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Chinese Public Perceptions of Japan and the United States in the Post–Cold War Era

FAN SHIMING

THE WORD FOR “perception” in Chinese literally means “observation and interpretation” or “interpretation through observation.” Perception is thus considered to be the result of the subjective or psychological cognition of the observer rather than the objective reflection of the object that is being observed.

In his famous book, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Robert Jervis introduces the cognitive variable to explain state behavior by saying, “It is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision makers’ beliefs about the world and their images of others. That is to say, these cognitions are part of the proximate cause of the relevant behavior.”¹ While Jervis focuses mainly on the perceptions held by foreign-policy makers, the public’s perceptions of foreign countries also matter in understanding policy choices and international relations. Mainstream public opinion might not necessarily be shared or accepted by decision makers, but it sets up the atmosphere for policymaking, delivers messages to foreign countries, and can be used by both domestic and foreign politicians to justify their choices. Moreover, in many instances, the people’s understanding of international relations is based more on the perceived world rather than the real one.

There is no single, commonly shared perception of either Japan or the United States among the Chinese public. Perceptions vary depending on individuals’ socioeconomic or peer group, the topic, and the particular point in time, and thus are always diverse and dynamic. One can, however,

identify some broadly shared opinions as being representative perceptions of a certain country within a given period of time. This chapter tries to present and characterize Chinese public perceptions of Japan and the United States in the post-Cold War era and analyzes the reasons behind these views.

CONCEPTUALIZING CHINESE PERCEPTIONS OF JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

Chinese Views of America: Ambivalence, Suspicion, and Diversity

Prior to China's reform and opening policy, the United States was regarded by the Chinese people as a declining, warlike "paper tiger" whose working people lived in a state of misery, or what is called in Chinese "deep water and hot fire."² Since the early 1980s, however, the image of America has changed greatly in China, and it has come to be viewed as a source of both fear and fortune. As a popular Chinese TV drama says, "If you love a person, send him to New York City, for it's heaven; if you hate him, send him to New York City, for it's hell."³ The United States has long been regarded in China as a paradoxical mixture: it is the most developed, free, and powerful country, but at the same time is a peremptory, belligerent, impervious hegemon. The post-Cold War Chinese perception of America has reinforced that "beautiful imperialist" image.⁴ At least since the mid-1990s, surveys have repeatedly shown that the Chinese public views the United States as the most impressive foreign country for its "richness," "advancement," and "power," as well as for its abuse of military force against others.⁵ It is perceived by many Chinese people as the most popular destination for overseas study (see table 1), a very attractive land for emigration (see table 2), and the most important partner for the Chinese economy (see fig. 1).⁶ At the same time, however, it is also perceived as the country that most interferes in Chinese domestic affairs (see table 3), is most threatening to China's security (see tables 4 and 5), and is the most arbitrary bully in world politics.⁷

This "love-hate" complex has turned into a strong suspicion of American intentions toward China, especially since the mid-1990s, when China rose to the status of a real power and the United States became the only superpower. Recognizing that the US economic and military advantage continues to grow, many Chinese people are increasingly concerned about the possibility that the purpose and practice of American power, both regionally and globally, might be detrimental to China. Based on the Taiwan Strait crisis

Table 1. Most desirable destinations for overseas study, 2004

Expected destination for study abroad	Percentage of respondents
US	22.1
Australia	19.6
UK	12.5
France	10.5
Japan	7.0
Germany	4.7
ASEAN	2.2

SOURCE: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, "Survey on the World in the Eyes of Urban Chinese People," 2004.

Table 2. Expectations of emigration to United States (percent), 2007

Country	Life for emigrants to the US is seen as . . .			
	Better	Worse	Neither	Don't know*
Morocco	52	7	17	24
China	45	14	9	32
Argentina	43	12	24	20
Jordan	37	22	29	12

SOURCE: Pew Research Center, "Global Unease with Major World Powers," June 27, 2007, 28.

* Includes those who say they do not know anyone who has moved to the United States.

Table 3. Reasons cited by Chinese who said they dislike the United States, 1998

Reason for disliking the US	Percentage
Criticism of China's human rights	26.9
US international behaviors	26.1
US interference on Taiwan	25.2
US response to China's re-entry into WTO	10.9
Criticism on China's birth control	3.4
Other	6.7
Not sure	0.8

SOURCE: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, 1998.

Table 4. Chinese perceptions of the threat from the United States and Japan (percent), 2001

Country	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Statement 1: Each of the countries listed below, in your view, has hostile intentions against our country's vital interests and security.				
US	4.7	20.9	54.0	20.3
Japan	5.9	26.7	52.9	13.9
Statement 2: Each of the countries listed below, in your view, has the military and/or economic power that poses a real and immediate danger to our country.				
US	1.8	9.2	69.4	15.2
Japan	1.8	20.7	62.7	7.3

SOURCE: Adapted from Chen Jie, "Urban Chinese Perceptions of Threats from the United States and Japan," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2001).

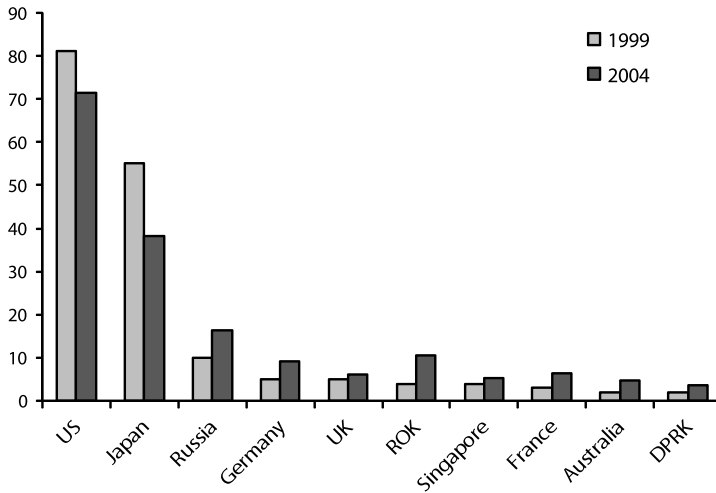
Table 5. Countries perceived by Chinese people as unfriendly toward China (percent), 1999 and 2004

1999		2004	
US	70.3	US	74.4
Japan	52.6	Japan	66.3
Indonesia	16.3	India	9.2
India	15.4	Vietnam	6.0
Vietnam	6.1	Indonesia	4.9
UK	5.9	UK	4.8
Russia	2.0	DPRK	2.8
DPRK	2.0	Singapore	2.3
ROK	1.4	Russia	2.3
Australia	1.4	ROK	1.6

SOURCE: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, "Survey on the World in the Eyes of Urban Chinese People," 1999 and 2004.

of 1996, the reinforcement of the US-Japan alliance in 1997, the Belgrade embassy bombing in 1999, the EP-3 spy plane incident in 2001, and many other incidents, the United States is seen as intending to make trouble on the Taiwan issue, to restrain the greater role that China deserves in world affairs, to engage China on terms that favor US dominance, and even to contain China.⁸ The tone that was set in China in the late 1980s—that China should learn from and cooperate with the United States—encountered

Figure 1. Countries perceived by Chinese as China's most important economic partners, 1999 and 2004 (percent)



SOURCE: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, "Survey on the World in the Eyes of Urban Chinese People," 1999 and 2004.

criticism and challenges from emerging nationalist sentiment. Since 9/11, as Washington has clearly focused on an antiterrorism campaign, Chinese suspicions have not been relieved much. As one top Chinese international relations scholar observes, popular suspicions have gone beyond bilateral, conventional problems to more global, nontraditional issues like "financial security, energy procurement, environmental protection, climate change, the trade balance, intellectual property rights, product quality and safety, and so on" that are more relevant to China's domestic agenda.⁹ Some are wondering if the United States—or at least certain hostile American groups such as the so-called "Blue Team" in the US Congress—is trying to use new means to circumscribe China's emergence. A best-selling book titled *Currency Wars* (Huobi zhanzheng) shows the typical anxiety in recent years that Wall Street is conspiring to trap and ruin the Chinese economy.

A group of intellectuals who are labeled the "New Leftists" echo the popular worries about the United States from another perspective. They identify capitalism and globalization as the major sources of problems in post-Cold War China and hegemonic America as the source of international instability. They appeal for more state intervention, more social and economic equality, and even a reconfirmation of some pre-reform policies in China, while questioning China's continuous marketization and

integration into the world system. They look for remedies from Western critical thinking like the Frankfurt School, dependency theory, Orientalism, or postmodernism. Some New Leftists covertly showed their sympathies with the 9/11 attackers while openly opposing the American War in Iraq in 2003.¹⁰ Interestingly, prominent members of the New Leftist School were educated in US universities, and some even call themselves New Deal liberals.¹¹ It is difficult to say how much New Leftist advocacy has influenced policy, especially foreign policy, but the popularity of this school cannot be neglected when China faces complex social and economic problems, and so the pressure it is placing on policymaking is apparent.

Despite the suspicions and challenges that exist, mainstream Chinese political elites have been insisting since the mid-1990s that China is facing “the best international environment” since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which can be interpreted as implying that there is no imminent menace coming from the major powers, especially not from the United States. They avoid using words like “strategic competitor,” “adversary,” or “enemy” to define the United States and instead try to promote such concepts as “strategic partner” or “stakeholder” in public statements to stress the necessity and possibility of bilateral cooperation. While realists support China-US cooperation based on their assessment of the power balance between the two, according to which the United States is still unchallengeable (see table 6), constructivists also support bilateral cooperation since mutual trust is only produced through communication. For those who believe that the sources of problems in China are still the lack of a mature market and the lack of rule of law—both of which originated with the old Chinese system—the New Leftists’ charges regarding marketization and American dominance simply distract from an investigation into the domestic roots of the issues. They believe that

Table 6. Perceptions of the global balance of power, by country (percent), 2006

	China will replace US as dominant power in...				
	10 years	20 years	50 years	Will not replace	Don't know
India	32	24	9	24	12
US	11	22	10	47	9
Russia	10	17	13	45	15
Japan	7	19	13	59	3
China	4	13	20	34	29

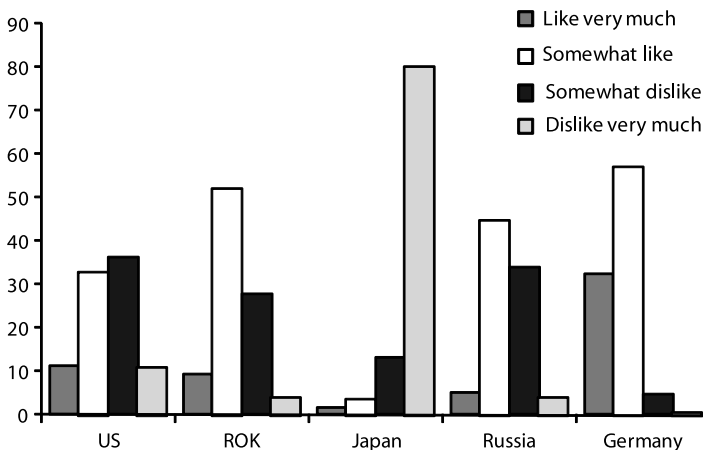
SOURCE: Pew Research Center, “Publics of Asian Powers Hold Negative Views of One Another,” September 21, 2006.

the integration of China into the Western-dominated (or US-dominated) system has generally favored China's development. The overall Chinese attitude toward America thus remains diverse and ambivalent.

Chinese Views of Japan: Retrospection, Coldness, and Emotion

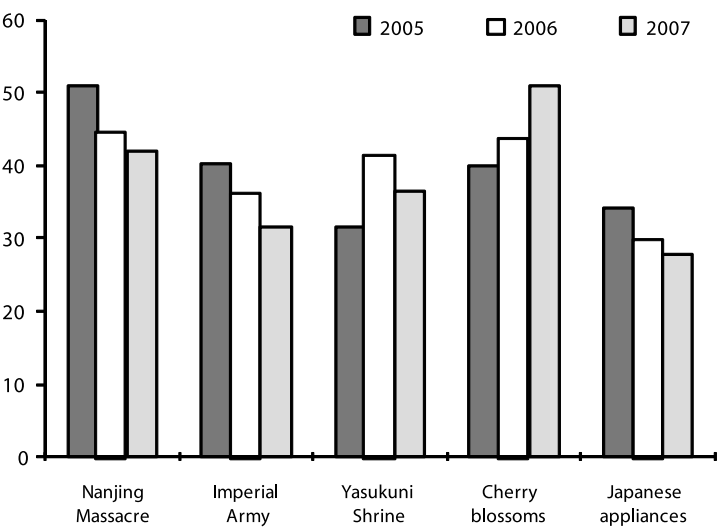
In contrast to their post-Cold War ambivalence toward the United States, the Chinese public's perception of Japan can only be described as having turned increasingly negative (see fig. 2). The image of Japan as a "modern, friendly neighbor" that was formed in the 1980s quickly gave way to that of a remorseless, vexatious, and stubborn "small man" that is still defined in the early 21st century by its wartime history of aggression against China.¹² An array of surveys have shown that unfavorable ratings of Japan did not stop rising in China until 2006. When people are asked what they think of first when they think of Japan, responses like the Nanjing Massacre, the Yasukuni Shrine, and the old Japanese army rank high (see fig. 3). The Chinese public widely believes that Japanese society is still overwhelmed by militarism and nationalism, and they fail to recognize its democracy, peace-oriented reforms, and international contributions (see fig. 4). Even while acknowledging that the Japanese people are polite, diligent, and community oriented, the Chinese public generally perceives them as warlike, cruel, selfish, and untrustworthy.

Figure 2. Internet user attitudes toward foreign countries, 2003 (percent)



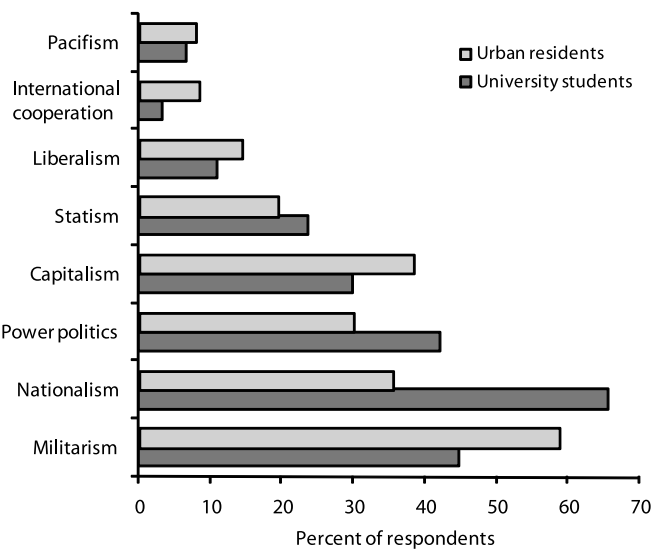
SOURCE: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, 2003.

Figure 3. Images associated with Japan among Chinese students, 2005–2007 (percent)



SOURCE: Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, 2005, 2006, and 2007.

Figure 4. Chinese perceptions of prevailing political ideology in Japan, 2007

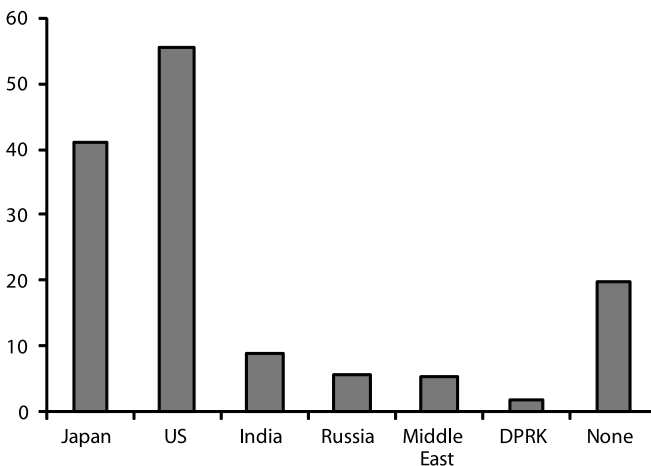


SOURCE: Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, 2007

Nor do the Japanese receive much positive attention when the Chinese public thinks of Japan's power and its international position. For most Chinese people, Japan is seen as struggling not only with economic stagnation, political reform, and domestic aging but also with its "failed Asian diplomacy."¹³ The strengthening and reorientation of the Japan-US alliance is first and foremost aimed at China. Japan's efforts to play a larger role in peacekeeping operations are just a reflection of its intention to militarize, and its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council without having correctly accepted its past wrongdoing is perceived as objectionable. In the eyes of the Chinese public, Japan is moving toward the right and causing alarm. While Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine hurt Chinese feelings, Japan's energy diplomacy in Russia just as intentionally hurt Chinese interests. Accordingly, Japan has followed the United States in polls as the number two threat to China's security (see fig. 5).¹⁴

These sentiments gave rise to several anti-Japan incidents in 2004 and 2005. Still, there is at least a minimum amount of pragmatism that prevents the Chinese public from identifying Japan as "the enemy." The importance of China-Japan ties in Chinese foreign relations is recognized by a majority of people as being second only to those between China and the United States; most people support cooperation with Japan on regional affairs, especially on nontraditional issues; more often than not, bilateral economic relations are regarded as a win-win game instead of a zero-sum one; and extremist

Figure 5. Threats to China's security as perceived by the Chinese, 2007 (percent)



Source: Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, 2007.

suggestions like boycotting Japanese goods have been rejected by young people.¹⁵ The “diplomatic revolution” argument raised by a few Chinese scholars did not win public or political support but helped to deepen the understanding of China-Japan relations. Thanks to the way that Beijing and Tokyo have addressed the difficult challenge of rebuilding ties since the end of the Koizumi administration, the Chinese public’s perception of Japan has ceased its downward slide, but it remains in a fragile position.

Comprehending Chinese Perceptions of Japan and the United States

Chinese perceptions of the United States and Japan naturally do not spring from thin air. Instead, a “5-E” formula can be employed to interpret the sources of Chinese public attitudes toward these two countries:

$$\text{Perception} = \text{Egocentrism} + \text{Events} + \text{Emotion} + \text{Education} + \text{Experience}$$

Egocentrism Egocentrism here means that the public’s perceptions of foreign countries are mainly a reflection of the values, memories, confidence, and orientation of its own country, instead of the objective reflections of the outside world. Existing studies have found that individuals’ attitudes toward specific foreign countries and foreign policies are significantly influenced by subjective “predispositions that affect the interpretation of evidence.”¹⁶ Egocentrism can also be supported by Professor Jervis’s argument on cognitive consistency, in which people tend to interpret information using their existing frame of reference and refuse those facts that are seen as inconsistent.

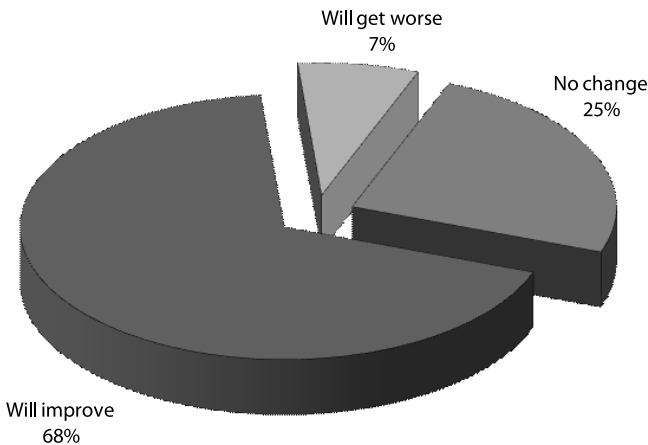
In the case of Chinese perceptions of the United States and Japan, egocentrism is almost self-evident. The Chinese perception of US hegemony (*badao*) apparently comes from its own humiliating history, its traditional affection for benevolent rule (*wangdao*), and its adherence to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.¹⁷ Most Chinese refuse to accept Japan as a democratic and peaceful country mostly because of their memories and stereotypes rather than reality. Egocentrism can also explain why the US image improved in China when American popularity was declining in most other parts of the world (see table 7), since China-US relations were seen in China as being satisfactory.¹⁸ Also, the reason why most Chinese are optimistic about China-US relations and their future (see fig. 6) may be closely connected with the country’s own rising confidence (see table 8). To understand elite support for a modest, cooperative Chinese diplomacy,

Table 7. Public image of the United States, by country, 2002–2006

	Percentage whose view of the United States is “very/somewhat favorable”				
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
China	—	—	—	43	49
Great Britain	83	80	73	70	69
France	71	58	53	64	65
Germany	70	67	68	65	66
Russia	67	65	64	61	57
Indonesia	65	56	—	46	36
Turkey	31	32	32	23	17

Source: Pew Research Center, “America’s Image Slips, but Allies Share US Concerns over Iran, Hamas,” June 13, 2006.

Figure 6. Chinese expectations for China-US relations, 2004 (percent)



Source: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, “Survey on the World in the Eyes of Urban Chinese People,” 2004.

egocentrism matters too, since in the past 30 years there has been a basic consensus in China that its international strategy should be firmly oriented toward domestic development.

Events “Events” refers to those historical and contemporary incidents or prominent events that provide analogies or a basis for reasoning in public perceptions. Of course, revolution and war usually shape collective

Table 8. Shift in domestic confidence levels, by nation (percent), 2003–2006

	Respondents who are satisfied with the state of their own nation			
	2003	2004	2005	2006
China	48*	—	72	81
Jordan	42	59	69	53
Great Britain	46	38	44	35
Russia	28	26	23	32
India	9*	—	41	31
United States	50	39	39	29
Japan	12*	—	—	27
France	44	32	28	20

Source: Pew Research Center, “America’s Image Slips, but Allies Share US Concerns over Iran, Hamas,” June 13, 2006.

*Summer 2002

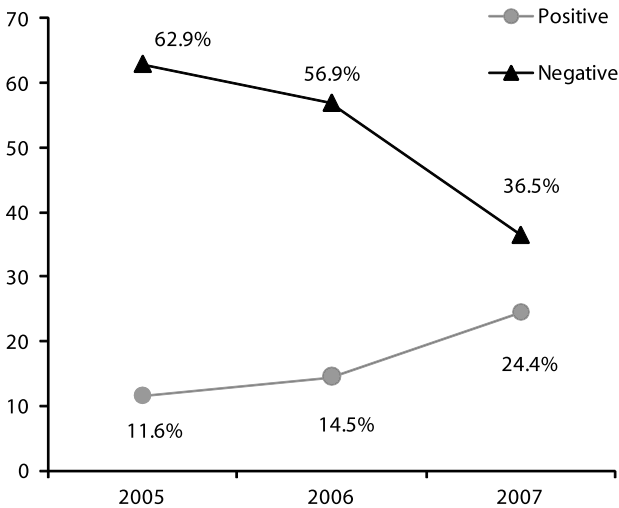
perceptions in terms of how one nation sees another, but unexpected incidents can also come into play at times.

When we look at Chinese perceptions of the United States and Japan in the post–Cold War era, we find that fluctuations are linked to events in China-US and China-Japan relations. Whenever negative events happen, public perceptions of the United States or Japan turn sharply unfavorable. The 2001 EP-3 spy plane incident aroused strong Chinese criticism of US hegemony, while Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine apparently made the shrine into a symbol of Japan in China. General impressions of Japan in China improved remarkably in 2007 after Prime Minister Abe suspended prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine and the two premiers visited each other’s capital (see fig. 7).

Event-driven perceptions may fluctuate, but they are not transient. Events can activate underlying memories and emotions that make up the framework in which perceptions are formed. For example, when we look back on China-US relations in the 1990s, events can be linked together in the public’s mind to empirically prove existing arguments for US conspiracies, hostility, or hard-line policies targeted at China. Events may also arouse emotions, which can further complicate matters.

Emotion Cognition is balanced by emotion. Emotions are sentiments that may distort perceptions of values and events. Under most circumstances, when we say somebody is “emotional,” we consider it to be a temporary release of a strong feeling that keeps that person at a distance from “normal”

Figure 7. Chinese impressions of Japan, 2005–2007 (percent)



SOURCE: Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, 2005, 2006, and 2007.

feelings and reality. Emotions sometimes affect Chinese perceptions of Japan and America. In the case of Japan, for example, although Japan became China's largest trading partner in 2002 and Chinese-Japanese economic relations have been crucial to China's development, a 2003 poll found that respondents regarded Japan as just the fifth most important actor for China, following the United States, ASEAN, Russia, and Germany. Researchers believe that emotion played a role in those results.¹⁹ Another survey showed that the more people like Japan, the more significant they deem the bilateral relationship to be (see table 9) and the more probable it is that they will buy Japanese products.²⁰ The emotion factor shows a stronger influence over Chinese buying behavior toward Japanese products as compared with American and Korean products.

Emotion sometimes adds volatility to situations, but it cannot dominate people's perceptions and behavior, especially when it goes against basic reason and pragmatism. Studies have also shown that many people still purchase American and Japanese products even if they hold unfavorable opinions of those countries. As one Chinese news report noted in 2004, the newly rich people in China "hate Japan but still love Japanese products."²¹

Education The education that respondents receive is also relevant to their perception of foreign countries. Education does not necessarily mean

Table 9. Emotion and perception of Sino-Japanese relations (percent), 2003

Issue	Perception	Netizens*, by opinion of Japan			
		Like Japan	Do not like Japan	No opinion	Overall
Importance of China-Japan relations	Important	91.3	50.7	81.2	53.4
	Not important	6.7	43.3	9.6	40.8
	Don't know	1.5	6.0	9.2	5.8
Evaluation of present bilateral relations	Good	16.5	15.3	27.5	15.4
	Bad	48.0	72.2	54.1	70.6
	Don't know	35.6	12.7	18.3	14.0
Expectations of future relations	Optimistic	14.5	16.0	28.8	16.1
	Pessimistic	37.4	76.0	45.4	73.4
	Don't know	48.1	8.1	25.8	10.5

SOURCE: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, 2003

* "Netizen" refers to an individual who is actively involved in online communities.

school learning. Education from family, school, and other sources not only shapes individual value systems but also provides the background knowledge against which people gauge issues. Preliminary research by this author shows that, although Chinese middle school textbooks emphasize patriotism, national identity, and sovereignty in history and ethics teaching, information directly related to Japan and the United States is still limited. Popular publications, TV dramas, and films may have a greater level of psychological permeation, but that is difficult to measure. Most Chinese appear to rely heavily on the Chinese media for information about Japan rather than on textbooks (see table 10), and young people rely on the Internet in particular. Discussions via "new media" played a central role in the understanding of, and actions against, Japan in the spring of 2005.²²

Alastair Iain Johnston has noted that different educational levels affect Chinese public perceptions of the United States and concluded that better education generally produces warmer feelings toward the United States among the Chinese public and lessens the sense of threat.²³ A Peking University–China Daily–Genron NPO joint survey conducted in 2005 also found that students in different disciplines or majors held discrepant opinions on certain sets of issues. For instance, students studying the Japanese language were less negative in their general perceptions of Japan than those who had never learned Japanese; people with science backgrounds in Chinese universities seemed more critical of Japan and more radical about China's approach to bilateral relations than those studying

Table 10. Sources of information about Japan in China (percent), 2007

Source	College students	Urban residents
Chinese news media	90.2	87.8
Chinese films and TV dramas	36.6	37.2
Japanese films and TV dramas	24.6	9.6
Other people's comments	20.3	11.2
Family, friends	10.6	11.9
Chinese governmental information	10.5	10.9
Personal experience	6.7	5.8
Chinese books (including textbooks)	5.6	40.6
Japanese books	3.9	3.9
Japanese news media	3.8	8.8
Other	1.5	0.1

SOURCE: Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, 2007.

NOTE: Respondents could select more than one response.

the humanities; and students of international studies were more inclined toward cooperative and pragmatic ways of dealing with Japan (see tables 11, 12, and 13).

Experience Experience provides an important supplement to—or can even be a decisive factor in—people's perceptions of other countries or cultures. Experience can sometimes adjust misperceptions caused by egocentrism, emotion, events, or education. Experience provides direct and real raw data upon which perceptions can be based. In the case of China-Japan relations, studies reveal that people who have been to Japan have a more positive perception of Japan than those who have not.²⁴ Most Chinese people, however, have not been to Japan—less than 4 percent of students and 2 percent of urban dwellers in China have visited Japan, and 62.3 percent of students and 92.4 percent of city dwellers do not have any Japanese acquaintances. More than 90 percent of Chinese people base their understanding of Japan mainly on Chinese newspapers and television.²⁵

Interviews also confirm that students change their impressions of Japan after visiting that country.²⁶ Similarly, in a study on public perceptions of China-US relations, a number of differences were found between those who had overseas experience and those who did not (see table 14).²⁷

Table 11. General impressions of Japan among Chinese university students (percent), 2007

	Students studying Japanese	Students not studying Japanese	All students
Very good	0	0.5	0.5
Relatively good	16.7	4.5	4.8
Not good or bad	53.3	34.9	35.4
Relatively bad	23.3	37	36.6
Very bad	3.3	21.8	21.3
Don't know	3.3	1.3	1.3

SOURCE: Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, 2007.

Table 12. University student attitudes toward Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council (percent by major), 2005

	Respondent's field of study				All students
	Humanities	Social sciences*	Science	International studies	
Support	1.2	1.1	0.9	0	0.8
Against	66.8	71.7	83.4	52.4	71.1
Conditionally support	27.5	26.7	13.5	46.0	25.8
None of our business	0.8	0	0.4	0.4	0.4
Don't know	3.6	0.5	1.8	1.2	1.9

SOURCE: Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, 2005.

* Does not include international studies

Table 13. University student attitudes toward the Diaoyu [Senkaku] Islands dispute (percent by major), 2005

	Respondent's field of study				All students
	Humanities	Social sciences*	Science	International studies	
Should land on the island	21.5	22.6	31.4	16.9	24.6
Should shelve the dispute	31.2	34.4	27.6	56	35.8
Should apply international law	43.7	38.7	35.7	25	35.6
Should tolerate proactive measures by Japan	1.6	3.2	3.6	1.2	2.6
Don't know	2.0	1.1	1.8	0.8	1.5

SOURCE: Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, 2005.

* Does not include international studies

COMPARING CHINESE PERCEPTIONS OF JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

When comparing what the Chinese people like or dislike about the United States and Japan and why, some interesting observations emerge.²⁸ First, most Chinese dislike the United States mainly because of its foreign policies and international behavior—especially toward China—and not because of its domestic values, culture, institutions, or political leadership.²⁹ This has been repeatedly discussed in Chinese writings and proven through empirical studies.³⁰ In a poll taken in 2001, when most people were very critical of American foreign policy, 66 percent of the respondents gave favorable ratings to the general US domestic situation.³¹ In short, what the Chinese dislike about the United States is its arbitrary, condescending, interfering, and hegemonic international behavior rather than its internal democracy, freedom, or economic and scientific achievement. However, when it comes to Japan, the Chinese show little admiration for its values,

Table 14. Impact of experience on perceptions among Chinese people, 2001

Do you agree that . . .	People with interna- tional experience		People without interna- tional experience	
	response	%	response	%
. . . US hegemony threatens world peace?	yes	35.1	yes	51.2
	(92.8 percent responded yes among those who had visited the US)			
. . . your general impression of the US is good?	yes	82.5	yes	62.6
. . . American people are friendly to the Chinese people, but the US government is unfriendly?	no	56.7	yes	57.7
. . . fair but not accurate?	yes	47.4	yes	31.2
. . . US media coverage of China is . . .				
. . . not fair and not accurate?	yes	36.1	yes	46.6
. . . the embassy bombing was caused by wrong intelligence?	yes	9.3	yes	4.4
	absolutely not	59.8	absolutely not	80.2
	(21.4 percent responded yes among those who had visited the US)			

Source: Yu Xunda, Chen Xudong, and Zhu Jiping, "Zhongmei guang: gaizi minzhong de kanfa" [China-US relations—perceptions from the public], in *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* [World economics and politics], no. 6 (2001).

culture, or institutions. What the Chinese appreciate about Japan is mostly practical things, such as home appliances, and the spirit behind them, such as seriousness, diligence, and teamwork. What the Chinese dislike most about Japan is of course its attitude toward history, which is deeply rooted in Japanese values and culture. The history dispute strongly overshadows the Chinese people's understanding of contemporary Japan.

Second, there is also a difference in the intensity and breadth of people's like or dislike of the United States and Japan. Anti-American sentiments, though sometimes strong and violent, are more event driven and can fluctuate with specific occurrences. Once an incident has passed, emotions fade, and China-US relations seem to improve overnight. Anti-Japanese sentiments, however, seem more persistent and ingrained, although they are often aggravated by incidents as well. Events trigger emotions, and those emotions reinforce stereotypes and transcend the events themselves. So China-Japan relations often seem to deteriorate overnight. Moreover, anti-Americanism in China is more directed at the US government and not at the American people, whereas anti-Japanese sentiments are very easily extended from individual leaders or the government to the people or the nation as a whole. As Chen Shengluo notes, people in China usually call those who are fond of the United States "pro-America," but they call those who are fond of Japan "national traitors," a word much more negative and intolerable in Chinese political culture.³²

Third, the nature of anti-Americanism and anti-Japanese feelings differs. China-US confrontation is perceived in China more as a power struggle in which realism is employed. Compromise is accepted by the public mostly because of the power balance between the two countries. Ideological competition exists more between the two governments and less among the people of the two countries. China-Japan disputes, however, are perceived more through a moral lens. It is not just about power but about "who is right and who is wrong, who is good and who is evil."³³ The moral conflict exists not only between the two governments but also between the two peoples. Thus it is less likely that the Chinese public will tolerate any Japanese behavior that is seen as incorrect, such as textbook revisions or the Yasukuni Shrine visits, which reflect Japanese values about history and beyond.

In Chinese perceptions of both the United States and Japan, we see possible common psychological deviations, as mentioned by Robert Jervis: (1) perception of planning—incidents like the embassy bombing and the EP-3 spy plane incident, viewed together with policies on human rights, currency, and other issues, tend to be seen as evidence of scheming or conspiracies

against China's rise rather than as accidents or confusion; (2) perception of unity—there is a tendency to interpret the attitudes of individual Japanese toward history as the dominant or even unanimous position in Japan, without recognizing the existence of any plurality or diversity in that nation; (3) wishful thinking—there is a tendency to base perceptions on one's own expectations and fears, which are the result of historical memories, instead of on reason and reality, which creates, for instance, the image of present-day Japan as a militarist state; and (4) cognitive distortion or dissonance—contradictory images of America exist among the Chinese people, and even within individual Chinese people, and there is a lack of balance between the image of the warlike, cruel, selfish, untrustworthy Japanese and that of a polite, serious, community-minded people.³⁴

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chinese public's knowledge of the United States and Japan is still indirect, superficial, and fragmented, and is naturally based on Chinese values, experiences, social context, and a tendency to be inward looking. This way of thinking is understandable, but it needs to be improved.

More than a few wise people have appealed for Chinese public perceptions of Japan and the United States to be more comprehensive, deep, and rational. A greater focus on the internal political, social, and cultural factors of the two countries is recommended. For instance, some Chinese scholars suggest that religion in the United States should not be neglected when people attempt to understand America, including its international behavior.³⁵ Repeated calls have also been made for a more balanced and less emotional perception of Japan. One Chinese writer, for example, argues that the image of declining Japanese power is not accurate if one considers the broader framework with a cool head.³⁶

This chapter has applied a 5-E formula to interpret Chinese perceptions of the United States and Japan. The first E, egocentrism, reminds us how people's perceptions tend to reflect their own situations; the second E, events, helps explain the fluctuations in public perceptions of the two countries; the third E, emotion, plays an important role in creating misperceptions and distortions; the fourth E, education, is especially meaningful in understanding differences; and the final E, experience, may result in adjustments that produce a more balanced and constructive perception.

Public perceptions of the United States and Japan should be seriously considered against the backdrop of expanding public participation in

policy discussions in China. Never in the history of the PRC has the Chinese government paid as much attention to public voices or feelings in its decision making as it does today. But this trend in China should only continue if the public demonstrates informed, balanced, and rational thinking. There is both a dark side and a bright side when public opinion plays a function in decision making. The dark side, as discussed by Taylor Fravel in this volume in relation to the Diaoyu [Senkaku] Islands case, is the potential for the public to play a trouble-making role or to create obstacles to governmental reconciliation. The bright side, on the other hand, is the potential to provide the government with a basis for different policy choices or for bargaining. We should expect a more strategic vision from decision makers and academia; they must provide better leadership and education to shape Chinese perceptions of the United States and Japan in order to prevent relations from being derailed by public outcries. It is critical that we incorporate discussions of ways to manage public perceptions or public emotions into governmental dialogues, as is already being done between China and Japan.

Based on the 5-E formula analysis, a number of measures can be prescribed to improve Chinese perceptions of the United States and Japan:

- Direct, effective, people-to-people interchange must be enhanced so that ordinary people have more opportunity to *experience* the perceived countries. There is a Chinese saying, “seeing is believing,” even if you just discover part of the truth. There are plenty of travelers between China and Japan already, but the actual communication occurring does not seem to be very effective. People-to-people interchange must involve not only seeing another country but talking with the people there as well. Communication produces experience, and experience produces better perceptions. In this regard, the Chinese, Japanese, and US governments should maintain or expand grassroots exchange programs, enhance student exchanges, loosen visa restrictions, and support more Track 2 dialogues.
- Media coverage of the perceived countries should be improved so that ordinary people better grasp *events*. Studies confirm that the media is the general public’s primary source of information on what is happening, and that the “new media” is more trusted in China than in Japan and America.³⁷ The media does not just inform but also interprets, sets the agenda, and influences opinions. Media coverage and the public perception of a foreign country are therefore closely connected, and sensational coverage of trilateral relations by the media for commercial reasons should be firmly rejected.

- Greater support and encouragement should be given for the participation of thoughtful opinion leaders in public discussions so that the general public is better *educated*. An open, accommodating public discussion results in an informed public. To be sure, there are always problems with who is thoughtful and whether personal risks are involved, but opinion leaders should take responsibility. The existence of egocentrism makes clear the significance of empathy in perceiving others, and that can only be learned through more experience and education.

It might not be realistic to expect public perceptions of foreign countries to ever be free of egocentrism and emotion. However, greater experience and education and a stronger grasp of events can balance egocentrism and emotion to some extent and adjust misperceptions in the Chinese public's view of the United States and Japan.

NOTES

1. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1970), 28.
2. Yang Yusheng, *Zhongguoren de Meiguo guan* [Chinese views of the United States] (Shanghai: Fudan University, 1996), 234–51.
3. This saying was from a 1990s TV show, *Beijingers in New York*.
4. This term was used by David Shambaugh in his book, *Beautiful Imperialist, China Perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993).
5. An opinion poll in 2001, for example, found that 94.6 percent of respondents fully agreed or basically agreed that “the United States is the most advanced country in terms of science and technology”; 90.5 percent chose the US economy as “most competitive”; 81.5 percent regarded the United States as “militarily far ahead of other countries”; while 82.9 percent believed that “American hegemonic policies endanger world peace.” Yu Xunda, Chen Xudong, and Zhu Jiping, “Zhongmei guangi: gaizi minzhong de kanfa” [China-US relations—perceptions from the public], in *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* [World economics and politics], no. 6 (2001).

In another analysis of the American image in Chinese public discourse, “hegemonic country” (which has a negative connotation in Chinese, equal to “arbitrary power politics”) is the word most used to identify the United States. See Qian Hao and Qian Xiaoming, “Dazhong huayu zhong de Meiguo yu Zhongmei guanxi” [American image and Sino-US relations in public discourse], in *Guoji Jingji Pinglun* [International economic review], no. 3–4 (2003).

Opinion surveys conducted by the China Youth Daily in May 1995 and the Horizon Research Consultancy Group in 1995, 2002, and 2003 also show that “rich,” “developed,” “powerful,” and “war events” are the terms identified most frequently by the Chinese public when they think of America. See Zhang Chun, “Lengzhan hou Zhongguoren de Meiguo guan” [Chinese perception of America after the Cold War], in *Kaifang Shidai* [Open times], no. 3 (2004).

6. In a survey by the Horizon Research Consultancy Group and Sina.Com in 2003, the United States was regarded as one of the most important countries for future Chinese economic development by 86.8 percent of the respondents, far ahead of ASEAN (38.5 percent), Russia (37.1 percent), Germany (32.4 percent), and Japan (31.6 percent). See *Xinlang-lingdian diaocha baogao: Zhongri minjian guanxi* [Sina-Horizon poll report: people-to-people relations between China and Japan], <http://www.sina.com.cn>.
- Another survey, conducted by *Huanqiu Shibao* in 2006, also confirmed that China-US ties were chosen as the most influential or important bilateral relationship for China by 78 percent of the respondents, far surpassing China-Japan ties (48.7 percent), China-Russia ties (19.8 percent), China-Europe ties (13.2 percent), and China-Africa (6.2 percent). See *Huanqiu Shibao*, December 31, 2006, as cited by Gao Jing, "Beijing Daxue xuesheng de Zhongguo guojia anquan guan fenxi" [An analysis of national security perceptions of Peking University students], master's thesis, Peking University, 2007.
7. A total of 64.3 percent of respondents regarded the United States as the major threat to China's development and power in the long run. Yu, Chen, and Zhu, "Zhongmei guanxi."
8. See Niu Jun, "Hou lengzhan shiqi Zhongguoren dui Meiguo de kanfa yu sikao" [Chinese perceptions of America in the post-Cold War era], in *Guoji Jingji Pinglun* [International economic review], no. 7-8 (2001).
9. Wang Jisi, "America in Asia: How Much Does China Care?" *Global Asia* 2, no. 2 (2007): 24-28.
10. Xiao Shu, "Zhongguo bufen xizuopai renshi xuanze yu kongbu zhuyi zhanzai yiqi" [Some Chinese New Leftists chose to stand by terrorism], in *Sichao* [Thoughts], ed. Gong Yang, 364 (Hong Kong: CASS, 2003); and <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,781844,00.html>.
11. Gan Yang, "Zhongguo ziyou zuopai de youlai" [The origin of Chinese liberal leftists], in *Sichao* (Thoughts), ed. Gong Yang, 110.
12. The "Chinese-Japanese War" is the most widely known event of modern Japanese history in China, while the "history problem" consistently ranks number one (with more than 70 percent of respondents) as the top bilateral issue. The data come from polls done by Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO in 2005, 2006, and 2007.
In a 2006 poll by the Pew Research Center, 81 percent of Chinese respondents said that "Japan has not apologized sufficiently for its military actions in World War II." "Publics of Asian Powers Hold Negative Views of One Another," September 21, 2006.
13. In surveys conducted by Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, "Losing trust of neighbors and diplomatic crisis" has repeatedly been listed as the number one or two problem facing Japan.
14. In a 1997 poll by China Renmin University and a 2007 joint poll by Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO, Japan was named as the greatest threat to China's security by 21.1 percent and 41.2 percent of respondents respectively, following the United States' 39.9 percent and 55.6 percent.
15. See the joint surveys in 2005, 2006, and 2007 by Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO.
16. Chen Jie, "Urban Chinese Perceptions of Threats from the United States and Japan," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2001).
17. The Five Principles for Peaceful Coexistence, which were agreed to by China and India in 1954, include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.
18. According to *Huanqiu Shibao* surveys in 2005, 2006, and 2007, the total percentage of respondents who chose "very satisfied," "satisfied," or "possible to be satisfied" with

- China-US relations were 70.9 percent, 79.8 percent, and 74.7 percent respectively. See Gao Jing, *Beijing Daxue xuesheng de Zhongguo guojia anquan guan fenxi* (An analysis of national security perceptions of Peking University students).
19. See "Xinlang-lingdian diaocha baogao: Zhongri minjian guanxi" [Sina-Horizon poll report: people-to-people relations between China and Japan].
 20. Ibid.
 21. "Zhongguo xin fu jiecheng: taoyan Riben, ai Ri huo, mengxiang Meiguo" [The newly rich Chinese: repulsed by Japan, love Japanese products, dream of America], *Guoji Xianqu Daobao*, November 19, 2004.
 22. Fan Shiming, "The Internet and Political Expression in China," in *Nation-State and Media*, ed. Kenji Suzuki (Tokyo: Asahi Shoten, 2007).
 23. Alastair Iain Johnston, "The Correlates of Beijing Public Opinion Toward the United States, 1998–2004," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. by Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross, 340–78 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
 24. Peking University–China Daily–Genron NPO joint surveys, 2005 and 2006.
 25. Peking University–China Daily–Genron NPO joint surveys, 2007.
 26. Personal interviews with a group of Peking University PhD students who have joined a program and visited Japan.
 27. Data taken from Yu, Chen, and Zhu, "Zhongmei guanxi."
 28. Professor Chen Shengluo of China Youth University for Political Science offers an excellent analysis in his paper, "Zhongguo daxuesheng de Meiguo guan he Riben guan bijiao" [A comparison of Chinese university students' perceptions of the United States and Japan], in *Zhongguo Qingnian Zhengzhi Xueyuan Xuebao* (China Youth University Review), no. 6 (2006).
 29. China was not among the countries that most dislike American ideas about democracy in a global survey by the Pew Research Center in 2007. "Global Unease with Major World Powers," June 27, 2007.
 30. Zi Zhongyun, *Leng yan xiang yang* [See the world with a cool head] (Beijing: San Lian, 2001). See also, Wang Jisi, "Meinyu yu yeshou" (Beauty and the beast), in *Meiguo Daguan* [American panorama], no. 8 (2001); and Fan Shiming, "Ai hen jiaorong zhong de fanmei zhuyi" [Anti-Americanism in the love and hate complex], in *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu* [Studies of International Politics], no. 2 (2005).
 31. Yu, Chen, and Zhu, "Zhongmei guanxi."
 32. See Chen Shengluo, "Zhongguo daxuesheng de Meiguo guan he Riben guan bijiao," 29.
 33. Ibid, 28.
 34. See Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 319–27, 356, and 382.
 35. Wang Jisi, "Renshi Meiguo he renshi ziji" [Understanding America and understanding ourselves], *Nanfeng Chuang* [For the Public Good], January 23, 2006; and Yu Zhiyan, "Shuaxin Zhongguoren de Meiguo guan" [Update Chinese perceptions of America], *Nanfeng Renwu Zhoukan* [Southern people weekly], April 11, 2007.
 36. See Zhao Xiao, "Ribei jingzhengli: Shuju zhong jian zhenxiang" [The competitiveness of Japan: data tell the truth], *Nanfeng Chuang*, October 1, 2004.
 37. Polls by Peking University, China Daily, and Genron NPO suggest that around 90 percent of the Chinese and Japanese people know about each other through the news media in their respective countries. Other research on perceptions of China-US relations also indicates that the news media ranks first as an information source in China. See Yu, Chen, and Zhu, "Zhongmei guanxi," 34.