

INTRODUCTION TO *CHRONOLOGY  
OF MODERN SINO-JAPANESE  
RELATIONS:  
1799–1949*

One very important factor that has prevented Japan and China from building a relationship of mutual trust is the way in which each has chosen to interpret relations between the two countries in the modern period. In recent years, there have been attempts to stop concentrating so much on the hostile aspects centered around the history of Japanese aggression, and instead incorporate into the historical analysis such aspects as the interdependence and “competitive co-existence” that existed between the two countries at the same time<sup>1</sup>. In connection with such multi-faceted efforts to come to mutual understanding about historical facts, there is nothing like a proper chronology to which to refer. Unfortunately, such reference works have been few and far between, until now.

The project of publishing 『近代日中関係史年表 1799–1949』 (*Chronology of Modern Sino-Japanese Relations: 1799–1949*, Iwanami Shoten, 2006, 809 p., Hereafter, *Chronology*) was launched in response to the scarcity of such literature. What follows is a short introduction to the work, including its objectives, new features both in content and form, and some comments from the reviewer, who was personally involved in the compilation project as its editorial committee chairman.

## OBJECTIVES

The expression “2,000 years of contact between Japan and China” is often used to emphasize the lengthy history of relations between the two countries, but at the same time, when seeking desperately to build mutual trust, like now, it would probably be more appropriate to focus directly on the shorter period in Sino-Japanese relations known as the modern era, which is the time frame in which the problems at hand arose. Since the mid-nineteenth century, from the intrusion of the European powers beginning with the Opium War, China was continuously forced to open its ports to foreign traders and, along with Japan, was plunged into the world of modern capitalism. Japan chose to respond in kind to western modernism and launch its own invasions, including a series launched on Chinese territory. While the Japanese military invasion of China ended with the former’s defeat in World War II, within the postwar era, which was marked by civil war between nationalist and communist factions in China and the formation of the international Cold War regime, Japan first chose to sign a peace treaty with the Nationalist government that had fled to Taiwan, but eventually normalization of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic, which controlled the Mainland, was realized in 1972. In the China-Japan Joint Statement made on 29 September of that year, the Japanese side stated that it “regrets our past military actions which caused the Chinese people so much human and material destruction.”

Following this epoch-making rapprochement between the two countries twenty-seven years after the actual end of hostilities, a treaty of friendship was signed in 1978. However, over the last thirty years since the joint statement, one would be hard pressed to say that the rapprochement resulted in a stable relationship of mutual amity. China has argued that Japan lacks recognition that the country’s past activities have caused damage to the Chinese life and sentiments. Such issues as the treatment of Japanese imperialism in that country’s school textbooks, visits by government officials (including prime ministers) to Yasukuni Shrine to worship “their” war dead, Chinese taken by force to Japan to work, Chinese women enlisted as military prostitutes during wartime, and chemical weapons abandoned in China by fleeing Japanese are the main causes of the friction that continues to the present day. In 1995, the year of the 50th anniversary of the War’s end, then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi made another statement of “regret” and “apology,” saying, “At a time in our not so distant past, we made national policy mistakes and went to war..... wreaking terrible havoc

and destruction on the peoples of Asia.” Despite the adoption of this statement as the official government interpretation of the past, later prime ministers continued to worship at Yasukuni Shrine in their official capacities. In such circumstances, the Japanese people face the question of just how we, the Japanese people, are supposed to go about deepening mutual understanding and iron out the differences that exist between us and our Chinese counterparts. At least one requirement in such an endeavor would certainly be gaining an accurate perception of the history of relations between the two countries in modern times.

Of the many chronologies that are available to us focusing on world history and the history of Japan, China, culture, economy, etc., we find very few dealing specifically with international relations between the two countries. As a matter of fact, in my search I was able to find only one attempt during the postwar era in Japan, *Draft of a Chronology of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations: 1905–1945*, edited by Usui Katsumi.<sup>2</sup> Until the appearance of Usui’s work, textbooks on the subject would refer readers to *A Chronology and Source Material Collection of Japanese Diplomacy* compiled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1955 as the best reference.<sup>3</sup> A number of chronologies on the subject have been published in China, focusing mainly on politics and diplomacy;<sup>4</sup> however, should we not also be concerned with “Sino-Japanese relations” in their economic, social and cultural contexts, which transcend mere political affiliation, and also focus on interpersonal relations that cannot be classified within a framework of international rivalry? If so, we may just come upon new historical images and meaning, juxtaposing the aspect of national rivalry with the interdependence that has developed out of common culture characteristics nurtured through contact between the two countries for over two millennia.

It was in this spirit that Eto Shinkichi, councilor of the Center for Japan-China Historical Studies proposed that a committee be formed to publish a new chronology along those lines. The Center was set up as an annex to the Japan-China Friendship Hall based on the policy directions pursued by previously mentioned Prime Minister Murayama, “to teach younger generations about the horrors of war” and “to develop relations of deep mutual understanding and trust with neighboring countries,” a part of which was “the promotion of scientific research concerning the historical background of those relations in modern and contemporary times.” The *Chronology* project was funded through a grant from the Center and compiled by a six-member committee under the guidance of Professor Eto. The editorial board consisted of Fujii Shozo, Nakamura

Tadashi, Yamada Tatsuo, Ishii Akira, Iechika Ryoko and yours truly, all specialists in the study of modern Chinese history.<sup>5</sup>

## TIME SPAN OF THE *CHRONOLOGY*

One of the major features of the *Chronology* is that 1799 was chosen as its starting point. What follows is the reason for the decision.

Generally, the beginning of modern Chinese history is put at the outbreak of the Opium War in 1839; however, if one is to take into account the process leading up to that war, one would have to start with the McCartney Mission of 1793, through which the British demanded free trade with China. Furthermore, opium smuggling was already on the rise at that time. On the Japan side, its modern era generally begins with the opening of its ports in 1854, or the year before, marking the arrival Commodore Perry. However, if we take into consideration the process leading up to those events, we find a Russian emissary returning shipwrecked Japanese and requesting trade as early as the end of the eighteenth century, followed by similar demands from other Western nations throughout the early nineteenth. The historical Japanese term for “embargo” (*sakoku*) is first found in an 1801 translation of a part of Engelbert Kaempfer’s *The History of Japan*, entitled *Sakoku-ron* (On Japan’s Isolationism),<sup>6</sup> a work which made clear to Japanese readers the prohibitive conditions imposed by their country on the western ships that passed (or attempted to pass) through their territorial waters. It is for these reasons that our chronology of the modern age of Sino-Japanese relations, the beginning of which was marked by pressure from western powers to lift all embargoes on foreign trade, starts at the turn of the 18th century, although the first entry dated 1799 notes the publication of Nakagawa Tadateru’s *Shinzoku Kibun* (Anecdotes about Chinese customs). This work is an accurate, detailed description by the Bakufu’s functionary at Nagasaki of the culture, mores and daily lives of Chinese inhabiting mainly Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian, and exemplifies well the interest that Japanese have always had in things Chinese since antiquity. The information contained in reports on China originating in Nagasaki, the sole entry point for traders from that country, played an important role in the changes that occurred in Japan’s perception of China following the Opium War. This is why *Shinzoku Kibun*, which marks both the continuation of traditional relations as well as the opening curtain for modern East Asia, leads the *Chronology* off.

Our decision to end the *Chronology* at 1949 was not our first choice,

since we initially considered the year 2000 as the cutoff date. However, the task at hand and the time allowed to complete it soon forced a change of mind to wrap it up at 1949, the year marked by the establishment of the People's Republic of China, five years after the defeat of Imperial Japan in 1945.

In our minds, these five years represented an important period linking "modern" Sino-Japanese relations with their "contemporary" version. It was on 15 August 1945 that in Japan the Emperor's "Acknowledgment of the end of the War" was broadcast nationwide and in China Jiang Jieshi broadcast his "Address to the people of China and the world proclaiming victory in our war of resistance."<sup>7</sup> Jiang Jieshi's statement to the effect that responsibility for the war did not lie in Japanese people but in the military, not only paved the way for amiable relations with Taiwan, but also for the Japanese troops and civilians remaining in China to be peacefully evacuated and for the later (Nationalist) Republic of China to relinquish any claims to war reparations from the Japanese government. China ceased to exist as the object of Japanese invasion and occupation for the past half-century or so, and in Japan under the Allied Occupation, those who had led the invasion were arrested and tried, material symbols of Japanese colonialism, like the South Manchuria Railway Co. and the Bank of Taiwan were dissolved, and books and other cultural artifacts taken from China during that time searched out for return to their rightful owners. In China, a civil war broke out between the nationalist and communist factions, resulting in the formation of the People's Republic in October 1949 and the flight of the Nationalist Government to Taiwan in December of that year. In the Sino-Japanese relations history, these five years cannot be overemphasized as the period of postwar process for Japan and as the formation of a new state for China.

## STYLE

In order to include numerous areas of activity, not just political developments within the *Chronology*, a more comprehensive synchronic horizontal axis was added to the conventional diachronic vertical axis. This horizontal axis was divided into four main sections: Japan, China, Sino-Japanese Relations, and International Developments, Sino-Japanese Relations further divided into subsections of "Politics/Military," "Economy," and "Socio-Culture."

Such a detailed breakdown of this section is one of the unique

features of the *Chronology*, reflecting the multi-faceted character of relations between the two countries. The “Japan” and “China” sections contain not only important events in their respective modern histories, but also how these events influenced or reflected the nature of relations between them. The “International Environment” section aims to capture Sino-Japanese relations in a global perspective, as part of world history: for example, the proceedings at the Washington Conference concerned with the return of the parts of Shandong occupied by the Japanese during World War I.

The layout is an open B4 dual page spreadsheet with headers for the year and 6 columns for each section and sub-section. All column entries are dated with a month and day (e.g., 8.15 = August 15) and lined up accordingly on the same row, allowing the reader to move easily over the categorized data, as it changed diachronically (vertically) and occurred synchronically (horizontally).

Here is what the 15 August 1945 sheet looks like.

Reading horizontally, the reader will find when the Japanese people first heard about their defeat in the War, and the immediate reactions of Chinese residents of Kobe, whose activities had been suppressed by Japanese authorities under the wartime regime, and of the former

**Table 1** 1945 (Showa 20) (Minkuo 34)

Japan	Sino-Japanese Relations			China	International
	Politics/Military	Economy	Socio-Culture		
8.15 Minister of the Army Anan Korechika commits suicide. 8.15 Emperor's end of war address broadcast. 8.15 Suzuki cabinet resigns.	8.15. Zhu De, Supreme Commander for the Eighth Route Army, ordered Okamura Yasuji, Supreme Commander for the Japanese Expeditionary Force in China, to surrender.	8.15 Mitsui shipping Co. closed down the Hong Kong branch and the Guandong office. 8.15 North China, Tianjin and Central China branches of Dainippon Spinning Co. closed.	8.15 Shanghai school for Japanese nationals closed. 8.15 Mitsubishi Bibai Mine Chinese workers strike for better conditions. 8.15 Kobe Chinese Youth Organization formed.	8.15 Jiang Jieshi's victory address broadcast. 8.15 Zue De notified Great Britain, U.S., and USSR of the five requirements including representation of armed groups in liberated areas.	8.15 Korean State Building Preparation Committee formed.
8.16	8.16			8.16	8.16
8.17	8.17		8.17		8.17

Japanese colony of Korea. One also finds changes wrought by the end of the war on Japanese nationals living and working in China, like the closing of Japanese-run business enterprises.

Vertically, the data unfolds like any other chronology, with the process of surrender and disarmament of the Japanese Army under the political subsection of “Sino-Japanese Relations,” together with the Soviet occupation of Harbin, the Nationalist-Communist summit meeting in Chongqing and the nationalist government’s takeover of Taiwan in the adjacent “China” column.

## CATEGORIZING THE DATA

The following are the guidelines established for what might be viewed as the “grey areas” concerning the *Chronology*’s categories, most importantly, how to “keep tabs on” Japan’s East Asian colonies during modern times.

First, all the data pertaining to Taiwan while it was a Japanese possession (1895–1945) is listed under “Japan,” including anti-Japanese uprisings that occurred on Taiwanese soil, like the Xilalian Incident of 1915. The 1985 Sino-Japanese Agreement stipulated that Taiwan be a Japanese territory, resulting in the island placed under the control of Japanese administrative Taiwan Governor-General. This is why after World War II, the Taiwan data appears under “China,” while the data pertaining to Korea after the War jumps over to “International.”

Manchukuo is dealt with as an “independent state,” rather than a Japanese colony, due to its governance mechanism under a separate monarch and ministry of state and its diplomatic status in Japan as a sovereign entity.<sup>8</sup> The events pertaining to all of them were classified under “China” (e.g., the proclamation of the establishment of Manchukuo) and their dealings with Japan (e.g., the appointment of Komai Tokuzo as Manchukuo’s chief of general affairs) under the politics/military subsection of “Sino-Japanese Relations.” The same principle also applies to other provisional and regional governments formed in Japanese occupied areas in China, including the Autonomous Government of the Mongol Alliance and Wang Jingwei’s National Government of the ROC in Nanjing, in which Japan may have intervened.

In making such categorical distinctions, no one is denying that Manchukuo was no more than a puppet regime of Japan. However, it was their geo-political and institutional existence, rather than legitimacy



and *raison d'être*, that were the criteria for classification as “regional states.” How to treat Japanese colonial possessions and puppet regimes in China is a controversial issue, which for the purpose of the *Chronology* we “solved” in terms of strict institutional formality.

On the other hand, the Ryukyu Islands, which up until the time of their incorporation by the Meiji government as a “feudal territory” (*han*) in 1872 constituted a kingdom that paid tribute to China, while at the same time existing as a territory of conquest under the military rule of Satsuma Han, were dealt with as part of Japan during the *Chronology*'s time span, hence the classification of their tributary dealings with China within the realm of “Sino-Japanese Relations.”

## OTHER DISCUSSIONS

Here are some examples of how the *Chronology* has managed to uncover levels and aspects of Sino-Japanese relations not found in other similar references, due to the adoption of 1799 as a starting point of the *Chronology* and the incorporation of data from areas other than political developments.

First, there is the period up through the 1860s marked by a lack of modern style diplomacy, featuring traditional tributary relations between the Ryukyus and China (categorized into “Politics” under “Sino-Japanese Relations”), Sino-Japanese trade at the port of Nagasaki (“Economy”), the import of Chinese books and their replication, plus incidents involving castaways (“Socio-Culture”).

As to Chinese books, not only were there junks that brought Chinese originals, but also those that returned with Japanese replicas. Li Shuchang, soon-to-be Chinese ambassador to Japan, published *Guyi Congshu* [1880], a series of books that had become extinct in China, with the help of Yang Shoujing, Chinese classics scholar of the day, but were still extant in Japan. In addition to his diplomatic career, Ambassador Li also sponsored poetry readings with members of the Japanese literati. This is a good example of the traditional cultural exchange conducted between the two countries up to as late as the mid-Meiji era.

Turning to the subject of castaways, there are descriptions of fugitives from the sea, like Bunta, who told stories of what was happening in Shanghai and Zhapu during the Taiping Rebellion, and Otokichi, who had been employed as an interpreter on a British frigate. Despite the degree to which such eye-witnesses were of use to the authorities at the time, all the same they are a genuine part of the history



of Sino-Japanese relations during Japan's "sakoku" era.

Next, there is the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), which set the stage for over nearly five decades of Japanese aggression on the Continent, and how it was reported. Author Kunikida Doppo (*Kokumin Shinbun*), haiku poet Masaoka Shiki (*Nippon*) and artist Kuroda Kiyoteru all served as war correspondents, and several photo collections were released, including those compiled by the Land Survey Department under the Army Chiefs of Staff. Only one month after the declaration of war, Kawakami Otojiro's acting company was already performing a stage play based on the conflict. Although media involvement would escalate during the later Japanese invasion and the 2nd Sino-Japanese War with writers and actors being actively recruited and sent to China by the Armed Services, thus increasing the amount, frequency and genre of news about the War, media accounts and propaganda drawing public opinion in support of Japan's advance onto the Continent all started with coverage of the war of 1894-95.

After the first war, China began a rapid process of modernization, which inspired a great number of Chinese to study abroad in Japan, including not only intellectuals and political figures like Qiu Jin, Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Zhou Enlai and Jiang Jieshi, but also artists like Zhang Daqian and Fu Baoshi. During the 1930s, before the outbreak of total war for the second time, the *Chronology* was filled with stories about writers and artists traveling back and forth to exchange ideas with their colleagues on opposite shores in a spirit of interdependence and friendly competition, despite such violent events as the Manchurian Incident. With the outbreak of the 2nd Sino-Japanese War, the socio-cultural subsection of the *Chronology* becomes what seems to be an account of "the Japanese cultural invasion," by groups active under the Occupation forces and streams of Japanese leaving for China. This trend suggests the way cultural interaction changed after the War broke out.

The *Chronology* has enormous potential to show concerning Sino-Japanese relations, and what it will show depends on the reader. Unfortunately, however, the space is too limited to discuss further here. We hope that the *Chronology* will contribute to rich perspective being developed by as many readers as possible.

We are now in the process of compiling a second volume covering the time after 1949.

## NOTES

1. See the proceedings of a joint symposium, entitled 『日中関係の150年：相互依存・競存・敵対』 (One hundred and fifty years of Sino-Japanese relations: Mutual dependence, competitive co-existence and hostility), ed. Yamada Tatsuo山田辰雄 (Tokyo: Toho Shoten, 1994). There is also a joint research project that is attempting to analyze the Sino-Japanese War from such new perspectives. Results to date have been published in 『中国の地域政権と日本の統治』 (Japanese colonial rule and local governance during the war in China), ed. Himeda Mitsuyoshi 姫田光義 and Yamada Tatsuo山田辰雄 (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2006), and 『日中戦争の軍事的展開』 (The military history of the Sino-Japanese War), ed. Hatano Sumio 波多野澄雄 and Tobe Ryoichi 戸部良一 (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2006), while another volume tentatively entitled 『日中戦争期の中国における社会と文化』 (Society and culture in China during the Sino-Japanese War) is still in the stage of preparation.
2. 『日中外交史年表草稿 1905-1945』 (A draft of chronology of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations, 1905-1945), ed. Usui Katsumi 臼井勝美 (Tokyo: Kress Shuppan, 1998) is an attempt to revise 『日本外交年表並主要文書』 (A chronology and source material collection of Japanese diplomacy), ed. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1955).
3. Yamane Yukio 山根幸夫 et al., eds., 『近代日中関係史研究入門』 (Introduction to the historical study of modern Sino-Japanese relations) (Tokyo: Kenbun Shuppan, 1992), 7.
4. See, for example from postwar publications, 『中日韓近百年大事記』 (Important events for China, Korea and Japan over the past 100 years), ed. Chen Guting 陳固亭 (Zhonghua Congshu Publishing Committee 中華叢書編審委員会, 1971); 『中日関係史事年表』 (Chronology of Sino-Japanese relations), ed. Su Zhenshen 蘇振申 (Huagang Publishing 華岡出版, 1977); 『中日歴史大事年表』 (Chronology of major events in the history of China and Japan), ed. Ling Fengtong 凌鳳桐 (Heilongjiang Education Publishing 黑龍江教育出版社, 1990); and 『戦後中日関係史年表 1945-1993』 (Chronology of postwar Sino-Japanese relations), ed. Tian Huan 田桓 (China Social Sciences Press 中国社会科学出版社, 1994). Only Tian's chronology has separately categorized sections of economy and socio-culture in addition to politics.
5. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ando Masasi and Usui Katsumi for their valuable contributions to the compilation project, even after they had to leave due to a work-related commitment.
6. Kawakatsu Heita 川勝平太, 「清代中国と徳川・明治期日本の比較文明」 (Cultural comparison between Qing China and Tokugawa-Meiji Japan), in 『日中関係の150年：相互依存・競存・敵対』 (op. cit.), 27-28.
7. 『中央日報』 *Zhongyang Ribao* 15 Aug. 1945. See also Iechika Ryoko 家近亮子, 『日中関係の基本構造：2つの問題点・9つの決定事項』 (The basic

structure of Sino-Japanese relations: Two problem points, nine solutions)( Kyoto: Koyo Shobo, 2003), 127–31.

8. Yamamoto Yuzo 山本有三 argues that the territory of Manchuria was “colonized” in the wake of Japanese imperialist expansion not as a direct possession in the traditional sense, but as a sovereign nation manipulated behind the scenes by Japan, in his 「日本植民地帝国と東アジア」(Japanese colonial empire and East Asia), in 『近代日本における東アジア問題』(East Asian issues in modern Japan), ed. Furuya Tetsuo 古屋哲夫 and Yamamuro Shin'ichi 山室信一 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2001), 294.