

Introduction

This course reader deals with relations between Japan and China primarily in the period 1895-1945. Before 1945 Japan was indivisible from its empire, and the most important target of Japanese imperialism was China. The lingering impact of this shared imperial history is very different in Japan and China, a fact that has an enormous impact on the relationship between the two countries today. While this history is not forgotten in Japan, it is not central to Japanese identity. By contrast Chinese national identity has been built around China's suffering under foreign—especially Japanese—imperialism.

In both places historical memory centers on conflict, without acknowledging the equally important histories of cooperation and mutual influence. In 2011, for example, Chinese nationalists defaced a monument at a cemetery for Japanese refugees in Fanzheng county, Heilongjiang, a province that had once been part of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. The Japanese buried there were agricultural migrants (peasants) who had in some cases come to China against their will, and who starved in 1945 before they could make it back to Japan. While these migrants were certainly part of Japan's invasion of China, they can also be seen as victims of the Japanese empire. Those Chinese today who prefer to think in terms of a sharp dichotomy between evil Japanese oppressors and virtuous Chinese resisters do not acknowledge this kind of complexity, although the Chinese press sometimes does. As one Chinese newspaper put it, "many of the settlers were ordinary Japanese civilians [but]... once they came to China they took on the role of invaders." So how should we think about these issues today?

From about 1850 both Japan and China were threatened by Western imperialism and both responded by trying to borrow the Western model of the national state. Both were also influenced by Pan-Asianism, the idea that Asian peoples were not (or not only) a collection of autonomous nations, but that they shared certain cultural, historical, racial, or political characteristics that marked them out from other nations, and that this should lead to some sort of common action, organization, or feeling. But these two responses to the threat of imperialism often contradicted each other. Pan-Asianism, like Pan-Arabism or Pan-Slavism, always had a problematic relationship with nationalism. Was Pan-Slavism an attempt to create a Slavic world, or an attempt to expand Russian national power? In the case of Pan-Asianism, Japanese national interests would gradually take over from more egalitarian ideas. As a result most of the early Pan-Asianists are now seen as apologists for Japanese imperialism even though, if history had unfolded differently, they might not be viewed that way. The purpose of this set of readings is to uncover the various meanings Pan-Asianism had for Chinese and Japanese in hopes of better understanding the relationship between the two.

Japan provided a model to China on how to modernize its economy, military, and society. Countless Chinese were educated in Japan, including both exiled politicians and intellectuals who went on to form all of China's twentieth-century governments. Sun Yat-sen became the Father of the Chinese Republic in part because of Japanese aid. Both Wang Jingwei, the leader of Japan's puppet government during the 1937-1945 War of Resistance Against Japan, and his opponent, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Chinese resistance, studied in Japan. Chiang actually served in the Japanese Army. Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, founders of the Chinese Communist Party, both studied in Japan. Lu Xun, China's most famous modern writer, claimed that Japan was the site of his political awakening. Even

those who did not travel there read books translated from Japanese. But while these people got a great deal from their connections to Japan they all harbored suspicions about Japanese imperial interests in China. When the artist Feng Zikai departed for Japan his friend Ye Tiandi encouraged him to go, but also warned him: “Don’t eat too much of their raw fish and cold rice... and don’t fill yourself up on their militaristic thinking either.”¹

For Japan too, China was vital. After the Western intrusion, China lost its traditional place as Japan’s most important source of ideas and culture, but it remained the most important site of expansion for Japan economically and militarily. Japanese went to China for many reasons, such as to make money, help save Asia from Western expansion, escape trouble at home, or learn to play jazz.

All of these exchanges took place in the context of both growing political conflict and ever-closer ties between the two countries. Japan’s victory in the 1894-5 Sino-Japanese War led to the beginning of direct Japanese colonization over the former Chinese island of Taiwan. Japan also became one of the leading imperial powers in China, and Japanese economic interests in China expanded rapidly. That war also led to a burst of Chinese interest in learning from and working with Japanese. By 1910 some ten thousand Chinese students were studying in Tokyo. Conflict and co-operation continued to ebb and flow, but conflict gradually predominated. While some Japanese were aware of the increasingly exploitative nature of the relationship between the two countries, for most it was easy to think of the relationship as primarily friendly even after the Japanese seizure of China’s Northeast in 1931 and the outbreak of open war in 1937. In the end, the war was a disaster for Japan, a disaster in large part caused by Japan’s inability to find a way to live peacefully with its neighbors, above all China.

It is therefore not surprising that the 2011 protesters in Fangzheng county were infuriated by the monument for dead Japanese, especially given that the memorial described them as “pioneers” (*kaituo tuan*). But their anger was directed mainly at other Chinese. The protesters claimed that the monument they objected to had been erected by the local government in hopes of attracting Japanese investment and tourism, which may well have been true. Just as before 1945, individual Chinese and their government can both reject foreign political domination and still be eager to absorb foreign goods and culture. In fact, Japan and China remain intimately connected today as they have been for the last 100 years. While many of the people discussed in these readings are today denounced as apologists for Japanese imperialism—and some of them were just that—the readings also show a more complicated relationship. As Timothy Brook puts it, describing those Chinese who worked with Japan, “Contemporary Chinese consciousness has no way of making sense of such people, especially of that minority who declared themselves willing to combine a Japanese allegiance with their Chinese identity.” It may surprise readers to know that during the war Chinese often spoke and wrote sympathetically about the Japanese civilian population in general, carefully contrasting them to the military forces, unlike the 2011 protesters against the cemetery. The current situation of major conflict and even larger cooperation between the two countries is far closer to the situation of 1895-1945 than to the Cold War situation of minimal contact, and this vital relationship cannot be understood without knowing its history.

¹ Barne, *An Artistic Exile*, 50.