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# **SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF THEIR YOUTH. MOVING TOWARDS RECONCILIATION?**

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**Abstract:** Today's Sino-Japanese relations continue to be dominated by territorial disputes and a range of grievances related to Japan's colonial past. Despite there is no open conflict between China and Japan, the two countries maintain normal diplomatic relations and have strong economic interdependence, almost 70 years after the end of the war, reconciliation has not been achieved. Socio-emotional barriers and trust issues still hinder the relations between the two communities. This article seeks to bring in a better understanding of how the young generations in the two countries perceive their counterparts' nation and of the challenges that they will face towards achieving reconciliation. By presenting the results of a series of questionnaires circulated among university students in Japan and China, this article discusses the understanding that young students have of the other country, of history issues and of the ongoing territorial disputes, and it discusses which are the key factors in shaping their perceptions.

**Key-words:** Sino-Japanese relations; students; perceptions; history; reconciliation.

**Resumo:** As relações sino-japonesas contemporâneas continuam a dominar as disputas territoriais e uma série de mágoas relacionadas com o passado colonial do Japão. Apesar de não existir um conflito aberto entre a China e o Japão e de os dois países manterem a normalidade das suas relações diplomáticas e uma forte interdependência económica, depois de 70 anos do final da guerra entre as duas nações, a reconciliação ainda não foi atingida. Barreiras sócio-emocionais e questões de confiança ainda levantam obstáculos às relações entre as duas comunidades. Este artigo procura trazer uma melhor compreensão **à questão de como as gerações** jovens dos dois países percebem os seus homólogos e aos desafios que irão enfrentar no processo para alcançar a reconciliação. Ao apresentar os resultados de uma série de questionários que circularam entre estudantes universitários no Japão e na China, este artigo discute o entendimento que os jovens estudantes têm do outro país, das questões históricas e das disputas territoriais em curso, assim como os factores-chave que determinam as suas percepções.

**Palavras-chave:** estudantes; história; percepções; reconciliação; relações sino-japonesas.

## Introduction

For anyone with an interest in East Asian affairs, it is a widely known fact that Sino-Japanese relations have seen better moments. The cold and distant handshake between the Chinese premier Xi Jinping and the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the 2014 APEC meeting in Beijing infamously became the latest public display of the myriad problems that dominate the relations between the two countries. This situation is not new. Nearly four decades since the two countries signed the bilateral 'Treaty of Peace and Friendship' in 1978, many of the historical grievances that separate these two Asian nations continue to cope the bilateral debate, for the most part, related to Japan's colonial past and imperial expansionism in the Asian continent during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this scenario, the long debated issue of reconciliation between China and Japan remains one of core importance. Scholars in the literature of peace and conflict studies have introduced a distinction between the absence of conflict, or conflict resolution, and reconciliation (Liu & Atsumi, 2008, p. 217; Nadler & Liviatan, 2004). That is, while in a conflict scenario, the cessation of hostilities can be achieved by leadership moves, such as signing peace treaties or normalizing diplomatic relations, reconciliation between two groups once in conflict requires one step further. For some authors, reconciliation entails that the "parties resolve the emotional issues that may have previously left them estranged" (ibid., p. 217). Building on the premise of such definition, reconciliation has not been achieved between Japan and China. Socio-emotional barriers and trust issues still exist between the two communities and consequently, the potential for future conflict remains open. At the same time, several important questions remain unanswered. Do people in these two countries have sufficient understanding of the realities in their counterpart's nation? Are the new generations more prepared to achieve reconciliation than their grandparents and parents?

The fact that Sino-Japanese relations continue to be deeply marked by the sequels of war 70 years after its end cannot be explained by the direct remembrance of the war in these countries' collective memory alone. In both countries, people who experienced the conflict directly are today in their 80s. Thus, narrated history and its mechanisms of transmission, including word-of-mouth, schooling and media, have a prime role in conditioning the perceptions of the younger generations, who have not witnessed in first person the issues that

today form the 'package' of historical grievances that separate the two countries.

With these premises in mind, this article will focus on today's university-aged students. This does not aim at being a prescriptive article about how to move towards reconciliation, since the complex and deeply rooted causes of Sino-Japanese grievances would require a depth of analysis and an extension further beyond the scope of this paper in order to propose valid solutions. Instead, this paper aims at presenting an overall and updated picture about how students in both Japan and China see their counterparts' country, and what are the reasons that explain their perceptions. In order to do so, this article will present some of the findings obtained through questionnaires circulated in Japan and China during 2013. Next, this article will explain the results obtained, in order to later analyze and discuss the implications that the observed situation has for Japan and China.

### **Young generations and their perceptions. Why does it matter?**

Among the main reasons that drew our attention to university students, there is an obvious but simple one. As the most highly educated tier in their generation, tomorrow's Japanese and Chinese leaders almost certainly count among today's college students in their respective countries. Besides, despite this is an aspect that has been scarcely researched, existing polls appear to suggest that college students' perceptions of the main problems in Sino-Japanese relations focus more on conflictive issues such as territorial disputes and the war legacy, than in the case of the overall population.

This is the case of the polls conducted on a yearly basis in cooperation by the Japanese think-tank Genron-NPO<sup>1</sup> and the China Daily<sup>2</sup>, measuring public perceptions on the bilateral relations in the two countries. For example, until 2012 (8th edition) Genron's China-Japan Public Opinion Poll included the distinction between data collected from university students and from the general public, albeit only in the Chinese side

In 2011, one year prior to the escalation of the Senkaku-Diaoyu territorial disputes after several incidents with fishing vessels, the survey asked the Chinese public to select three reasons that motivated their negative impressions of Japan. Among the general public, 74.2% of respondents selected the "wars in the past" as a reason; 46.3% named "Japan's failure to recognize and admit guilt for its colonial past"; and 40.9% pointed out to the "Japanese government's negligent attitude after the 2011 Fukushima-1 accident". By contrast, and despite the questionnaires were all circulated during summer 2011, university students failed to mention anything related to the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, refer to: <http://www.genron-npo.net/>

<sup>2</sup> See also: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>

Instead, 53.4% of students pointed out to the “Japanese Government’s firm position on the Senkaku-Diaoyu territorial disputes” as a main factor. Similarly, when asked whether they believe there are ongoing territorial disputes between Japan and China, 59.3% of the general public answered affirmatively, while in the case of university students, this percentage raised to 83.1%.

Although it is difficult to trace the direct causes of such differences, the more conflict-focused responses among the students are indicatives of the influence that schooling, including the use of government-sanctioned textbooks, has on shaping their perceptions. The debate on the necessity to elaborate shared narratives about the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century history has been on the table for years between Japan, China and South Korea. Some initiatives have been undertaken such as the creation of a multinational commission of scholars dedicated to elaborate a common history book. Nonetheless, not many efforts have been dedicated so far to understand how the younger generations in these two countries perceive their neighbor country, their common history and their complex bilateral relations of today; something that remains an underexplored topic.

### **Mapping students’ perceptions**

With the aim of shedding some new light into this topic, the following section presents the results of a series of questionnaires circulated among university students in Osaka Prefecture in Japan<sup>3</sup>, and in Hebei Province in China<sup>4</sup> between September and November 2013. In contrast to polls such as Genron’s China-Japan survey, the questionnaires presented here were designed to allow students to respond freely in the majority of questions, without providing them with pre-defined multiple-choice answers whenever possible.

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<sup>3</sup> A total of 84 questionnaires were circulated among students of Osaka University, aged 18-20, in an even distribution between males and females and between the departments of medicine, international public policy and law.

<sup>4</sup> 596 questionnaires were distributed among five universities in Hebei Province including Hebei University, the Hebei Finance University, and the Hebei Agricultural University, distributed among 38 different departments. Students were aged from 18 to 21 years old and distributed evenly between male and female. The choice of Hebei Province for passing the questionnaires is also relevant considering the fact that this Chinese province continues to apply the same educational model as in the preceding decades, with its high-school curricula predominantly oriented to preparing college entrance examinations (commonly known as ‘Gaokao’). By contrast, some of the first-tier regions of the country, such as Shanghai, have started applying pilot reformed plans (Shanghai Education Commission, 2012).

## 1. Positive and negative impressions from neighboring countries

In first place, students in both countries were given a list of 10 East- and Southeast Asian<sup>5</sup> countries and were asked to rank them from most positive to most negative impression. Chinese respondents to the questionnaire ranked Japan as the most negatively perceived country, preceded by Vietnam and the Philippines, countries that maintain open territorial disputes with China. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 indicates the most negative impression, Japan was ranked 8.29. Among Japanese students, China ranked 7.13 within same scale falling in 9<sup>th</sup> place, followed only by North Korea as the most negatively perceived country with 9.7 points.

When analyzing the responses to this initial question, the attitude of students' towards South Korea constitutes a noteworthy case. Like China, Seoul still maintains some open discrepancies with Japan in relation to the acts committed in the Korean peninsula during the colonization. However, in recent years, Korean pop culture has become increasingly popular among the region's youth both in Japan and in China. Interestingly, South Korea was identified as the second most positively perceived country among Chinese students, ranking 3.80 in the 1-10 scale. By contrast, Japanese students' impression about South Korea turned out to be more polarized than in the case of the other countries, with approximately 40% of students ranking the country in the first three positions and another 40% relegating it among the three most negatively perceived countries. In sum, among Japanese students, South Korea ranked sixth in the 1-10 scale receiving a score of 5.4.

## 2. Positive and negative attitudes towards China/Japan specifically

In the first place, in order to obtain a general picture of the students' impressions about the other country, while avoiding to influence their genuine impression by enquiring them about the more sensitive issues from the beginning, the questionnaire started by prompting the respondents to write up to three keywords about the other country. The question was to be answered freely, without the possibility of selecting any pre-given option and before the students knew the content of the rest of the questionnaire.

Starting with the Japanese students' responses about China (see figure 1), Chinese food came out as the most mentioned word, as it was in part, expected by the authors, since Chinese cuisine is fairly well-known in Japan. Next, about 10% of keywords were related to environmental problems, most of them

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<sup>5</sup> The list comprised the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, North Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, China in the Japanese survey, and Japan in the Chinese survey.

referring to yellow dust<sup>6</sup>, air pollution and PM 2.5<sup>7</sup>. In third place, Japanese students mentioned keywords related to Chinese culture, including shaolin temples, Chinese language, martial arts, and names of popular TV celebrities from China. Next, students mentioned keywords about the Communist Party and Communism. As illustrated in figure 1, problematic issues of concern for reconciliation start to appear only in sixth place, referring to the territorial disputes between China and Japan and the prevalence of anti-Japanese sentiments in China. This contrasts with the subsequent questions in which students are prompted directly about these most conflictive aspects of Sino-Japanese relations. The results suggest that, while these negative aspects take an important place in the collective understanding of China among Japanese college students, these are not the issues that immediately come to their mind when prompted without making *a priori* reference to Sino-Japanese conflicts.

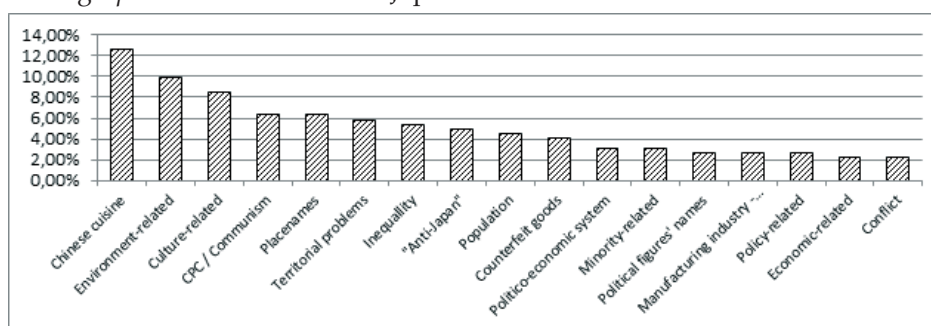


Figure 1: Keywords about China. Japanese students' responses.

On the other hand, the vision that Chinese university students manifested about Japan when asked to write the three keywords were more directly oriented to the conflictive issues that affect the two countries' relations (see figure 2). In addition to the words 'manga' or 'comics' that came out in the first place, nearly all of the most frequently written words were direct references to the territorial disputes, the Japanese invasion of China, militarism and Japan's colonialism. Besides, popular derogatory expressions commonly used in China to refer to Japan, such as '*Riben guizi*'<sup>8</sup> and '*Xiao Riben*'<sup>9</sup> were also mentioned, although with relative low frequency. The exceptions to this are the words '*sakura*'<sup>10</sup>, which came out in seventh place, 'earthquake', 'developed', 'crafty' and 'Mount Fuji', all mentioned with less than 2% frequency.

In comparison with Japanese respondents, Chinese students appear to pay more attention to war-related issues and the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute. As it will

<sup>6</sup> Dust storms coming from Mainland China, which often fly towards the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

<sup>7</sup> Atmospheric particulate matter.

<sup>8</sup> Translatable as Japanese devils.

<sup>9</sup> Literally 'little Japan', is an equivalent expression to 'japs'.

<sup>10</sup> Japanese name for the cherry blossom.



be discussed below, the history of 20<sup>th</sup> Century China is an essential part of the central examination curriculum, which students in first year of university would have been preparing during the previous three years. In addition, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute was something very frequently mentioned in Chinese media, particularly by CCTV, at the time of conducting the questionnaires. It is important to bear in mind that the central examination's curriculum obliges students to gain "proficient knowledge about international and domestic current affairs through self-study, and to be able to analyze them against the background of what they had learned in class"<sup>11</sup> (National Education Examinations Authority, 2014, p. 134). In order to obtain such knowledge, most students naturally resort to the media available in mainland China<sup>12</sup>.

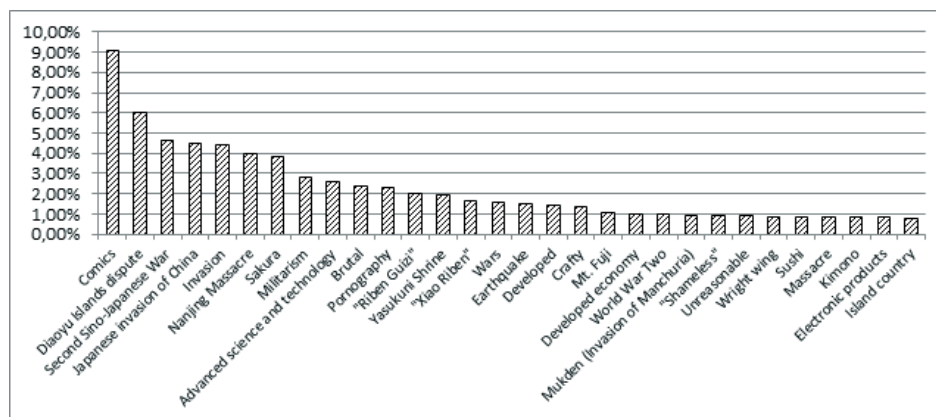


Figure 2: Keywords about Japan. Chinese students' responses.

The second part of the questionnaire enquired directly the students on their personal feelings and impressions towards the other country. At this stage, students were not asked to provide any justification for their answers, but merely to express their personal feelings. In the two cases (see figures 3 and 4), the majority of respondents indicated having negative impressions, with 42.6% of students in China and 40% in Japan choosing this option. In addition, it is worthy to note that in second place, students in both samples declared having no particular impression or feeling about the counterpart country. 41.4% of Chinese respondents and 38.70% of the Japanese ones indicated this option.

In third place, 11% of Chinese respondents declared that their impression of Japan was dependent on specific issues, rather than having a general positive or negative impression. In any case, among Chinese students, having a positive general impression of Japan was the least chosen option, with only 5.1% of respondents expressing this opinion.

<sup>11</sup> For example, for the 2014 exam, the period about which students should have proficient knowledge ranged from April 2013 to March 2014.

<sup>12</sup> See further below for the role of media in shaping students' perceptions.

In the case of Japanese students, these two last options are inverted. Nearly 14% of students in Japan declared having an overall positive impression about China, while 7.50% expressed that their positive or negative impression depended on the issues being debated.

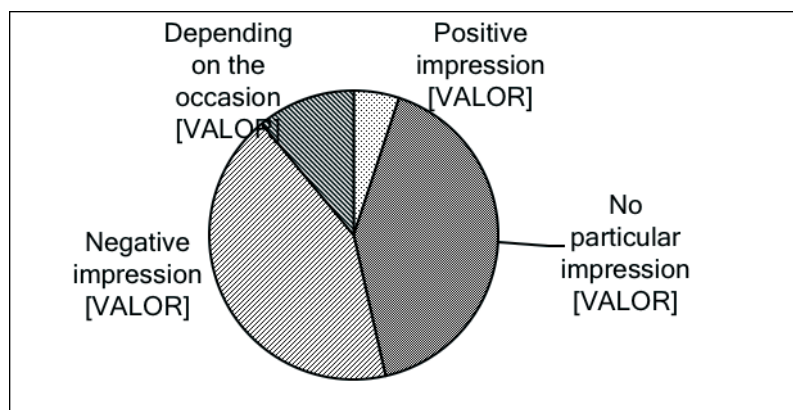


Figure 3: Chinese students' self-declared feelings towards Japan

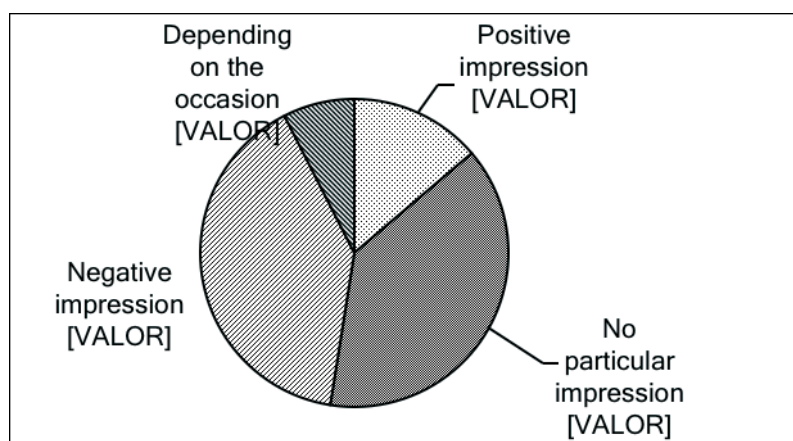


Figure 4: Japanese students' self-declared feelings towards China

In the following part of the questionnaire, students were asked to indicate their positive or negative impressions about a range of issues related to the other country. These issues included food/cuisine, culture, movies and pop culture, science and technology, politics and economic issues. In addition, students were prompted to provide additional comments justifying their choices. The results obtained in this section of the questionnaire start presenting a more complex picture of the perceptions that students have of the other country, particularly since the differences observed between the two samples are substantial. In

relation to this question, it is also worthy to note that the impressions that Chinese students manifest about Japan are, in general terms, more positive than in the opposite case. This contrasts with the observed results in the previous questions, especially when prompted about keywords (figure 2), in which Chinese students appeared to be more focused on conflict-related issues.

The responses by Chinese students (see figure 5) in relation to non-politically sensitive aspects can be generally considered positive. For instance, 72% of students had a favorable impression of Japanese cuisine and food items, 75.1% declared liking Japanese *manga* comics, 82.6% declared a positive impression of Japanese science and technology, and about 63.4% of them had a positive image of the Japanese economy. In contrast, Japanese politics earned the most unfavorable opinion, with over 90.6% of respondents declaring their negative impression. The reasons given for their discontent with Japanese politics will be discussed below. On the other hand, the responding Chinese students saw issues such as Japanese culture, and Japanese movies and audiovisual culture, in slightly negative light. Among the reasons exposed by the students to justify these negative impressions counted, *inter alia*, negative/aggressive aspects of Japanese society such as suicide, inequality between men and women, and the presence of pornography in Japanese society.

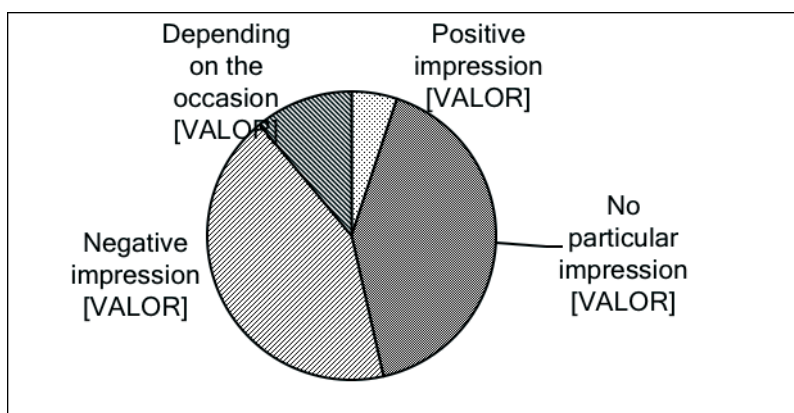


Figure 5: Positive/Negative impressions of Japan distributed by aspects. Chinese respondents.

On the other hand, the impressions expressed by Japanese students in relation to China leaned generally towards the more unfavorable side (see figure 6). At the same time, the responses given by the Japanese students also suggest that the media reports about China have a strong influence in shaping their opinions. For example, 83.1% of the Japanese respondents manifested a negative impression of Chinese cuisine and food items<sup>13</sup>. Among the reasons specified for this, there were various keywords about food safety issues, such as 'poisoned dumplings'<sup>14</sup>, 'dangerous' and 'dirty'. Similarly, 51.8% of students indicated a negative impression about China's economy, contrasting with 24.1% that had a positive impression –the same percentage of students that did not have a formed opinion. Among the reasons mentioned, there were the restrictive Chinese policies towards rare-earth exports, wealth inequality and the low quality of Chinese goods. In addition, in relation to Chinese politics, 74.7% of students manifested having a negative impression, contrasting with the mere 1.20% that said to have a positive image.

At the same time, it is also important to note that the number of Japanese students that opted for the ambiguous answer (neither) is substantially higher than in the sample of Chinese students, suggesting that in relation to many of the issues, the image of China is not particularly solid among Japanese youth. A similar conclusion was drawn by Ogawa and Ishimori in a similar research conducted among high-school students:

"When students do not have any previous knowledge, the image about China is very vague. In that case, students have formed their images through the (little) information seen on TV while seeing sensationalist and tendentious reports about incidents and conflicts between the two countries. When the information they are exposed to is limited and negative, students easily adopt negative impressions." (Ogawa & Ishimori, 2007, p. 40)

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<sup>13</sup> Note that the interpretation of this question contrasts with the one above (in figure 1) that prompted students to give keywords about China, in which Chinese cuisine was the most frequently mentioned keyword. By contrast, when questioned specifically about Chinese cuisine and food items, the negative aspects appeared to be more easily recalled.

<sup>14</sup> In 2008, there were about 80 cases of food poisoning in Japan after consuming dumplings imported from China. Later in 2010, the Chinese police claimed to have found that an employee in the Chinese factory had injected insecticide in the dumplings. The case became a major issue in Japanese media, causing major social alarm (McCurry, 2008).

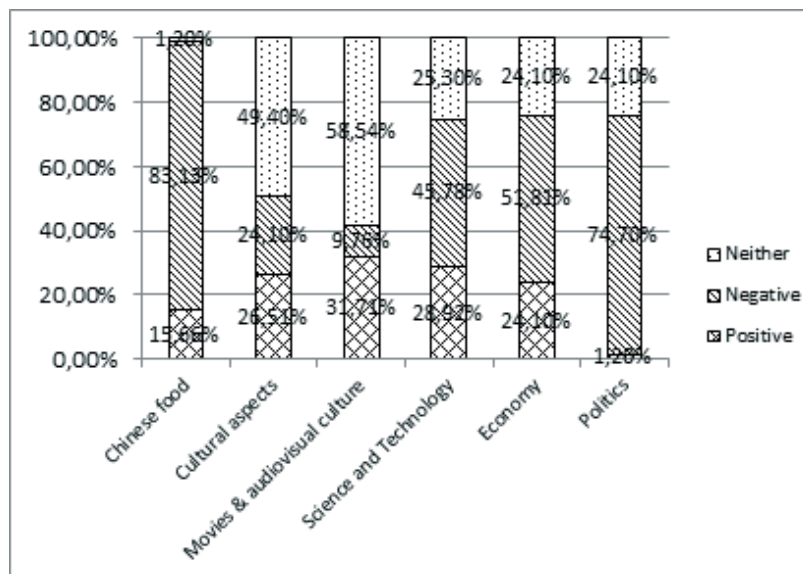


Figure 6: Positive/Negative impressions of China distributed by aspects. Japanese respondents.

Continuing on this aspect, the following part of the questionnaires was aimed at further understanding the reasons that motivated students' negative image of the other country's politics. Students that had marked having a negative impression of Chinese or Japanese politics in the previous question were prompted to give their reasons freely, without providing pre-determined multiple-choice options. The reasons given by students were later grouped by similarity into categories.

Among Japanese students (see figure 7), the reason mentioned with most frequency was the fact that China is a one-party system. Next in importance, students mentioned politics being a source of inequality, corruption, the lack of democracy, and the Chinese government's stand about the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Issues such as the lack of freedom, lack of transparency and accountability by the government, and the attitudes towards Japan were mentioned in repeated occasions.

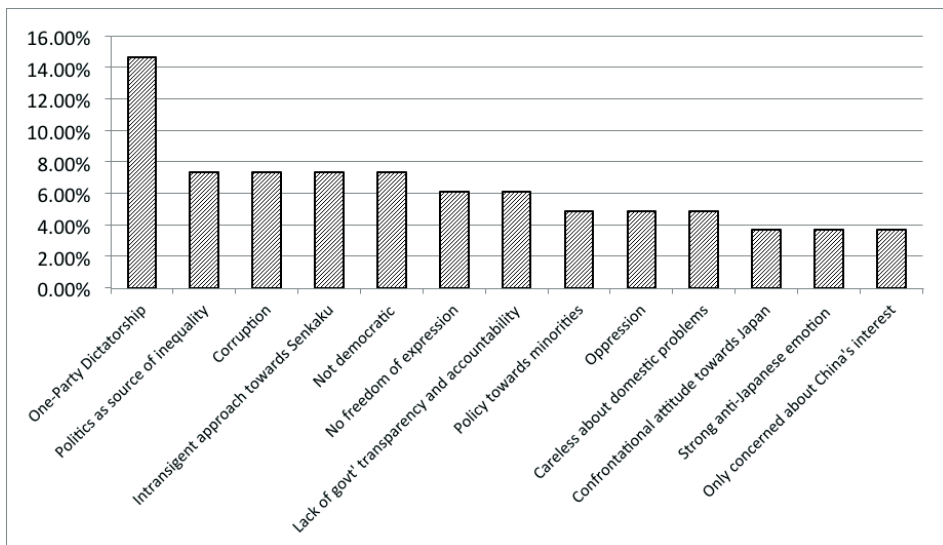


Figure 7: Reasons for negative impression about Chinese politics. Japanese sample.

Conversely, in the case of Chinese students (see figure 8); the reason most mentioned for having an unfavorable attitude towards Japanese politics was the attitude towards history, with a frequency of appearance of over 27%. Next, although with much lower percentage, Chinese students mentioned the Japanese attitude towards the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and militarism. Right-wing politics, the official visits to Yasukuni shrine and the policy towards China were also mentioned in repeated occasions. In addition, a reduced number of students mentioned issues such as the textbook controversy and the fact that they perceived Japan to be overly dependent on the US.

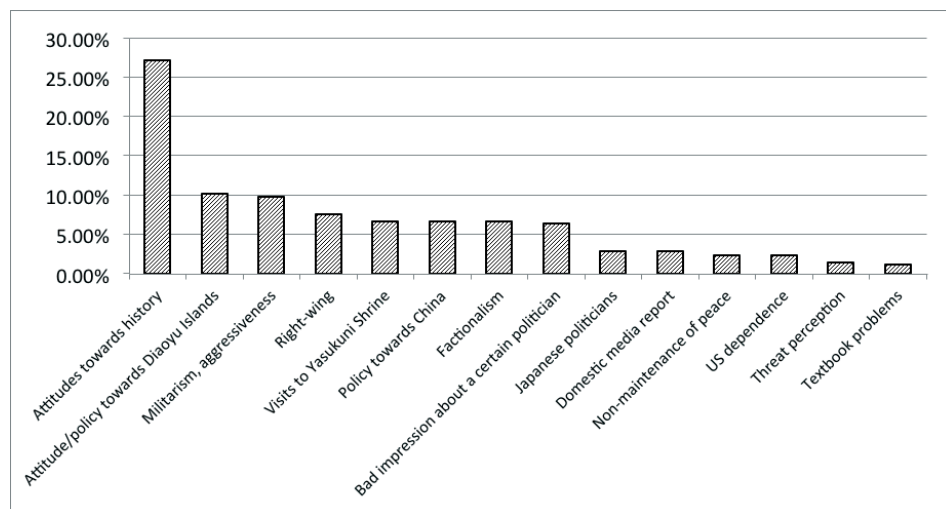


Figure 8: Reasons for disliking Japanese politics. Chinese sample.

An interesting fact is observable in both the Chinese and the Japanese samples, which further suggests the degree of influence that media in both countries has in shaping their perceptions of the outside world. A number of the expressions and words given by the students correspond literally with usual media wording in the two countries. In the case of Japanese students, expressions such as ‘one-party dictatorship’ (*ittou dokusai* 一党独裁), or ‘intransigent behavior’<sup>15</sup> (*oubouna koudou* 横暴な行動) can easily be found literally in Japanese news reports and websites. A few students also mentioned the fact that the Chinese government uses Japan as a scapegoat to lower its citizens’ attention on its domestic problems. Such expressions, together with other commonly repeated ones, e.g. Japan being a victim<sup>16</sup> of China due to the pollution and the confrontation about the Senkaku Islands<sup>17</sup>, are also commonly present in the discourse of Japanese media.

In the case of Chinese students, rather similar trends are observable. For instance, in reference to the history-related problems between China and Japan, up to 94 students used the expression that Japan is ‘not facing-up’ or ‘not recognizing its historical responsibilities’<sup>18</sup>, an expression which is very commonly used in CCTV reporting. Similarly, the expressions used by many students referring to Japan as having right-wing politicians (*youqing* 右倾)<sup>19</sup> and commenting about factionalism within Japanese political parties (*dangpai duili* 党

<sup>15</sup> Sometimes also ‘intransigent diplomacy’ (*oubouna gaikou* 横暴な外交).

<sup>16</sup> “China’s activities become harmful to Japan” (中国の動きは日本にとって不利なことが多い).

<sup>17</sup> “Japan is damaged due to the air pollution and the Senkaku Islands dispute” (尖閣諸島と空気汚染で日本に被害が来るから).

<sup>18</sup> Not recognizing/facing up to history (*bu zhengshi lishi* 不正視历史).

<sup>19</sup> “It seems evident that the country’s leadership is becoming more right-wing” (*lingdaoceng youqinghua mingxian* 领导层右倾化明显).



派对立), are also commonly found in the news reporting of major broadcasters, such as CCTV.

Hence, in both countries' cases it is possible to trace a line between media reports and the words and expressions students use to convey their perceptions. At the same time, this further clarifies the observation presented above, that among Japanese students, the image about China is somewhat fragile and blur. In this regard, despite influence from the media seems to exist, China does not appear to be a major issue of concern for a majority of students, while in the Chinese sample, students appear to be more concerned about political issues. Of course, this fact might be directly linkable to the importance that the central examination has in the upper stages of secondary education in China, as introduced above. As argued by Chen (2007), history education in China

"Only tells students the reasons of history's facts and the significance of its sequels, but little about their background and processes. Teaching history in this way does not encourage students to be analytical and critical about historical issues. It makes it easier for students to have narrow-minded and more dogmatic views."

### 3. Understanding the source of students' perceptions

The section presented below aimed at finding out, through self-reporting by the students, which where their primary sources of information about the other country. This question was presented in multiple-choice format, and students were prompted to name their three main sources of information. The charts below (figures 9 and 10) display the distribution of the most mentioned sources organized by whether they belong to media, education-related sources, audiovisuals and popular culture, literature, internet, direct experience or word-of-mouth.

In the case of Chinese students (see figure 9), the most mentioned source of information about Japan was CCTV News. The prime role that CCTV plays in China's information scene is very well illustrated by N. Sun, who, in particular reference to CCTV's 7pm News, wrote:

"It is the most widely known news broadcast program in China. It has the largest number of viewers, and it is the highest-rated TV program. As the main transmitter of China's propaganda system, its impact on the audience is subtle and immeasurable. It is the most symbolic of the 'ideological symbols'. Its reports about the outside world determine the tone and content of other domestic media news feeds" (Sun, 2012, p. 80).



In second place, ranking in frequency only slightly below CCTV news, students pointed out to history textbooks as a main source of knowledge about Japan. School education (besides textbooks) was mentioned by students approximately the same number of times as the internet as a source of information. However, Chinese TV series and movies, in which portrayals of the Second Sino-Japanese War are frequent, were mentioned slightly more frequently than school (besides textbooks) and the internet. At the same time, it is worthy to note the importance of the word-of-mouth in the case of Chinese students, who in most cases have heard wartime stories from their grandparents. Traditional printed press, on the other hand, was mentioned only by a very limited number of students, suggesting that newspapers such as the People's Daily do not appeal significantly to this age group.

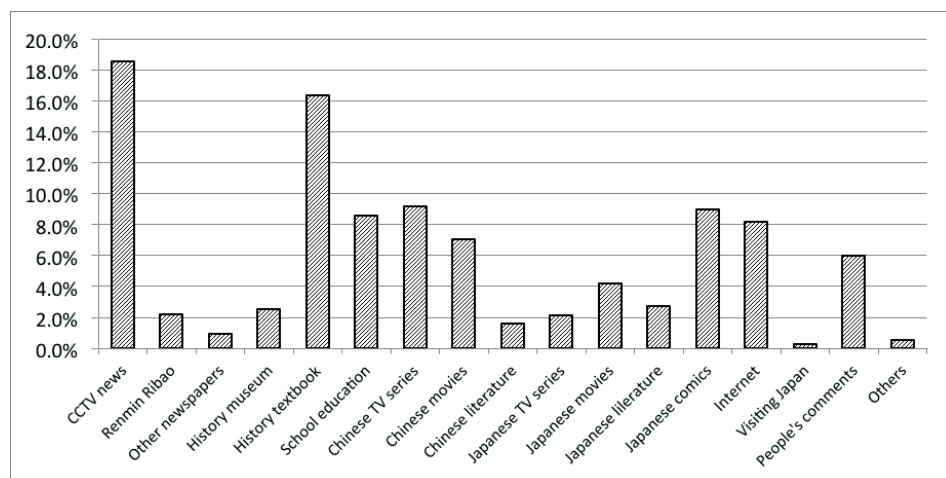


Figure 9: Sources of information about Japan. Chinese sample.

In the case of Japanese students (figure 10), the picture obtained does not differ dramatically from the previous case, although there are some noteworthy differences. TV news broadcasting was also the most frequently identified source by Japanese students, particularly from NHK, Japan's main public broadcaster. NHK appeared closely followed by internet sources, especially Yahoo News, Japan's most consulted website<sup>20</sup>. Contrasting with the Chinese responses, for Japanese students, school was third in rank of importance as a source of information about China, assigning approximately the same degree of relevance to textbooks and to other aspects of history education. This is an understandable response in a country that has a substantially higher degree of internet users, with 86.25% of its citizens using the internet regularly, than China, where this

<sup>20</sup> According to data of 10/02/2015. See <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/JP> for updated information.

number is only 42.3%<sup>21</sup>. Traditional printed press, in the case of Japanese students, was mentioned with slightly more frequency than in the Chinese sample. In this regard, it is important to note that newspapers remain a very popular source of information in Japan, and that the country hosts the three most circulated newspapers in the world<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, newspapers were mentioned in much lower frequency than television, school and the internet.

In addition, it is also worth noting that among all the students consulted in the two countries, only one of the Chinese students had direct experience in Japan by having visited the country, a fact that suggests that people-to-people exchanges between the two countries in this age group are scarce. Looking at the concrete numbers, the figures might seem at odds with this at first sight, since in 2014 there were about 81000 Chinese students in Japanese universities, and approximately 18000 Japanese students in Chinese institutions (Clavel, 2014). However, when contrasting these numbers with the nearly 2.9 million university students that Japan had in 2012<sup>23</sup> and the nearly 24.6 million that China had in 2013<sup>24</sup>, it becomes self-evident that the percentage of students having direct experience in the other country is very low. In addition, taking into account the important regional disparity that exists within the Chinese mainland, students who can afford study abroad experiences are most commonly found in the most prosperous urban areas.

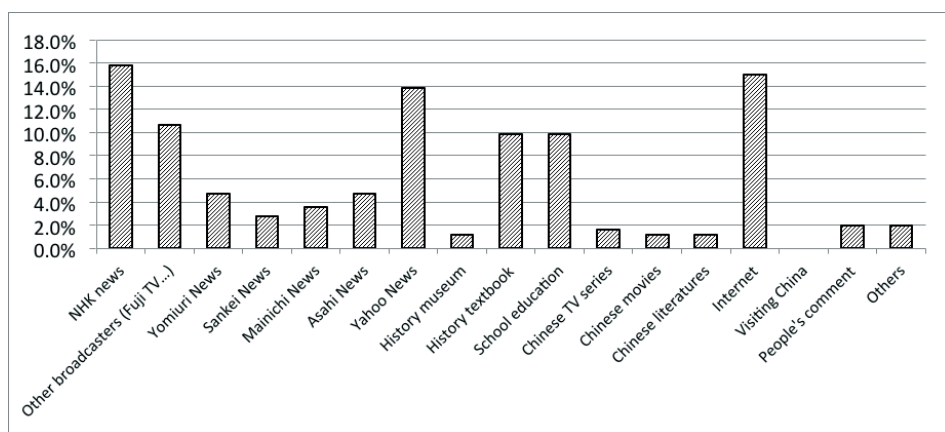


Figure 10: Source of information about China. Japanese sample.

<sup>21</sup> Data of 2013 (ITU, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> The Yomiuri Shimbun, the Asahi Shimbun and the Mainichi Shimbun (IFABC, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> According to the statistics of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (Monbukagakusho, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> According to the data of the Ministry of Education of the P.R.China (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2013).

## Conclusion

Through the results from the questionnaires presented, we could observe that the perceptions and images that students have of their neighbor country and their difficult relations are much more complex than initially expected.

At first sight, it may seem that Chinese students focus their attention on the conflictive aspects of the bilateral relations much more than their Japanese counterparts. This was initially revealed by prompting students to write three keywords about the other country, without any hint, and when enquiring them directly about whether and why they have negative impressions about Japanese politics. In this regard, the questionnaires suggested that Chinese students indeed give more importance to issues such as territory or history. As it has been seen, this can be linkable both to the particularities of the exam-oriented high school curriculum in mainland China, and also to the relevance that these issues have in the State-run media. However, when prompted directly about their negative or positive impressions about certain issues related to Japan, as seen in figure 5, Chinese students appear more prone to manifest positive attitudes about non-political aspects. Conversely, with the initial gathering of data through keywords and their positive or negative impression about China, Japanese students appeared to be less focused on conflictive aspects. However, when directly enquiring them about the different aspects about China, the frequency with which students manifested negative impressions was higher than in the Chinese sample. At the same time, the number of Japanese students that chose the ambiguous options was larger than among their Chinese counterparts.

Which picture does this present to us? The perceptions that students have are complex. Conflictive issues do have a degree of importance, but they do not appear to cope the students' entire mental image of the other country. From the picture obtained through this questionnaire, an important new challenge faced by the young generation in regards to Sino-Japanese reconciliation appears to be one of asymmetry, rather than one of antagonistic understandings. That is, rather than manifesting opposite views about the traditional conflictive issues in the bilateral relations, young students appear to attach different degrees importance to different aspects in each of the countries. At the same time, the level of factual knowledge about the other country appears to be shallow. In addition, people-to-people contacts between the two samples proved extremely rare; something that does not favor a more sophisticated mutual understanding between the two nations.

Given the scarcity of works in Sino-Japanese relations focusing on young people, further research on this area remains necessary. From the experience with these questionnaires, it is also relevant to point out the value of conducting research allowing respondents to articulate freely their own perceptions. For example, in Genron's Japan-China poll, conducted entirely through multiple-choice, ODA appears to have a significant weight in Chinese people when

prompted what words come to their mind when thinking of Japan. However, without providing selectable choices, only one student remembered ODA as a keyword about Japan. Hence, conducting further research in this way may facilitate a more accurate understanding of what the younger generations perceive.

This article opened by posing the question whether the young generations in China and Japan were more prepared than their grandparents and parents to achieve reconciliation between the two countries. Although it is too early to give a proper answer to this difficult issue, students' responses seem to suggest that, with generational change, new challenges to reconciliation will appear, as it may become increasingly difficult for the two communities to find a common understanding of conflicting issues.

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