

5-2018

## How Collective Memories And Divergent Historical Perceptions Influences Sino-Japanese Relations

Kenneth Chevreaux  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps\\_thes\\_all](https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all)



Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Chevreaux, Kenneth, "How Collective Memories And Divergent Historical Perceptions Influences Sino-Japanese Relations" (2018). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 338.  
[https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps\\_thes\\_all/338](https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all/338)

This Capstone Project (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Capstone Projects and Master's Theses at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csumb.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csumb.edu).

# HOW COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND DIVERGENT HISTORICAL PERCEPTIONS INFLUENCE SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS

KENNETH CHEVREUX  
GLOBAL STUDIES CAPSTONE  
PROFESSORS RICHARD HARRIS AND AJIT ABRAHAM

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

1	Introduction .....	2
2	Literature Review .....	3
3	Methodology .....	12
4	Theoretical Framework.....	13
5	Findings.....	14
6	Analysis .....	20
7	Conclusion.....	22
8	References .....	24

# 1 INTRODUCTION

---

China and Japan, two of the East Asian powerhouses with economies that account for a majority of the region's economic activity. They are two of the most influential countries within the East Asian region and arguably the world, but Sino-Japanese relations have a history of tension and conflict that spans back centuries. The future relationship of these two Asian powers could have detrimental effects to not only the region but the world if it turns hostile. Knowing the reasons behind the tensions between China and Japan can help give a better understanding of the possibilities to reduce tensions for a more peaceful future between these two countries. Thus, the main question of my research is to discover how the memories of historical rivalry and conflict contribute to a historical narrative that hampers current Sino-Japanese relations. Understanding how this historical memory structures foreign policy can help to give understandings of the possibilities for ways to reduce tensions and promote peaceful relationships between nations with historic rivalries.

China and Japan have had a long and deep diplomatic and cultural history that spans millennia. Though for the purpose of this study it is only the history of the late 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century that is important to analyze when discussing the historical structuring of the diplomatic relations between China and Japan. This history spans from the beginning of the Sino-Japanese conflicts in the 1890s, to World War 1 and 2, Cold War history, and Modern conflicts. The grievances of the Chinese during World War 2 such as the Nanjing Massacre and other wartime atrocities will be discussed in relations to how their interpretations impact Sino-Japanese relations. An important theme to discuss within this context is how the structured collective memories of both countries have created conflicting perspectives of the war and thus hampered proper discussion and resolution to the grievances of either country. The importance of this study

is to analyze the possibilities of a resolution to age old grievances and how diplomatic cooperation and understanding can be promoted between these two great powers and their people.

The goal of this project is to provide a comprehensive study of how history has influenced and structured modern Sino-Japanese relations. Despite the many different opinions on this topic it is my intention with this research project to develop a multi-perspective analysis of the structure of Sino-Japanese relations with a basis in constructivist theory. With this theory I can analyze both sides of the situation in the effort to assist discussions of how to appease both sides of the conflict and encourage cooperation and the building of diplomatic ties. This research if successful can assist in providing a fraction of a framework by which to assess diplomatic ties between nations that have a history of rivalries. Not only Sino-Japanese relations but many other countries around the world have deep historically rooted rivalries that hamper the building of stable diplomatic ties. If the historical structuring of these rivalries can be analyzed and if discussion be promoted maybe other frameworks can come to pass on how to effectively encourage these countries to resolve their differences and build diplomatic ties ensuring increased stability within their regions. That is the hope with this study that it can be like a small step in the big global political world of figuring out how people can set aside their differences to work together.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

---

The Literature review of this study is separated into three sections, Diplomatic, Historical, and Cultural themes. The purpose of this separation is to analyze the distinct themes of Sino-Japanese relations and how they contribute to the historically structured nature of their

arrangement. Within the sources these themes commonly intersect but they are organized to which they best serve the purposes of this study. Japanese and Chinese relations being one of the most important relationships within East Asia has effects that span not only the political theatre but the cultural and societal theatres as well. This literature will attempt to address the many facets of Sino-Japanese relations and how they interact with each other to give an overview of what conflicts exist in Sino-Japanese relations and why and how they came to be.

The political situation between China and Japan is a complex relationship; relations between China and Japan have been historically structured which is stated no better by Kent E. Calder (Calder, 2006). Within his article he likens the relationship between these two countries to that of Germany and Great Britain prior to World War 2 as both countries fear the militarization of the other, which is a focus point of the article. It points out that much of the tensions between these two countries has been founded on historical conflict, Japanese denial, resource conflict, and territorial disputes. Though unlike some other sources the author supports the idea that the United States should intervene between China and Japan and support confidence building between the two countries. This article provides a good starting point for analyzing Sino-Japanese tensions and a Western perspective of how to handle the tensions between the two countries.

Another comprehensive overview of post-cold war Sino-Japanese relations important for this project is the analysis done by Chien-peng Chung. In his book he explains how China and Japan's relationship has evolved since the fall of the Soviet Union (Chung, 2014). It does this through focusing "within the larger context of the objectives and constraints that each face in establishing and consolidating regional arrangements to address economic integration and security concerns in the Asia-Pacific" (Chung, 2014, p.8). The amount of information the book

provides is immense and it gives helpful insights into how both countries have tried to expand their economic influence via frameworks of regional integration and arrangements. By focusing on how Sino-Japanese relations have fluctuated within these regional arrangements the book gives a new perspective on the relationship between Japan and China for this study. This perspective on regional arrangements also brings into play how other countries within Asia-Pacific and South-East Asia regions have played roles in Sino-Japanese relations and offers a unique perspective. The book is a useful resource for understanding how Sino-Japanese relations affect regional integrations and arrangements and how these arrangements likewise affect China and Japan's relationship.

Both Japan and China invest efforts into the security of their nations to protect themselves from each other and a reason for this is the underlying worry of the resurgence of military tensions that existed during World War 2. Wu Xinbo within their article, analyzes relations between Japan and China from a security perspective and gives a good look at Chinese and Japanese perspectives and grievances with each other (Xinbo, 2000). This analysis focuses on the worry that both countries have of the other's military expansionism with other focuses being diplomatic alliances, Taiwan, and disputed territories. The article provides a good overview of differing perspectives from both China and Japan and gives observations that each country is holding some amount of caution because of historical tensions. China is worried about rising Japanese militarism and nationalism like that of the country during the Sino-Japanese conflicts and Japan is worried similarly about rising Chinese Nationalism and the possibility of Chinese hegemony within the region. These worries are founded on historical narratives that are a discussion point of this study, so the information provides is useful for expanding on the topics of this project.

Rising Sino-Japanese over security can be attributed partly to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands disputes and the Yasukuni Shrine, and it is important to understand all the perspectives on this contemporary issue. Zhang Baijia highlights in his article on how Sino-Japanese relations have begun to see a downturn in the modern day (Baijia, 2014). Much of his article details the steps that Japan has taken to jeopardize the relations between China and Japan and what steps both countries can take in order to encourage positive relations between their two countries. The author is quite adamant that Japan needs to be diplomatically pressured to acknowledge its mistakes of the past and its current transgressions, but he also stresses the importance of friendly Sino-Japanese relations and the benefits it could bring to East Asia. This article from the Chinese perspective adds a needed view on Sino-Japanese, showing that China does not want conflict with Japan but wants to be respected. This shows the other side of Sino-Japanese relations and argues that for the benefit of both countries it is imperative that Japan recognizes its faults and that the current relationship needs to change from a survival/rival-based relationship to a cooperative relationship.

Within the Japanese perspective on the Yasukuni Shrine conflict there is a conflict between narratives of the Left and Right in Japanese politics that place different meanings on the shrine. Daiki Shibuichi provides a look into the identity and politics of the Yasukuni Shrine dispute within Japanese society. The primary focus of the article looks at how the Japanese political right has escalated the Yasukuni issue within Japanese politics and how China, Korea, and the Japanese left have been resisting the narrative of the right. This provides evidence that even in Japan itself the narrative of wartime atrocities and Japanese repentance is divided and not homogenous. The discussion this article provides gives background to the divide in narrative and

perspective that exists in Sino-Japanese relations and helps discuss possible solutions to resolve this conflict.

Another key topic to analyze when looking at Sino-Japanese relations from the Chinese perspective is the view on Japan's current ruling political party headed by Shinzo Abe. Abe's party since its election has been a staunch supporter of right-wing policies that harken back to imperialist policies of decades ago says Liu Jiayang (Jiangyon, 2014). His article analyzes the causes of deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations since Abe's return to office in December 2012. One of these causes is the Yasukuni shrine dispute which is a discussion point for my study. Much of the diplomatic rhetoric used by Shinzo Abe when discussing the Japanese actions during World War 2 and his visits to the Yasukuni Shrine has reflected a revisionist attitude and has been a factor that has hurt relations. This rhetoric and the actions taken by Abe that have inevitably damaged relations between China and Japan. The author suggests that the international community should discuss the rising issue of Japanese right-wing nationalism and take steps to ensure peace in the region (Jiangyong, 2014). This article provides a strong analysis of Chinese views on Japanese diplomatic policies and how actions by the current Japanese government have damaged relations between the two countries.

There are two government documents that are important to look at when analyzing the general ideas of China and Japan's foreign policy. The speech recently given by Xi Jinping to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and the Japanese government's *Diplomatic Bluebook* both provide an idea of how the two countries go about their foreign policy. Xi's speech tells of the Chinese view of the use of diplomacy and cooperation in order to encourage world prosperity and peace. Though it doesn't go into detail on many of the current political issues it does give this research a general idea of Chinese foreign policy. The Japanese

bluebook gives us a more in-depth view on how the Japanese government views foreign policy. The document provides this study with the perspective of the Japanese in some of the conflicts between them and China and gives their justification for the actions they take. These two sources provide this study with the knowledge it needs to get a better understanding of both country's foreign policy and how they are handling the disputes and tensions between each other.

The 1990s can be cited as the beginning of current tense relations between China and Japan and is a valuable time for understanding the current tensions between the two countries. Woondo Choi expands upon the beginning of a confrontational attitude between China and Japan in 1994 by providing a background to how certain conflicts and tensions changed once warming Sino-Japanese cooperation into a cold diplomatic stalemate (Choi, 2003). The article analyzes both Japanese and Chinese perspectives on the issues during this tense moment in relations. The author uses the theory of "selective realism" to describe the economically positive relationship but poor security relations between the two countries. This provides the article with a unique interpretation counter to this study's use of constructivism for why the two countries cooperate economically, but chafe against each other on issues of regional security. This helps add another facet of inquiry into the conflicts of Sino-Japanese relations and offers an opposing narrative by which to discuss how Japanese and Chinese relations have been structured.

Japanese foreign policy has begun to change within the modern era as Japan perceives the growth of China as a threat to national security, as well as North Korea's development of nuclear weapons. To better understand Japanese foreign policy in the modern era, Yutaka Kawashima gives a look into how Japanese foreign policy has been historically and diplomatically structured through the actions of politicians from half a century ago. Not only this but his book gives this study an analysis of how Sino-Japanese relations have been structured from history, perceived

threats, nationalism, public opinion, and more. All the information that is provided by the book gives an in-depth look at how Japanese foreign policy has been structured through a complex mix of variables. This Japanese perspective on its country's own foreign policy helps to develop a perspective of the Japanese within Sino-Japanese relations, thus helping my study to understand not only the Chinese point of view but the Japanese as well.

Sino-Japanese relations have become characterized by fluctuations between positive and negative and that trend is seemingly continuing for now. Linus Hagström and Björn Jerdén within their article *Understanding Fluctuations in Sino-Japanese Relations: To Politicize or to De-politicize the China Issue in the Japanese Diet* analyzes the reasons for the fluctuations in Sino-Japanese relations between the years of 1999-2008. They use discourse analysis as a framework by which to examine the downturns and upturns in diplomatic exchanges between the two countries. The article also brings forward that two representations of China exist within the Japanese Diet, a moderate and radical representation which adds its own complexity. It shows examples of these representations within the events of the Tibetan unrest and the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and closes out by predicting future policy that the Japanese government could make toward China. The article has use in analyzing diplomatic discourse between the two countries within the early 2000s and attempts to provide a Japanese view-point of the issues despite the article's western origin. This article though from a Western author does help to flesh out the Japanese side of the conflict and provides another unique facet by which to analyze Sino-Japanese relations.

Japan has interacted with China in a variety of ways during the Cold War and Post-Cold war period that has changed and morphed as relations have fluctuated sometimes in response or sometimes as a cause of the fluctuations. Christopher W. Hughes' article *Japan's Response to*

*China's Rise: Regional Engagement, Global Containment, Dangers of Collision* outlines Japanese foreign policy on China during a broad period from Post-World War 2 1955 to the present, though focusing more on the latter. It focuses on the ways in which Japan has engaged with China within both regional and extra-regional areas on mainly economic grounds, but it includes diplomatic tensions as well in its analysis. This adds a global reach to Sino-Japanese relations as the article shows how China and Japan have competed globally as well as regionally, both competing for influence among developing countries and seeking cooperation with already developed ones of importance. Though the article lacks a Chinese viewpoint on their own foreign policy the article provides useful analysis for expanding how Sino-Japanese relations have affected places outside East Asia.

An issue that has caused current soured relation between China and Japan is how history is perceived in each country and how history has become a force to intensify nationalism. Zheng Wang within his article discusses how history how history has played a role in the structuring of the relationship between China and Japan in recent turn of the century (Wang, 2014). The author points out some factors such as how China and Japanese citizens perceive past historical events. The author also examines how each country educates their citizens about their history differently and how this has caused tension. The Chinese choose to heavily load their curriculum with information from the Century of Humiliation (1839-1949) while Japan instead has a curriculum that largely ignores or glances over war crimes or atrocities that they committed during World War 2. These two-different means of education have been a cause of tension between the two countries. The article stresses that if tensions are to calm both nations must take steps to address historical grievances and their impact and to balance out their educational curriculum. This

article is key to understanding one of the factors that causes a historical divide between China and Japan.

Historical perspective can be another important insight that can give a deeper understanding of issues that might underlie the current relationship between China and Japan. *China-Japan: A Brief* is a historical article written by Lindsay Russell after World War 1 that gives a brief overview of the Chinese and Japanese states. It is useful in that it provides insights into a section of history of Sino-Japanese relations. The article does have an issue in that it has a pro-European and Japanese bias and thus leaves out a Chinese perspective within the overview. Imperialism and colonialism from Japan is perceived as Japan protecting its sovereignty and interests rather than as a breach of another country's sovereignty. Issues within China such as corruption, lack of infrastructure, and civil conflict are reasoned to be only caused by China and no fault at all to European meddling. These issues of bias might be problematic within a global perspective but the evidence this provides gives a understanding of how historical narratives of the past have influenced the structure of Sino-Japanese relations today.

Internally Japan is a complex situation, and this plays a role in the construction of Sino-Japanese relationship on the local and transnational level. Masaru Tamamoto provides an internal view within Japan regarding the Sino-Japanese relationship within their article. The main points of the article highlight how Japanese society and its government imagine/perceive China, and it mainly analyzes the timeframe during which prime minister Junichiro Koizumi held office and the escalation of tensions that resulted from his time in office. The article provides a useful analysis of how the Japanese population feel about China at least during the timeframe of this article's study. This insight gives a greater understanding of a difference of attitudes on China between the people and the government, who have generally held more

hawkish attitudes about China. This helps to not only show how different Japanese actions have influenced relations with China but helps to highlight how the population of Japan hold a much different view of China and themselves.

Japanese perspective on the Sino-Japanese relationship has been impacted by Anti-Japanese nationalism within China this has been a factor that has had effects on Sino-Japanese relations and China's reactions to these protests can be used as an indicator of current tensions within the relationship. Su-Jeong Kang focuses on anti-Japanese nationalism and the possibilities on how it has affected Chinese foreign policy within her article. It focuses on how anti-Japanese nationalism has played a role in shaping Chinese foreign policy towards Japan and offers insights on how nationalism among citizenry can impact the bigger picture and vice versa. It offers links between government policy and mass anti-Japanese protests within China and shows how nationalism expressed by the public can have larger impacts on governments and how they interact with the targets of nationalist movements.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

---

My research project will be using a mixed methods approach with an emphasis on primary and secondary sources to examine the current and past state of the relationship between Japan and China. Using both historical and current documents my goal is to analyze not only the perspectives of different scholars but also to understand the different perspectives that exist between these two countries. I am looking to give a shred of new insight on why tensions between these two global powers continue to alternate between patterns of increased political cooperation and then souring. Other insights on this topic will be gathered from consultation with Japanese and Chinese students from California State University Monterey Bay. This is to

gain a more grounded human-like perspective on the issue so that my research can get a personal perspective from those affected by Sino-Japanese relations.

Considering that I am looking at the perspectives from two different countries, China and Japan a synchronic approach to analysis is the best method to explain the relationship between these two countries. This method will be comparing the methods and approaches that each country has taken to cooperate with each other or to cause rifts in the relationship. This will be not only looking at the modern-day issues but comparing cases from nearly a century back, at the historical cases showing cooperation or conflict that transpired between China and Japan. The perspective of these sources will be varied just as the perspectives on the issue vary from each region, and I intend to show both equally. This is so that I can grasp all perspectives surrounding the issues that way I can grasp the grand scale of the issue and look for solutions.

## 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

International relations theory is the key concept within my analysis of the relationship between Japan and China, taking that into account I am using a constructivist approach to view the divergent perspectives of the two sides within this tenuous relationship. The idea behind constructivism in international theory is that reality has been historically and socially constructed and that it is not simply a consequence of human nature or some other essential characteristic. Alexander Wendt explains that international relations are built by interactions between agents (diplomats) and that structures (like a government) restrict these agents and build their identity and interests. The phrase of his, “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt 1992) describes his explanation that if anarchy is the primary concept of international relations then different structures can have different perspectives of anarchy that can change over time. The main point

of constructivism is that instead of defining international relations behind one ideal like realism and liberalism constructivism looks at how interactions between states and actors are defined by how culture and society has shaped these states and agents.

I am using this theory as a middle ground between realist theory and liberal theory to analyze the two divergent perspectives on the conflicts within the Sino-Japanese relationship. Both countries have differing international perspectives Japan having a dominant liberal perspective and China holding a dominant realist perspective. Constructivism is an effective way to bridge the gap between these divergent perspectives and expand upon the issues to grasp a greater understanding. In addition, Constructivism looks at how relationships have been built through social and historical means and I believe this is true for Sino-Japanese relations. History has become a tool that both countries either use or ignore to suit their agendas and analyzing it via a constructivist point of view I believe gives the most thorough understanding of the issues.

## 5 FINDINGS

---

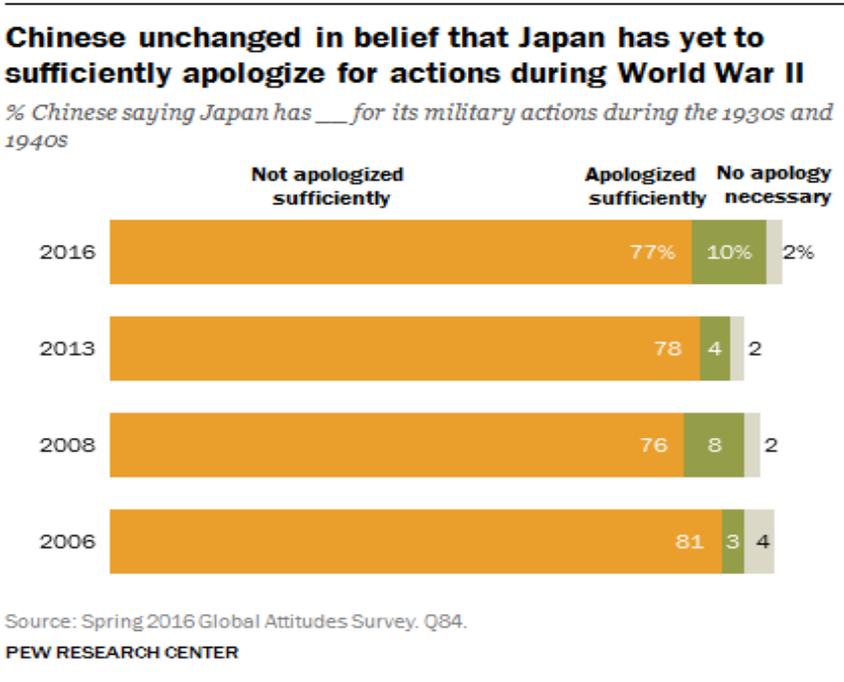
Sino-Japanese relations have gone through a tumultuous past and even now the two countries have difficulties embracing a cooperative diplomatic relationship. Many conflicts remain between the two countries such as the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island disputes, the Yasukuni Shrine dispute, and other historical disputes. Though Sino-Japanese relations show signs of recovering after nearly three decades of upsets that have strained ties between these two countries. Now that relations have begun to take a turn to peaceful cooperation time will only tell if diplomatic ties continue to improve or if new or existing conflicts will cause them to deteriorate yet again.

My claim is that history plays a significant role in the structuring of Sino-Japanese relations, yet the influences it has is a complex topic of interweaving narratives. The conflicts that embroiled East Asia more than half a century ago continue to hold a strong influence over the countries of China and Japan today. The issue of history has become an influential structure within Sino-Japanese relations, as both countries have differing views and perspectives on the issues of history and how it plays a role in their diplomatic relationship. For either country Sino-Japanese history is interpreted differently thus, for either countries to strengthen ties with each other they must be able to look at these issues from each other's perspective. On a societal level there seems to be a strong divide between Japan and China on historical perspective that has been created by the distinct collective memories of either country. Because of this divide I will be showing the perspectives that both countries have on the issues and conflicts present within Sino-Japanese relations and how history has grown to mean different things to those in either country. This way this study can look at the differing perspectives that exist in both countries and how this contributes to the conflicts present within Sino-Japanese relations.

Within China the issue of history, especially that which relates to the 'century of humiliation' is a strong and sensitive topic. The Japanese invasions during the Sino-Japanese Wars resonate strongly within many Chinese people, thus territorial conflicts and diplomatic issues between China and Japan strike a chord of remembrance within many Chinese people. The horrors of the Sino-Japanese war still feel fresh to many even more than half a century after the wars ended. Thus, the current conflicts between them and Japan bring back the memories of the Sino-Japanese conflicts and the horrors that were committed. This is integral to understanding the Chinese perspective as a people wanting to be treated equal and respected

from the increasingly aggressive and militarist Japanese government whose actions have put Sino-Japanese relations and friendship into question.

This view is compounded by the fact that to many Chinese the Japanese have not adequately apologized for its past aggressions. Though some Japanese officials have attempted to apologize for the conflicts of the past the Chinese view the current Japanese attitude as one that has been increasingly critical and revisionist of the actions the military took during the Sino-Japanese conflicts. The Pew Research Center’s surveys on public opinion of Sino-Japanese relations in both countries saw that the Chinese overwhelmingly believe that the Japanese have not sufficiently apologized enough for past grievances, nearly 73% of Chinese citizens hold this view as shown in Figure A (Stokes, 2016). This evidence gives strong precedence to the idea that history is still a strong factor that affects public opinion within China. The Chinese people believe that the Japanese government must officially apologize for its actions during the Sino-Japanese conflicts if the two countries are to cooperate effectively.

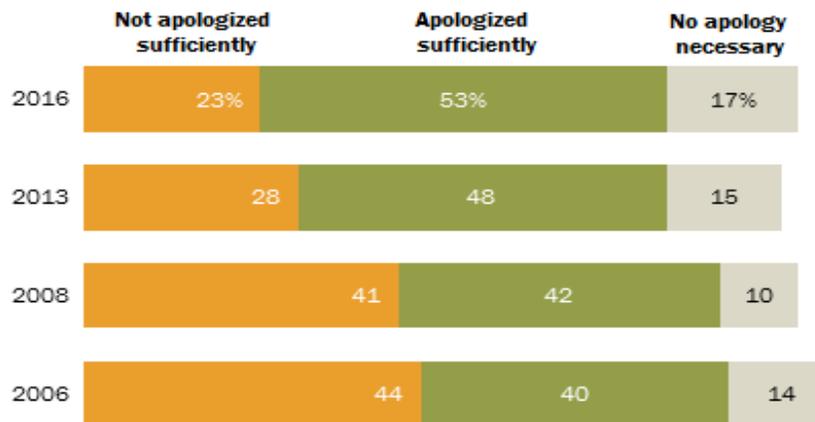


(Figure A: Source Pew Research Center 2016)

Within Japan the topic of history is one that is complex and has many facets. Many progressives have a view that there is still a need for apologies and tact to be taken on sensitive issues, but they have been increasingly contested by nationalistic views within the country. The nationalist/revisionist view contests the scale of the atrocities and some state that the atrocities never happened at all and are a fabrication. The view of history within Japan is that of something more distant from their past grievances and though much of Japan is aware of their past aggressions the perspective on it is mixed from Progressives to Revisionists. The general view of the Japanese public is that it has apologized enough for its past grievances. A near majority of Japanese believe that they have apologized sufficiently for past grievances, about 53% of Japanese hold this view as shown in Figure B (Stokes, 2016).

**Roughly a quarter of Japanese believe they have not apologized sufficiently for World War II**

*% Japanese saying Japan has \_\_\_ for its military actions during the 1930s and 1940s*



Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey, Q84.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

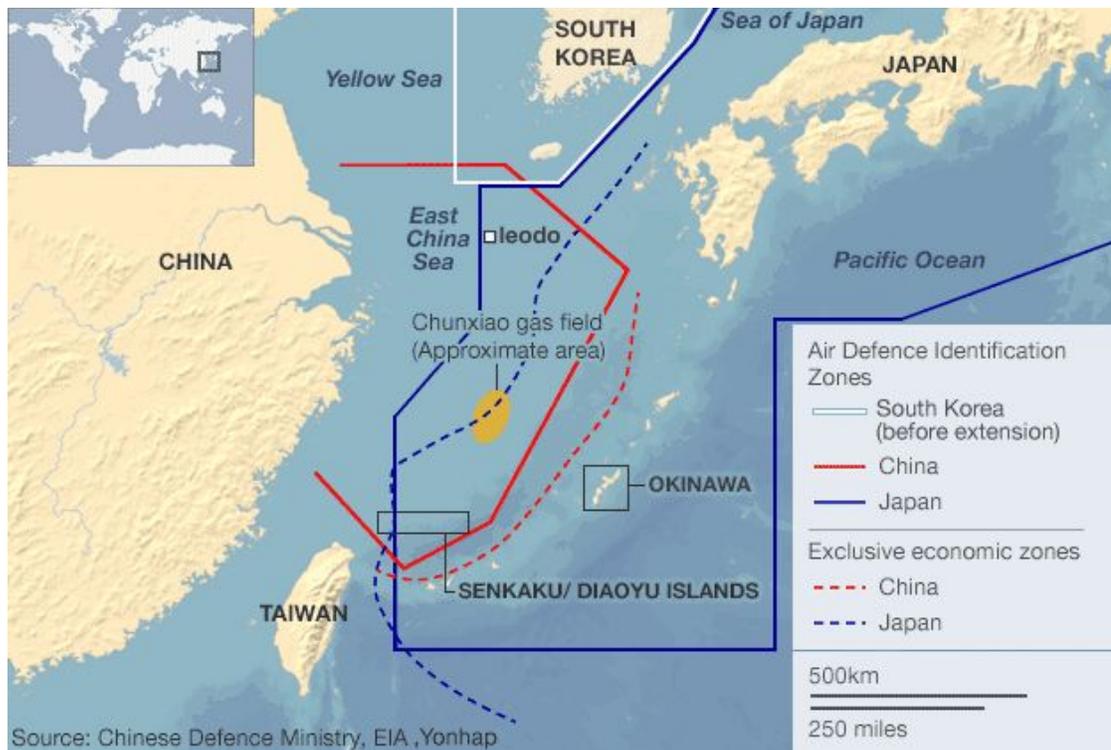
(Figure B: Source Pew Research Center 2016)

Though unlike China, Japan is not nearly as homogenous in its views on Japanese repentance for the Sino-Japanese conflicts. This shows that there is a divide between the two countries perceptions of history and that many but not all Japanese are of the thought that history is less of an issue to consider when looking at Sino-Japanese relations.

These two different perspectives on the history of Sino-Japanese relations can be partly attributed to how the two countries handle their education systems. China's state-run education system is saturated with literature that addresses the century of humiliation (1839-1945) and is designed specifically to foster unity and cohesion for the benefits of a socialist Chinese state (Whang, 2008). This makes it hard to forget the grievances of the past and makes it all the easier for people's fears to be reignited when there is the threat of Japanese aggression, like in that of the nationalization of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (Whang 2014). Japanese historical education is on the opposite spectrum as it lacks very little mention of the Sino-Japanese conflicts. Most textbooks lack any mention of the Nanjing Massacre, comfort women, or any other wartime crimes that the Japanese committed. The Japanese historical memory is profound in its absence of historical memory especially when dealing with the Sino-Japanese conflicts. These two widely different education systems lead to two widely different results, thus two different perspectives of history and how it structures Sino-Japanese relations has formed. This leads to two different perspectives on modern conflicts that end up causing old memories to resurface.

The Yasukuni Shrine dispute is the first of the contemporary issues that exists as an example of historical revisionism and tension between China and Japan. The Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto shrine that was founded in 1869 during the Meiji era in Japan that was originally made to honor the dead of the recent Boshin War (1868-1869), but has since come to honor millions of Japanese souls who died in wars since the founding. The issue with the Yasukuni Shrine comes

in 1978 when the shrine began honoring 14 executed A-Class war criminals, the shrine also honors another 1,054 other convicted war criminals. The enshrinement of war criminals who committed terrible atrocities on the Korean and Chinese people during World War 2 has caused serious diplomatic tensions between China and Japan. Japanese officials continue to visit the shrine and these visits only work to further escalate tensions between the two countries. These visits act as a reminder to the Chinese that the Japanese government still fails to fully recognize the grievances it committed during the Second World War. The Shrine dispute also shows how historical revisionism has a strong grasp within parts of Japanese society. For Sino-Japanese relations to see positive development there must be recognition of the grievances of the past and sincere apology.



(Figure C: The East China Sea and the disputed area of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands credit to BBC, 2014)

The Senkaku/Diaoyu Island disputes is another of the important contemporary conflicts that exists between China and Japan that helps in understanding the historical structure of Sino-

Japanese relations. As shown in Figure B, the Islands themselves are a set of eight uninhabited islands that sit within contested economic zones with potential oil and gas resources, but their importance primarily lies in their historical and symbolic meaning.

To China the Japanese nationalization and current ownership of the islands remain as a symbol that recalls the memory of Japanese aggressions during the Sino-Japanese conflicts. China claims that the islands historically belonged to China since ancient times and that Japan renounced control of the islands in the Treaty of San Francisco in 1945. Japan denies this, claiming that the islands were not part of the territories renounced in the Treaty of San Francisco and were lawfully transferred back to them during the Okinawa Reversion deal. Japan's claims that originally the islands were surveyed by them in 1885 and since they weren't found to be inhabited Japan formally claimed them. China's pressure on what seemed to be a settled issue to Japan shows how China is looking to assert more influence and power within East Asia. The justifications from both sides bring up the historical relevance of the islands and the impacts of this conflict has brought to bear the historical memory of both sides.

## 6 ANALYSIS

---

Despite these diplomatic conflicts China and Japan have continued to build economic ties with each other and have become much more economically dependent on each other than what one would assume considering the tensions that exist. These two countries are two of the world's largest economies and depend on each other's exports and investments to economically grow and succeed. The fact that Sino-Japanese relations have strong economic ties but weak diplomatic ties cannot be easily explained by modern international relations theories, that of realism and liberalism. Thus, Constructivist theory for the purposes of this study provides an alternative to realism and liberalism for explaining the unique relationship between China and Japan.

When looking through the perspective of realism, power both military and economic and survival are some of the important factors that distinguish the structure of relations between countries. Though within the structure of Sino-Japanese relations economic ties continue to be built even though tensions exist between the two that would be detrimental to economic ties growing. The other mainstream theory of Liberalism focuses on the importance of trade, economic integration, and institutions for encouraging cooperation between states. Liberalism would state that the large amount of bilateral trade between Japan and China and their strong economic ties would necessitate strong diplomatic ties, yet China and Japan have for the past decades since the 1990s faced strong diplomatic conflict which is opposite to what liberalism states should happen (Santos, 2017). Thus, an alternative theory needs to be used to address the faults in these theory for explaining the structure of Sino-Japanese relations.

These faults in mainstream theory can be addressed through the alternative of Constructivism which looks at the cultural and historical structuring of their relationship rather than just the power and economics of the situation. The perceptions of both countries on the conflicts that surround their current diplomatic relations and the depth that history can interpret these conflicts is considered within constructivist theory. Considering how different countries based on the cultural identity and the identity of their actors can forge different meanings of anarchy this concept can also be applied to how China and Japan have come to different perceptions of history. This divide in interpretation of history has basis in the cultural and educational structures of each country and just like how anarchy can mean something different based on a countries cultural and diplomatic identity so to can history be perceived in different ways. This theory when used in this manner provides a framework for analyzing the different

perspectives of China and Japan and how this has created different historical narratives within both countries through differing cultural identities.

## 7 CONCLUSION

---

The divided historical narrative between China and Japan will continue to play an important role in the structuring of the two countries diplomatic relations. Despite these conflicting narratives, Sino-Japanese relations have begun to take a turn toward what could be a positive development in cooperation. Both Shinzo Abe and Xi Jinping have expressed desires to build more positive diplomatic and economic ties in the coming year of 2018 and have been discussing the arrangement of diplomatic visits to each other's countries (Gao, 2018). Not only this, but Abe has become increasingly more interested in cooperating with China on their 'One Belt One Road Initiative' which could foster stronger economic and investment between the two countries (Gao, 2018). Though it is important to restate that even if economic ties between these two countries continue to be strengthened it is unlikely to have any distinct positive benefit toward their diplomatic relationship, as both countries are already economically dependent on each other yet this relationship has hardly eased tensions between the two countries within the diplomatic sphere. Thus, time will only tell if these promises of cooperation between China and Japan succeed in creating a more stable relationship or if current issues between the two countries cause discussions to fall short of delivering an important positive development.

Even with the current developments in Sino-Japanese relations, which could help stabilize diplomatic tensions it is important to continue to discuss solutions to the existing issues that could continue to cause problems. It is important for China and Japan to have an open line of communication between each other to promote as much communication and transparency between each other as possible. This has been partially implemented through the East China Sea

Crisis Management Hotline, but could be expanded upon (Panda, 2017). On Japan's side it needs to recognize its past wartime atrocities and work on building trust with the Chinese on these issues by committing to repentance instead of revisionism (textbooks and Yasukuni shrine visits), recognizing the atrocities, and sincerely apologizing for them. China needs to as well properly represent Japan within its own history education instead of promoting its own victimization. Both countries need to commit to stopping the rising tide of nationalism in both of their respective countries, ensure cultural exchange, and promote communication above all else. These solutions could help lessen the current tensions between the two countries and further cooperation and stability within the region.

Sino-Japanese relations are some of the most important bilateral relations in East Asia and the world. It is critical that these two countries with the support of the international community work towards building positive stable connections beyond that of economic relations. For this to happen there needs to be developments on both sides to ensure peaceful cooperation and recognition of grievances and faults committed in the present and past. Historical differences in perspective need to be bridged so that Japan and China can fully understand each other's perspectives and grievances. The famous writer and philosopher George Santayana said that "those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it". To maintain stability within East Asia the divide in perspective between Japan and China needs to be recognized and further discussed so that solutions can be created and a resolution met at some point within the future so that those of the modern generations don't have to relive the past.

## 8 REFERENCES

---

- Baijia, Z. (2014). Historical Vision and Strategic Thinking Required to Understand Tortuous Sino-Japanese Relations. *Modern International Relations: English Edition*, 24(2), 57-61. Retrieved April 1, 2018.
- Calder, K. E. (2006). China and Japan's Simmering Rivalry. *Foreign Affairs*, 85(2), 129. Retrieved November 7, 2017.
- Choi, W. (June 2003). Persistence and Change in Japan-China Relationship. *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 10, 1st ser., 75-92. Retrieved November 7, 2017.
- Chung, C. (2014). *Contentious integration: Post-Cold War Japan–China Relations in the Asia-Pacific*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Diplomatic Bluebook. (n.d.). Retrieved December 13, 2017, from <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/index.html>

Gao, C. (2018, January 09). Abe Vows to Achieve Major Improvement in Sino-Japan Relations in 2018. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/abe-vows-to-achieve-a-major-improvement-in-sino-japan-relations-in-2018/>

Hagström, Linus. *Japan's China Policy: A Relational Power Analysis*, Taylor and Francis, 2005. ProQuest Ebook Central

Hagström, L., & Jerdén, B. (2010). Understanding Fluctuations in Sino-Japanese Relations: To Politicize or to De-politicize the China Issue in the Japanese Diet. *Pacific Affairs*, 83(4), 719-739. Retrieved November 14, 2017.

Hughes, C. W. (2009). Japans response to Chinas rise: regional engagement, global containment, dangers of collision. *International Affairs*, 85(4), 837-856. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2009.00830.x

"How Uninhabited Islands Soured China-Japan Ties." BBC News. November 10, 2014. Accessed April 24, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11341139>

Japan's Yasukuni Shrine. (2012, October 18). Retrieved May 8, 2018, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-19987251>

Jiangyong, L. (2013). The " Abe/Aso Regime " and Sino-Japanese Relations. *Modern International Relations: English Edition*, 23(4), 22-43. Retrieved April 1, 2018.

Jingping, X. (n.d.). *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*. Speech presented at 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Beijing. Retrieved at

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi\\_Jinping's\\_report\\_at\\_19th\\_CPC\\_National\\_Congress.pdf](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf)

Kang, S. (2013). Anti-Japanese Popular Nationalism and China's Approach Towards Japan amid Sino-Japanese Political Tension, 2001–2006. *East Asia*, 30(2), 161-181.

Kawashima, Y. (2003). *Japanese foreign policy at the crossroads: challenges and options for the twenty-first century*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>

Panda, A. (2017, December 07). Japan, China Agree to Implement East China Sea Crisis Management Hotline. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/japan-china-agree-to-implement-east-china-sea-crisis-management-hotline/>

Renouard, J. (2017, December 26). Japan, China, and the Strains of Historical Memory. Retrieved May 7, 2018, from <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/japan-china-and-the-strains-of-historical-memory/>

Russel, L. (1919). CHINA—JAPAN: A BRIEF. *The Advocate of Peace*, 81(7), 214-215. Retrieved November 13, 2017.

Santos, D. (2017). Post - War Sino - Japanese Relations: A Constructivist Reinterpretation. *ISA International Conference*. Retrieved May 4, 2018.

Shibuichi, D. (2005). The Yasukuni Shrine Dispute and the Politics of Identity in Japan: Why All the Fuss? *Asian Survey*, 45(2), 197-215. doi:10.1525/as.2005.45.2.197

Stokes, B. "Hostile Neighbors: China vs. Japan." Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project. September 13, 2016. Accessed April 24, 2018.

<http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/09/13/hostile-neighbors-china-vs-japan/>.

Tamamoto, M. (2005). How Japan Imagines China and Sees Itself. *World Policy Journal*, 22(4), 55-62. Retrieved November 14, 2017.

Wang, Z. "History Education: The Source of Conflict Between China and Japan." *The Diplomat*. April 23, 2014. Accessed April 24, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/04/history-education-the-source-of-conflict-between-china-and-japan/>.

Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics. *International Organization*, 46(2), 391-425. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858>

Xinbo, W. (2000). The Security Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations: Warily Watching One Another. *Asian Survey*, 40(2), 296-310. doi:10.1525/as.2000.40.2.01p0070f