputes between the two nations.

The articles examined here clearly illustrate large portions of the disputes between China and Japan and Korea and Japan, however, none of them mention the focus of my research, that being how generational perspectives have shifted on these issues and how they are affecting relations between the countries today. Each article focuses only on the past while ignoring the active changes in the present, and it is for this reason that I believe my research will be invaluable in filling the gaps in what we know about this topic in its modern form.

I conducted an interview with Ketian Zhang, an assistant professor of international security at the Schar School of Government and Policy at George Mason University who herself grew up in China and states that “There is a myth that there is one singular Chinese view towards Japan. The younger generations themselves grew up on Japanese entertainment products such as manga, anime, and J-pop and themselves tend to hold friendlier views towards Japan, meanwhile the older generations are more likely to hold negative views towards Japan. She continues in stating though that “Age is not the only cleavage of viewpoints towards Japan within China as those people from the northern provinces, those that were more heavily occupied by Japan during WWII, tend to hold more

negative views than those from the southern provinces that did not feel the harsher impacts of the occupation.”

With more regard to younger generations Professor Zhang comments on education on Japan within China stating, “China employs a patriotic education campaign and their portrayal of Japan is not wrong but it is selective. Textbooks emphasize the imperial Japanese Army’s wrongdoings in WWII while not speaking of Japan’s assistance to China in the later years following the war. The Maoist period whenever speaking of Japan distinguished between the Japanese people and the Japanese army, but the post-cold war period made no distinction. There was a focus on wrongdoing and an elimination of difference between army and people designed to curate anti-Japan nationalism that can be controlled and divert from legitimate issues the Chinese Communist Party is dealing with.

As the younger generations begin to take leadership positions within China there are two major potential avenues of how relationships will develop in the future. If we operate under the assumption that the new generations of Chinese leadership are cosmopolitan and educated and maintain the friendlier sentiment they developed through growing up surrounded by access to Japanese entertainment, then with the increasing economic ties between the two countries China and Japan could enter an unprecedented era of political and economic relations with the only major limiting factor being the continued military relationship between the United States and Japan should that also continue into the future.

The other major avenue depends on the effectiveness of China’s patriotic education campaign. Should the younger generations continue to buy into the curated anti-Japanese nationalism than the relationship between China and Japan could largely be the same as it is today continuing the policy of “cold politics, hot economics,” or, in the event of some major shift in Sino-Japanese economic relations, and the continued US-Japan military alliance, the relationship between China and Japan

could deteriorate to a worse position than it is today. However, research largely indicates that the first avenue is the more likely of the two roughly within the next 50 years as natural demographic shifts begin to take hold within Chinese leadership.

The position in South Korea largely follows the same trends as in China. While not as extreme as China's patriotic education campaign the Korean education system does put a degree of animosity in their history of relations with Japan. This animosity is also much more evenly spread than in China as Korea is much smaller geographically and all regions of it felt the brunt of Japanese occupation. However, just as in China, younger generations present a change in viewpoints.

Through short interviews with members of George Mason University's Korean American Student Association I was able to gauge a feel for a younger Korean perception of Japanese people. I would say that the American university lifestyle did pose as a small hindrance to my research in this regard as I suspected it would, but not to the point that the data obtained cannot be taken into consideration. The response was largely one of similarity to China. Young Koreans grew up on Japanese entertainment and even now witness Japanese people within their own entertainment such as in the popular Korean pop groups Twice, NCT, or Izone. Younger Koreans still held a degree of skepticism towards Japanese people but not anything that I could classify as outright animosity. Young Koreans, at least here within the United States at GMU seemed generally indifferent towards Japanese people they interacted with on campus, though several admitted that may not be the case had they been in Korea.

Time will only tell how the future of Sino-Japanese and Korean-Japanese relations will unfold and whether or not they will improve or deteriorate. One thing is for certain though, the new generations within China, Korea, and Japan will undoubtedly bring about great change to their respective nations and its relationships with their neighbors.

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