

CHINESE MIGRANTS IN NIIGATA: A RESEARCH UPDATE

Daojong Zha
International University of Japan

Introduction

This paper is a sequel to my earlier paper under the same project “Human Flows across National Borders in Northeast Asia,” organized by Professor Tsuneo Akaha. In the earlier paper, I argued for the need to improve government policies designed to facilitate orderly import of unskilled labor from China to Japan, given the fact that labor movement simultaneously benefits an aging Japan and a labor-abundant China.¹ In the current paper, I present findings from a preliminary study of Chinese migrants in one Japanese prefecture: Niigata.

Niigata has been active in promoting economic and social exchanges with local areas across the Sea of Japan (East Sea).² How has such “people-to-people diplomacy” contributed to the Chinese presence in the prefecture? How do Japanese residents in Niigata Prefecture react to the Chinese presence? In what ways, if any, will relationships between Chinese migrants and local Japanese communities affect the relationship between the two countries?

To address these questions, I distributed by mail a survey questionnaire to Japanese residents in Niigata Prefecture in January-March 2002. The questionnaire consists of two parts: one that deals with views on contemporary Japan-China questions in general and local-level ties and the other on views regarding the presence of Chinese migrant workers in the prefecture. Twenty-four replies came from a cross-section of Niigata residents from throughout the prefecture.³ Thirty employees of the departments of the Niigata Prefecture and Niigata City governments who are involved in dealing with China-related affairs completed the same survey. In addition, I conducted interviews with prefecture and city officers in charge of exchanges with Chinese provinces as well as volunteers working for the Niigata International Association, an umbrella organization for the various citizens’ groups actively promoting exchanges between Japanese and foreign residents in Niigata City. I also tried to survey Chinese residents but the effort unfortunately did not generate much of a return at all.⁴ In its place, I rely on information presented in a Chinese book written by Heilongjiang residents who experienced living in Japan as well as conversations I have had with a few fellow Chinese working in Niigata City.

“People-to-People Diplomacy”: Niigata and Its Chinese Partners

For Niigata, promotion of “people-to-people diplomacy” with China began in dealing with the human legacy of Imperial Japan’s adventures into Manchuria. Relocation of Japanese farmers to populate Manchuria was a key component of the Imperial Japanese government’s policies. According to one record, until May 1945 a total of 12,641 “agricultural developers” and “young military volunteers” from Niigata were sent to Manchuria. This meant an uprooting of 1,648 households of Niigata farmers and their relocation to Northeast China in fourteen dispatches. It made Niigata the fifth largest Japanese prefecture in organized wartime migration to Manchuria.⁵ Most of Niigata’s “war-displaced Japanese” were found to be in Heilongjiang Province. For Niigata, tracking the whereabouts of war-displaced Japanese whereabouts became an arduous task, which did not begin in earnest until the mid-1980s.⁶ Through diplomacy at the national level, since the mid-1980s “war-displaced Japanese” and their Chinese families began to re-settle in Japan. As of November 1, 2001, 171 such persons, representing 62 households, reside in Niigata.⁷

Reciprocating the goodwill Chinese residents in Heilongjiang displayed toward the “war-displaced Japanese” living in the province became a strong rationale for Niigata to initiate formal ties of friendship with the Chinese province. In 1974, two years after the establishment of diplomatic ties between Tokyo and Beijing, the governor of Niigata led an official delegation to China and requested Chinese cooperation in identifying former Niigata residents and their offsprings in northeast China. In January 1997, the Niigata Prefectural Assembly sent its first official delegation to China. The group visited Heilongjiang and other

provinces in China's northeast. Delegates on these trips also offered to assist northeast China to develop agriculture.⁸

As part of the Chinese government's "friendship diplomacy" toward Japan in the 1970s, a Chinese "Ship of Friendship" docked at the Niigata port in May 1979 and received a warm welcome by the Niigata prefectural government.⁹ The two sides began discussions of a formal agreement of exchange, following a precedent set between Niigata City and the Russian city of Khabarovsk in 1964. In December 1979, Niigata City signed a sister-city agreement with Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang Province. The existence in human ties between Niigata and Harbin is said to be one of the main rationales for formalizing contemporary exchanges through a formal agreement (Appendix 1).

From the start Harbin placed more emphasis on (re)establishing economic ties with Niigata, while the latter was reluctant. The geographical disadvantage of landlocked Harbin and the incompatibilities in Chinese and Japanese economic systems have led to few results of government-invested economic projects. According to a former Niigata City official's account, Harbin and Niigata governments launched joint ventures by opening one ethnic food restaurant in each city but their business operations were not successful and later had to be sold to private operators.¹⁰ The Niigata-Harbin sister-city relationship also resulted in the donation of a Japanese garden constructed in Harbin. But in the 1990s, "it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain exchanges of visits that result in little more than a reaffirmation of the friendship tie-up."¹¹

In 1981, the first group of "war-displaced Japanese" visited Niigata. Then in 1983, Niigata Prefecture and Heilongjiang Province established a friendship relationship. This happened in part as a result of the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Japan-China Friendship Treaty. According to an official of the Niigata chapter of the Japan-China Friendship Association, there was also a feeling on the part of Niigata officials that they might be missing the last boat during a rush to form local ties with China.¹²

As of today, Niigata has formal ties with eight administrative entities of comparable level in China (see Appendix 1). Each relationship came into being as part of a drive to foster friendship exchanges between the two peoples. According to Niigata prefectural government's officials, however, since most of the Chinese partners rely on their Niigata counterparts to finance such exchanges, including bringing Chinese delegates to Niigata, some of these relationships below the prefectural level exist only in name. A notable exception is the friendship tie-up between the village of Nishiyama and the city of Huai An. Because Nishiyama is the birthplace of former Japanese Premier Minister Tanaka Kakuei and Huai An that of Zhou Enlai, the two national leaders who negotiated the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two governments, financial support for keeping their routine exchange projects going has been stable.¹³

Niigata's Pursuit of Economic Ties with China

In the 1990s the Niigata Prefecture government placed a greater emphasis on economic benefits in its ties with Chinese provinces. The prefecture continues to cultivate its economic ties with Heilongjiang, which itself features annual trade and investment conventions for economic ties across its border with Russia. In 1998, Niigata won the opening of a passenger airline service to Harbin.

In the early 1990s Jilin Province (south of Heilongjiang) became a point of interest for local-level economic ties in Northeast Asia as a result of the launching of the Tumen River Development Zone under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program. Since 1991 Niigata has engaged Jilin on an annual basis to promote use of Niigata's air- and sea- port facilities and exchange investment information through the Northeast Asian economic forums Niigata organizes annually.

A third province with which Niigata has cultivated economic ties is Shaanxi, known for being host to Xi'an, where the famous Qin dynasty terra cotta museums are located. In 1997, Niigata's governor led a goodwill mission to Shaanxi. The trip might have materialized as a precursor to the presentation of *ibises* birds, found in the wild only in Shaanxi, by China's President to the Emperor of Japan as a present in 1998. As was pre-arranged, the birds were later to be placed in Satogashima, an island under Niigata's administration. At the national level, the birds served as little more than a gesture of goodwill. But for Niigata, the birds bring additional tourist revenues. More importantly, Niigata lobbied for and won the opening of a passenger air route connecting Niigata airport with Xi'an (via Shanghai) in 1998.

In addition to passenger airline connections, since 1996 Niigata has established a weekly container sea line linking Niigata to Dalian, Qingdao, and Shanghai ports in China, as well as some of the neighboring ports along the Sea of Japan. According to officials managing the Niigata port, a joint investment between

the prefectural government and private businesses, Niigata's attraction as a sea port is somewhat hampered by declining levels of industrialization in the nearby areas.¹⁴ This symptom is perhaps not unique to Niigata, as industrialization is so heavily concentrated in areas along the Pacific coast of Japan.

In 1997, the Niigata prefectural government established a trade office in Dalian, the port city servicing the entire northeastern Chinese area. The prefecture's Department of Industry and Labor functions very much like a trade promotion office, by printing information for trade and investment in Chinese, Korean, and Russian languages and organizing investment tours and seminars both inside Niigata and abroad. China is by far the largest among Niigata's trading partners.

Friendship Building, Trade Promotion, and Chinese in Niigata

As of 2001, 3,120 Chinese were registered to be staying in Niigata. Their statuses of stay range across all Japanese visa categories except artists, practitioners of religion, journalists, and lawyers/accounts (Table 1 below).

Table 1. Registered Chinese in Niigata (over 100 in number), 2001

Status	Students	Trainees	Dependents	Designated Activities	Permanent Residents	Japanese Citizens' Spouses	Long-term Residents
	516	609	262	443	170	588	228

The statistics tells several things. First, Chinese stay in Niigata primarily to work. Trainees are unskilled workers who are allowed to stay for up to three years at a time. It is possible that a good majority of those in the "designated activities" category are in fact short-term employees of businesses in the area. This is so because under the Japanese rules for classifying foreign residents, "designated activities" include those on "working holidays" and "others". Since Japanese visa rules do not allow Chinese passport holders to enter on "working holidays," Japanese employers can sponsor entry of Chinese workers under this broad "others" category.¹⁵

Second, the fairly large number of Japanese citizens' spouses is indicative of a supply and demand in demographic movements. On the demand side, Niigata, like other parts of rural Japan, sees its own marriageable population moving to more prosperous areas of the country, making the importation of foreign wives for its farming population a necessity. On the supply side, for many Chinese women, marrying into a Japanese family and even living in rural areas represents a giant upgrade of their own standards of living.¹⁶

Third, although Niigata is not known for its educational institutions, the fairly sizeable number of Chinese students is also indicative of the primary reason for Chinese to move to Niigata: to earn a degree earned where there are sufficient job opportunities to support their studies. In this regard, the difficulties I encountered in having Chinese students enrolled in the Niigata University to participate in a Chinese language version of the same survey questionnaire about their impressions of life in Japan can be indicative. To begin with, it was not easy to assemble students to a gathering for an explanation session because Chinese students do not show up on campus unless there are classes to attend. For other time slots of the week they concentrate on their part-time jobs off campus. Even the head of the Chinese student association of the university showed little interest in assisting because he knew that without a comparable cash compensation for the time to complete the survey other students would simply throw the sheets of paper away.

It is important to note that although small in number, some of the Chinese students in Niigata are sponsored (with full funding) by the prefectural government to pursue their degree studies. Since 1984, the prefectural government's internationalization budget for bringing international students over for degree studies included those from China. As of 2002, 187 Chinese students had entered Niigata through this channel, including 34 who were invited for training in the prefecture's cancer treatment center.¹⁷ According to officials in the prefecture's international affairs division, the primary purpose for funding these students -- all from Heilongjiang Province -- is to start cultivating a new generation of Chinese individuals who will find it easier to assist Niigata Prefecture's efforts to promote its interests in the Chinese province and, on a larger scale, to help increase trust among the Chinese and Japanese peoples. The result thus far, however, was said to be less than satisfactory. "When the Chinese students return to their home province, they act individually. Thus it is difficult for them to have tangible influence on policymaking in their home society. Why don't they even form an alumnus group of their own?"¹⁸

Short-term exchanges

The number of registered Chinese staying in Niigata reflects only part of the dynamics in human movement from China, since Japanese law requires a foreigner to register his/her stay only if the length of stay is longer than 90 days. Since Niigata Prefecture entered into a friendship relationship with Harbin, it has organized a variety of short-term exchange programs, bringing ordinary Chinese to experience interaction with the Japanese people and society. Such exchange programs include youth groups since 1986, sports groups since 1990, and high-school students exchange since 1991. Each of these groups averages ten participants per annum. In addition, the prefectural government's sponsorship of Chinese language instructors to teach in the prefecture's women's college since 1993 also helps promoting mutual understanding at the grassroots level.¹⁹

The launching of direct air transportation routes between Niigata and cities in China opened another route for Chinese to come to Niigata on tourist visas. Indeed, the number of passengers on the Niigata-Harbin route rapidly increased from nearly 9,000 in the inaugural year (1998) to 31,000 in 2000. Although the number of self-sponsored Chinese on those trips is not clear, the total number gives an indication about the magnitude of the increases in human interactions among the Chinese and Japanese peoples.

Questionnaire Survey of Ordinary Japanese Residents in Niigata

With the assistance of the International University of Japan's Japanese Language Program, I distributed the survey questionnaire to about forty potential participants. Twenty-four completed surveys were returned by mail. The respondents live in seven different administrative districts of the prefecture, including the cities of Niigata, Joetsu, and Nagaoka (the three largest cities in the prefecture) and towns/villages that allow easier access to the location of the university by car. The following is a summary of the respondents' personal information (Tables 2, 3, 4).

Table 2. Occupations/professions of Niigata Respondents

Total	Company employees	Teachers*	Housewives	Unemployed	University students	Self-employed
24	7	5	4	4	3	1

* They include two who offer private group lessons for a living.

Table 3. Age of Niigata Respondents

Total	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s
24	3	5	4	7	5

Table 4. Highest Level of Education of Niigata Respondents

Total	High School	Two-year College	University
24	6	9	9

It should be noted that the respondents have either had or shown an interest in interacting with foreigners in the prefecture through language exchange. This, on top of the small number of samples collected, presents only a preliminary picture of Niigata residents' views about the questions in the survey.

On the frequency of contacts with Chinese on the job, only one of the respondents has daily contact with Chinese living in the prefecture. The respondent, an employee of a public health-care provider, interacts with a Chinese trainee, who is sent to learn Japanese ways of caring for the elderly by assisting Japanese doctors. Six of the respondents recall occasionally seeing Chinese, either through overhearing conversations in Chinese or observing their physical presence in shops and parent-teacher meetings in their children's schools. Three respondents reported meeting Chinese on a weekly basis, one of whom has a Chinese friend and two others simply know Chinese are around by knowing they come for services in eateries and bars. The rest (14) of the respondents had no contact with Chinese whatsoever.

Off the regular job routines of the Japanese respondents, there exists a similar situation of limited contacts with Chinese residents. Of the five who do interact with Chinese on a monthly or weekly basis, conversations take place either by way of attending Chinese language courses organized by the local government offices or exchange teaching. One 38-year-old language instructor teaches English to a Chinese, who in return teaches her Chinese!

Over half of the respondents described their impressions of the Chinese individuals they know or know of in positive terms. The most frequent (9 out of 24) reference is “diligent” (“majime” in Japanese). Other positive terms include “open minded,” “big-hearted,” “trust-worthy,” “good at socializing,” “friendly,” and “caring about details.” Negative impressions include “aggressive,” “selfish,” “cunning,” and “self-centered.” There are some neutrally stated references, too, such as “full of personalities” and “independent.” Since those respondents who reported no regular contact with Chinese residents did not write down their impressions, the observations recorded indicate careful assessments based on direct personal contacts.

When asked about their participation in organized Japan-China exchange programs that take place inside Japan, only one respondent had such experience: through providing Japanese food to an Asian cultural festival in Joetsu City in 2000. This fact corresponds with a young (in his early 20s) prefectural government employee’s complaints that exchange programs are too limited to a select number of participants lest a positive mood might be absent.

In recent years, Japanese media have heavily focused on crimes committed by Chinese residents as well as crime groups involving Japanese gang elements and Chinese. So much so that the growing number of reported crimes by Chinese living in Japan contributed to the deterioration of Japanese perceptions of China in the past decade.²⁰ Nation-wide in Japan, concerns about the continuous growth in the manufacturing sector in China and its “hollowing-out” effect on the Japanese economy provide another important source of the “China threat” rhetoric in Japan. Would it be natural, then, for average Japanese to turn inward when they are asked to think about the future scope of the Chinese presence in Japan?

While 11 out of the 24 respondents chose “no opinion” in response to the question about their expectations of the future Chinese presence in their neighborhoods, eight replied that they would like to see a modest increase. Three of the eight respondents who would like to see more Chinese cited the lack of variety in rural daily life as a reason. One elementary school teacher wrote in a separate comment, “internationalization programs like the Japan Exchange and Teaching organized by the government should bring in many nationals, including Chinese, rather than being an exclusive venue for English-speaking natives from Europe and America.” A housewife noted that it is important for Chinese people to experience what life is like for Japanese farmers.²¹ Two others pointed out that an increase in international presence in their neighborhood should not be limited to China or any other particular nationality. Among the 24 respondents, five clearly stated their opposition to any increase in Chinese presence in their communities. One gave possible competition for jobs as a reason. Another one plainly asked, “there is no problem around here, why do we need to see an increase [in the Chinese presence]?”

Asked about the impact the Chinese presence has had on the local communities, thirteen out of the 24 replied “no knowledge” of any impact and offered to say that they were simply not aware of any Chinese living or working in their neighborhood. Together with another seven respondents who chose “no impact” (one cited similarities with Japanese in appearance), an overwhelming majority did not have direct knowledge of how Chinese in Niigata lived. Of the three who did think that the Chinese presence had a positive impact on their neighborhoods, one cited marriage of Chinese women with Japanese men as a merit, another thought that it was possible to talk with her Chinese friend without reservations, and the third mentioned that it is important to have more opportunities for promoting mutual understanding between Japanese and Chinese peoples.

Comments on Japan-China Relations

Five of the survey questions have to do with the respondents’ assessment of the current state of affairs in bilateral relations between Japan and China. To the question about their feelings towards China (the country), although over half replied that they felt “close” or “somewhat close” to China, they did not provide explanations to support such feelings. One observed that there exist many areas of similarity between Chinese and Japanese societies. Another comment simply noted that China once provided ibises

birds and pandas to Japan. It seems that the majority of the respondents did not feel they could relate to China because they had no direct experience of life across the oceans.

What did they think about Japan-China relations? On this question the answers varied widely. The largest number (6) reported having mixed feelings about these relations. Only two of the 24 respondents referred to the Japan-China war experience and the need for genuine reconciliation. The two respondents, both in their sixties, stated Japan should repay the “benevolence” Chinese leader Zhou Enlai displayed in the 1970s by not asking Japan to pay war compensations. The image of China getting economically stronger was on the mind of three of the respondents: the need for better cooperation in seeing that change in the value of the Chinese currency would not affect that of the Japanese Yen; Japan must think about better means than blaming competition from cheap Chinese imports; the intensifying economic competition is a complex issue to deal with. For another three respondents, there existed differences between human-level contacts between Chinese and Japanese and government-to-government contacts. The solution, according to one, would be to let the local governments and individuals play a larger role in Japan-China relations.

What do the respondents see as necessary means of improving Japan-China relations? Of the twenty respondents who answered this question there is an even split in opinions. Ten, in their forties and above, refer to the need for overcoming rifts in understanding the relevance of history to the handling of contemporary political relations. One respondent, whose sister experienced growing up in China during the final years of the war, commented that it was regrettable that people did not seem to differentiate between the warmth individuals displaced towards each other anymore. History was painted in one brush as either black or white. A man in his 60s simply said, “the only thing that can improve Japan-China relations is time, as all other means of reconciliation have been exhausted.” How do the respondents feel about the Chinese government’s demand for Japan to apologize? Only one mentioned that necessity, while the rest stayed at the level of observing that ways must be found to overcome political difficulties over the history issue.

The other ten of the respondents saw intensification of exchanges and increase of mutual understanding at the grassroots level. There was a definite disappointment in how both the Chinese and Japanese governments have handled political ties between the two countries. According to these respondents, the emphasis should be on cultural exchange, increased interaction among the young people of both societies. Only one respondent mentioned careful handling of the Taiwan question as a means of maintaining positive political ties between Japan and China.

Overall, comments in relation to improving Japan-China relations provided a good reflection of the complex webs of interdependence, cooperation, and frictions that permeated the news, the main source of information about Japan-China ties to the respondents.

Individuals, Sister Cities, and Friendship Exchange in Postwar Japan-China Relations

In international relations, there is a long history of actors other than the national government – the unit recognized by international law to represent the nation-state – behaving to impact what we normally recognize as “international relations” and/or “international politics.”²² Indeed it has by now become commonsensical to note that the state and what it does on behalf of the territory and people it governs and represents internationally is only a part of that nation-state’s international diplomacy.²³ Between Japan and China, non-state actors, particularly those involved in cultural exchange, going back centuries, laid the foundation for Japan and China to interact as nation-states.²⁴ Only in the modern era did both the Japanese and Chinese governments learn to adapt to the norms and principles of modern diplomacy, a historical heritage largely from the West.

Japan and China did not begin to interact with each other as equal sovereign states until after the surrender of Japan in 1945. The Chinese civil war from 1945 to 1949 made it impossible for the two nation-states to have any meaningful diplomatic relationship. Soon after the establishment of the People’s Republic, Japan, like the United States, had to deal with a “two China” problem. The American occupation of Japan (1945-52) and the Korean War (1950-53) led Japan to choose to diplomatically recognize Taiwan (the Republic of China). When Japan did start to interact with “China” as a sovereign equal, it was fully embroiled in the China-Taiwan controversy, making diplomatic relationship in the normal sense of the term impossible with China.

Individuals, namely those Chinese and Japanese who had direct experience of living in each other's societies and/or participating in the Sino-Japanese war (1894-95) and who emerged after the end of that war as key figures in the respective political establishments and societies, became the main facilitators to move bilateral political ties in a positive direction. Such individuals are not restricted to a few dedicated political leaders such as China's prime minister Zhou Enlai (in office 1949-76) and Japan's prime minister Tanzan Ishibashi (in office December 1956 – 57). They also include influential business leaders, in addition to heads of those societal groups that were established for the specific purpose of promoting goodwill between the two peoples.²⁵ The activities of these individuals and the political environments they operated in have been documented elsewhere and it is not the purpose here to recount them. It deserves notice that individuals are credited to continue to be of special importance in the evolution of Japan-China relations after the establishment of a formal diplomatic relationship in 1972 and the signing of a Peace and Friendship Treaty in 1978.²⁶ In fact, it was not until the dramatic worsening of the political aspect of China's external environment, caused by the summer 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, that the significance of individuals in Japan's China policy was seen to begin to diminish.²⁷

In addition to making trade between Japan and China possible in the absence of a normal state-to-state relationship, these individuals also played a large role in enabling units of governments below the national level to establish formal ties, known as sister cities after formal diplomatic relations between the two national governments was established. The Japanese port city of Kobe and the Chinese port city of Tianjin were the first to enter into a sister-city relationship, in 1973.

In global politics, the twinning of cities ("sister cities") across the ideological, strategic, and developmental divides of the Cold War emerged in the 1950s.²⁸ Theoretically, sister cities make it possible for sub-national levels of government to directly involve each other in "people-to-people diplomacy." However, it ought to be noted that cities would not have been able to enter the arena of inter-national diplomacy without the approval of the central government – the sovereign actor. A case in point is United States President Dwight Eisenhower's public support for an organized American program of sister cities in 1956. "There can be little doubt that the project was, in effect, a product of the Administration's overall Cold War strategy, albeit one of its less malevolent components."²⁹ In addition, the actual impact of "people-to-people diplomacy" on overall bilateral relations does not and indeed cannot match its rhetorical purport. Indeed, in International Relations literature cities are rarely taken as actors worthy of serious research attention.

Sister-city relationships, however, do provide a venue for the promotion of cross-national interactions at the grassroots level. The first Japanese-American sister-city relationship was established in 1955, between Nagasaki and St. Paul. Since then nearly four hundred twinning relationships have been established. The United States ranks first to have such twinning relationships with Japan, followed by China, Australia, South Korea, Canada, and Brazil.³⁰ The four-volume survey conducted by the Japan Foundation on sister-city interactions indicates that the scope of such activities ranges from cultural (goodwill) missions, to exchanges between educational institutions, and joint efforts aimed at addressing issues of global concern.³¹

Between Japan and China the total number of twinning relationships at the prefecture-to-province level stood at 34 as of April 1, 2002. That number is high, given that after China, the United States has 22 state-level twinning relationships with Japan. In addition, there are 232 sets of twinning below the prefecture/province level, including cities, wards/districts, towns, and villages. In contrast, 393 sets of sister-city and township ties have been established between the United States and Japan.³² These numbers serve as a useful indication of the differing levels of administration autonomy American and Chinese governing entities have in establishing friendship ties across national borders. Nonetheless, given the vastly different strategic-political relationships postwar Japan has with the United States and China respectively, the record of sub-national twinning between Japan and China is impressive indeed.

On the Chinese side, the sister city relationship Tianjin established with Kobe was the first of its kind. By the end of 1999, Chinese provinces, cities, and governing units further below had established twinning relationships with their counterparts in one hundred countries. Japan ranked the first in the total number of such tie-ups China has established, followed by the United States (134), Russia (49), South Korea (48), Australia (42), and France (41).³³

There has yet to be a systematic academic study to track and assess the evolution of activities that have been launched as a result of these twinning relationships between Japan and China.³⁴ On the basis of the

available literature, though, a general observation can be made that earlier pairings of Japanese and Chinese sister cities carried with them a definite element of passion. They were a continuation of the goodwill exchange programs led by Liao Chenzhi, Takahashi Tatsunosuke, and a much longer list of individuals in the 1950s. Such programs included trade exhibitions, cultural exchanges, and “wings of friendship (organized tours by air flights),” as well as “boats of friendship (organized tours by cruise),” for ordinary Japanese citizens and Chinese participants to visit and gain a taste of postwar Chinese and Japanese societies. The purpose of such activities was clear: to soften the feelings of enmity that remained harsh in the short wake of the war.³⁵ So much so that in the Japanese language, such exchanges with China are characterized as cultivation of *yuko* (friendship) and *shinzen* (goodwill).³⁶ Similar expressions can be found in the Chinese language as well (*youhao*). Such avowedly sincere friendship-building efforts sometimes result in new sources of friction, due to gaps of expectations on both sides. Among other things, Japanese groups complain that their Chinese counterparts turn out to be more inclined to seeking personal gains rather than assisting to spread the intent of goodwill from the Japanese society. Moreover, the Japanese side is often expected to cover all the costs for making citizen exchange programs possible.³⁷

A key institutional actor that was part of the positive passion is the Japan-China Friendship Association. Established on October 1, 1950, the first anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, the association and its Chinese counterparts were dedicated to cultivating venues for economic, cultural, and social exchanges in spite of the Cold War confrontation between the national governments of Japan and China. The historical roles these associations have played in the evolution of Japan-China relations are complex, including the split of the Japan-China Friendship Association into two in 1967 (partly as a consequence of the Cultural Revolution in China), and the de facto governmental role of the China-Japan Friendship Association (established on October 4, 1963). For our purpose of inquiry, it is important to note that the pragmatic camp of the Japan-China Association has served as an important conduit to the establishment of bilateral formal relations between governing/ administration units below the national level.³⁸ As of 2000, there existed forty-three prefectural chapters of the Japan-China Friendship Association and a provincial chapter of the China-Japan Friendship Association in all thirty Chinese provinces.

From the 1950s through most of the 1980s, Japan-China relationships evolved along two parallel lines. On issues of sovereignty and the handling of the history of Japanese militarism in China, the two national governments had little in common. China continued to pressure Japan not to show any signs of warming its relations with Taiwan and demanded that Japan formally apologize for the war. The two governments also watched each other’s growth in economic power and particularly military might wearily.³⁹ At the same time, when tension over a specific issue arose, political leaders of the two countries often implicitly justified the need for compromise with China for the sake of *yukou/youhao*. This larger background made it possible for prominent individuals to play important roles in decision-making that often arose out of a sense of appreciation on the Japanese side that the Chinese government had foregone demand for war reparations from Japan.⁴⁰ It also made possible for sister-city exchanges to take place, thereby giving an opportunity for social exchanges to take place away from the media spotlight of high diplomacy.

Kokusaika (Internationalization) and Jichitai Gaiko (Local Diplomacy) in Japan

Since the 1980s, more and more Japanese private citizens have gained direct experience of the outside world through foreign travel, foreign study, inter-cultural/racial marriages, an increase in foreigners living in Japan, and participation in international NGO activities. *Kokusaika* or “internationalization” began to manifest itself as a more tangible experience than the overseas cultural tours of earlier years that were, after all, limited in citizen participation.⁴¹ In January 1986 the Japanese central government’s Ministry of Local Authorities began to take a series of activities to assist the local governments (prefectures and below) in developing ties across national borders as an effort to increase the level of “internal internationalization.”⁴² It was against this background that local governments throughout Japan began to initiate more and more twinning agreements with local governing/administrative entities throughout Asia, resulting in a geographical balance with the West (primarily the United States).⁴³ Indeed, the number of twinning agreements signed between Japan and China grow from one prefecture-province set in the 1973-79 period to 23 pairs in 1980-89, and 33 in 1990-99. The number of new ties below the prefecture/province level increased more dramatically for the respective periods, from thirteen (1973-79) to 98 (1980-89) and to 101 (1990-99).⁴⁴

The relationship between the flourishing of *jichitai* (local authorities) initiatives and the continuing influence of the Japan-China Friendship Associations and other groups dedicated to directing the passion dimension of Japan-China relations in the positive direction is not clear. What is clear, though, is that along with the emergence of *jichitai* as actors in Japan's foreign relations in general and its China relations in particular, there has been the establishment of semi-official *kokusai koryu kyokai* (international associations) to coordinate assistance to foreign citizens residing in prefectures' administrative jurisdictions and to work with foreign staffers dispatched to exchange administrative experiences in Japanese government offices. What is also clear is that local chapters of the Japan-China Friendship Association became but one of many sources of input into a *jichitai*'s efforts to position themselves in relation to their Chinese counterparts.

The emergence of *jichitai* as an actor in Japan's foreign relations has caught the attention of a growing number of scholars. Susumu Takahashi's summary of Kanagawa Prefecture's pursuit of "people-to-people" diplomacy shows that local initiatives dated back to 1975 and included programs of cultural exchange, peace rallies, and economic exchange. There also emerged efforts to promote better understanding between Japanese and foreign residents within Kanagawa's jurisdiction.⁴⁵ Fujita and Hill's case study of Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Kamaishi, Kitakyushu, Toyota, Kanazawa, and Tsubame cities informs us that Japanese cities in the 1980s and 1990s intensified their economic roles, linking their local activities with actors across the globe, particularly in the Western Pacific rim. Through sharing their successes in urban management, especially in designing transportation and communications packages, Japanese cities help their Pacific Asian counterparts address problems of restructuring jobs and supportive services.⁴⁶ Hill and Fujita's study of Osaka discusses the prefectural government's success in collaborating with Japanese companies based in its administrative jurisdiction in promoting economic ties with the rest of Asia. This points to the potential of their *jichitai*'s capacity in mobilizing resources to pursue ambitions in bringing the benefits of *kokusaika* home through reaching out to local authorities in neighboring nation-states.⁴⁷

In the post-Cold War era, sub-national governments in Japan began to play an even more active role in Japanese foreign policy. By way of initiating their own forms of international cooperation (including the grant of local official development assistance or ODA packages), Japanese *jichitai gaiko* leaves a more active imprint in bilateral and multilateral forums of traditional international relations. Heads of prefectural governments, Tokyo governor (1999-) Shintaro Ishihara as the most noticeable, have begun to assert a moral if not directly bureaucratic influence on the Japanese central government's foreign policy.⁴⁸ Indeed, Ishihara has been quite vocal about his disinterest in continuing even the formalities of Tokyo metropolitan government's sister-city ties with Beijing, the capital of China, which were established in May 1979.

Industrial development within Japan is geographically concentrated along the Pacific coast (or *Omote Nihon*). Prefectures along the Sea of Japan coastline (or *Ura Nihon*) stand at a profound disadvantage in promoting local initiatives for establishing international ties. In the 1990s, these prefectures began to move in earnest in an attempt to bringing visions of building a dynamic Sea of Japan economic rim of peace and prosperity closer to reality. Gilbert Rozman has conducted one of the very few English-language studies of *Ura Nihon*'s pursuit of local ties across the national boundaries. By looking into the cases of Kanazawa (Ishikawa Prefecture), Niigata (Niigata Prefecture), and Sapporo (Hokkaido) from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, Rozman concludes that actual progress lags far behind expressions of vision. Rozman attributes the state of affairs to a weak industrial base, the zigzagging process of decentralization of administrative power, entrenched local political interests, and the ups and downs in Japan's bilateral relations with Russia, China, and the two Koreas at the national level.⁴⁹

Critical assessments of the gap between expressions of vision and the development of realities in the Sea of Japan regionalism should not lead us to discount the value of pursuing a study of a *Ura Nihon jichitai*'s role in the development of contemporary Japan-China relations. To the contrary, against the geographical, economic, institutional, and cultural constraints that do exist, we should ask how has Niigata pursued its own ties with provinces and cities in China?

Niigata and Northeastern Chinese Provinces

Niigata is not the only Japanese prefecture with which Heilongjiang has established sister-province prefecture relationship agreements. The other two Japanese prefectures are Hokkaido and Yamagata. For historical and geographical reasons, Heilongjiang has much more extensive ties with Russian provinces just across its border.⁵⁰ For Niigata, as shall be discussed below, Heilongjiang is not the only Chinese province

with which it has developed local ties, either. What, then, justifies a focus on the development of local ties between Niigata and Heilongjiang?

I choose Niigata as a case study for both practical and intellectual reasons. To begin with, Niigata is where my university is based, making it easier to access locally disseminated research resources. But, more importantly, Niigata's focus of its *jichitai gaiko* with local governments in Northeast China merits intellectual inquiry. Niigata is among the frontier prefectures that saw large numbers of its population relocated to Northeast China along with Japanese occupation of what was called Manchuria. One local record puts the total number of "agricultural developers" and "youth military volunteers" from Niigata to Manchuria at 12,641, making Niigata the fifth largest Japanese prefecture in wartime migration to northeast China.⁵¹ According to local records, a total of fourteen dispatches of 1,648 households of Niigata farmers were sent to Manchuria. The last such dispatch was made in May 1945.⁵² When the war ended, an unknown number of Japanese farmers as well as low-rank military personnel were left behind, mainly in Heilongjiang Province. Most of them later married local Chinese farmers and stayed there until they were able to return to Japan first for family visits and cross identification and later for resettlement back in Japan.⁵³ Clearly Niigata is among the prefectures that have to face a more direct local impact than most other Japanese prefectures of the agony of the war and the resettlement of military and civilian Japanese left behind in northeast China after the war's end. This history ought to give Niigata a strong reason to place passion (positive or negative) high on its agendas in reaching out to China's northeastern provinces, particularly Heilongjiang. But how true can such reasoning be?

Niigata's Kokusaika: a Brief Overview

According to officials in Niigata Prefecture's International Affairs Division, the history of Niigata's interactions with the outside world can be traced as far back as 1858, the year when the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed and construction of the Niigata port was planned.⁵⁴ The Niigata port opened in 1868. It was not until the 1970s that Niigata became a base of its own to have regular communication links with the rest of the world: regular air routes to Khabarovsk opened in 1973 and to Seoul in 1979.

Since the 1980s, especially since the end of the Cold War, the Niigata Prefectural Government has launched a number of initiatives in support of efforts to realize the dream of transforming the local regions along the Japan Sea Rim into a zone of peace, cooperation and prosperity.⁵⁵ In 1993, Niigata prefecture decided on its own initiative to assist the development of port facilities in the Russian Far East.⁵⁶ Since 1992, Niigata has hosted an annual regional economic conference involving participants from Japan, China, South Korea, Mongolia, and the Russian Far East. Each of these conferences features a speaker from the Heilongjiang government who is in charge of the province's external economic ties. The conference also features the awarding of a "Japan Sea Rim Niigata Award" in recognition of individuals and groups that excel in promoting local-level ties across the Sea of Japan. The Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA, since 1993), partly funded by the Niigata Prefecture, has now established itself as one of the most productive research institutes in Japan on Northeast Asian affairs.⁵⁷

In terms of "people-to-people diplomacy," Niigata's first sister city relationship was established between the city of Niigata and Galveston, Texas in 1965. As of the year 2000, 34 sets of twinning relationships have been established between various levels of Niigata *jichitai* and their counterparts in twelve different countries. The growth of such twinning relationships clearly mirrors the national trend in Japan. From 1965 to 1985, Niigata had nine pairs of twinned institutions. Eight more pairs were added in the 1986-90 period alone and another seventeen pairs materialized in the decade of 1991 to 2000.⁵⁸

It is beyond the purpose of this paper to give a more comprehensive recording of the scope of Niigata's *kokusaika* projects and activities. It should be noted Niigata has firmly established itself as a leader in the move to shift local-level internationalization efforts away from *yukou* (friendship) toward more substantive ties based on economic and social interests between partner countries.⁵⁹ In addition to Niigata's initiative to fund the improvement of the port of Zarubino in the Russian Far East, since 2000, Niigata Prefecture and Niigata City host annual small-scale trade shows organized by China's Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning Provinces as well. Jilin and Liaoning do not have formal sister relationships with Heilongjiang, but they are geographically indispensable for transportation links to reach Heilongjiang by road. The launching of a regular direct airline service between Niigata and Harbin in 1997, which became possible thanks in part

to the prefecture's lobbying, also brings tangible benefits to the local economy. Finally, Niigata Prefecture has played a key role in opening sea transport routes linking Niigata with Shanghai and the Chinese southern port of Fuzhou. The sea routes position Niigata as a distribution center for its neighboring prefectures.⁶⁰

Niigata and Heilongjiang

The first twinning relationship between Niigata and provinces/cities in China was the sister-city relationship between Niigata City and Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang Province in 1979. Since then, Niigata has entered a total of eight pairs of twinning relationships with Chinese provinces and governing units.

Before 1979, Niigata sent two delegations on *yuko* missions to China (one in 1977 and another in 1978).⁶¹ Such exchanges were without doubt part of the "China Boom" sweeping Japan in the years following the establishment of diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Specifically, how did Niigata City and Harbin establish a sister relationship?

Formal discussions leading towards the twinning agreement between Niigata City and Harbin took place when the "Ship of Friendship" mission led by Liao Chenzhi paid a visit to Niigata as part of its tour of Japan in May 1979, on which occasion the Niigata prefectural government played warm host.⁶² The tour gave impetus for the elevation of the Niigata chapter of the Japan-China Friendship Association to Niigata Prefectural Japan-China Friendship Association, which allowed for Niigata a higher profile in exploring ties with China.

The personal leadership of then Niigata city mayor Kawakami Kihachiro played a pivotal role in materializing such an initiative. Kawakami gave his personal support to Tozaburo Sano, then head of the prefecture's Japan-China Friendship Association. Sano, who at the age of 31 became the director of a land improvement district in his hometown Niigata, had been on goodwill missions to China in 1974 and 1978. Through such contacts, Sano was known to have developed strong personal ties with Liao Chenzhi. With Sano and Liao acting as liaisons, authorities of the two city governments exchanged letters and sealed an agreement of sister-city relationship in December of the same year.

It is interesting to note that contents of the Harbin-Niigata agreement are almost identical to the sister-city protocol concluded between Harbin and the Russian city of Khabarovsk in 1965. But, Harbin had from the start placed more emphasis on economic ties. Since 1979 Niigata and Harbin have launched joint ventures by opening one ethnic food restaurant in each city but their business operations were not successful and were sold to private operators. The Niigata City-Harbin sister city relationship has also resulted in the construction of a Japanese garden in Harbin, which serves as a symbol of friendship. By the 1990s, Niigata City decided to work with Harbin more closely under the framework of the Kyoto protocol on environmental cooperation.⁶³

Niigata Prefecture and Heilongjiang Province entered into a friendship relationship in August 1983, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Japan-China Friendship Agreement (signed in 1978). The timing also had to do with another event. In 1981 some Japanese wartime orphans left behind in northeast China were allowed to visit their relatives in Japan. The third rationale for the prefecture to elevate the existing city level *yuko* protocol to the prefectural level was expectations of economic cooperation, particularly in agriculture, with Heilongjiang. The agricultural land of Heilongjiang is eight times the arable area of Japan. Now that Niigata locals such as Sano Tozaburo had earned prominence among China's Japan policy establishment, the prefecture wished to be able to ride on the wave of positive passion in Japan-China relations of the day.⁶⁴

The sketch of exchanges presented above informs us that the friendship relationship proceeded with a degree of substance. In other words, Niigata's exchanges with Chinese localities went way beyond soothing the pains left over from the war alone. The activities launched under the slogan of friendship promotion bring economic and societal benefits to Niigata as well. Indeed, since 1983 Niigata prefecture extended its scope of economic exchange activities to other provinces in northeast China. But it obviously did not place its friendship ties with Heilongjiang above everything else. A truth-telling case is that in 1997 Niigata Prefecture opened its overseas Economics and Trade Office in Dalian, Liaoning Province, the center of maritime transportation for the entire northeastern China, rather than a city in the landlocked Heilongjiang province.⁶⁵ It should be noted here that neither Niigata Prefecture nor Niigata City has a formal friendship relationship with Liaoning Province or Dalian City. In other words, the prefecture sees a clear distinction

between friendship building and promoting its own economic interests in pursuing its own *jichitai gaiko*. Indeed, of the other six sister relationships other cities and villages in Niigata have established in China, only the one between Nishiyama-mura, the birthplace of Kakuei Tanaka, and Huai-an, Jiangsu Province, the birthplace of Zhou Enlai, is purely based on symbolism.⁶⁶ The rest result from an identification of shared economic interests and shared ties. What we see is a transformation of traditional forms of friendship building to pursuing economic ties and environmental protection. It can be said, on the other hand, that friendship missions have contributed to mutual learning. Such learning, in turn, has contributed to the efforts by Niigata-based businesses to explore the northeastern Chinese market. As a matter of fact, China (Hong Kong included) ranks the first among the destinations of overseas bound activities by Niigata-based businesses.⁶⁷

Local Impact on National Policy: the Case of Japan's ODA for Agricultural Development in Heilongjiang

Official Development Aid (ODA) is a significant component of Japan's economic diplomacy towards China. In terms of geographical distribution of the ODA projects in China, the focus from the 1970s to the mid-1990s was on coastal and resource-rich regions.⁶⁸ Since the mid-1990s, Japan began to pay more attention to funding projects to improve the environment in China and assisting infrastructure development in China's Western region. Northeast China, the land-locked Heilongjiang Province in particular, stands at a disadvantage when it comes to competing for Japan's ODA projects. In fact, it was not until 1992 that the first ODA-funded project took place in Heilongjiang. To date, Japan's ODA has funded three categories of projects in Heilongjiang: agricultural development (two projects), transportation (one bridge construction project), electricity transmission networks (one project), telephone communication (one project), and environmental protection (one project).⁶⁹ Of these projects, the largest amount of funding has gone into agricultural development.

It is important to note that in spite of the massive amount of attention in Japan about ODA to China, little has been done to illustrate the decision making process of or the policy dynamics involved in the selection of a specific project. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the agency for selecting and implementing the Japanese government's ODA projects, reveals very little about its project selection, in spite of the fairly comprehensive country study reports on China.⁷⁰

My research about Niigata-Heilongjiang ties has led to some interesting findings about the actors involved in the project evaluation process of one of the ODA projects for agricultural development in Heilongjiang. Because of the long duration in the selection process (from the 1970s to the 1990s), it was not possible to interview the persons directly involved. The following information comes from three sources: an eight-piece series carried in the Niigata Nippo (Daily) newspaper in anticipation of the dam's completion,⁷¹ a 1990 interview of Tozaburo Sano by Taizo Iida, a professor in the Law Faculty of Hosei University,⁷² and a calendar of the Baoqing dam-related events posted in the Niigata Japan-China Friendship Association's website.⁷³

ODA for Agricultural Land Improvement in Baoqing, Heilongjiang

In December 1996, the Japanese government agreed to grant a three billion yen low-interest (2.3 %) loan to China, earmarked for the Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Water Resources to construct a multi-purpose dam at a site called Longtouqiao (dragon head bridge) on a small river in Baoqing County. The loan, dispersed in one package, was categorized as "ordinary untied" (i.e., without having to purchase Japanese equipment), with a payback time of thirty years and a grace period of ten years.⁷⁴ The dam project -- completed in the year 2001 -- is one of the two hundred and fifty-eight projects Japan's yen loans to China have financed since the loan program's start in 1979 and the amount for it is very small in comparison to most other projects. The amount of the loan is only a tiny fraction of the total 580 billion yen in the first phase of Japan's fourth yen loan package to China (1995-1998, for forty projects). What makes the project interesting different is how the idea for funding it reached the level of central government agreement between China and Japan in the first place.

Sano's China Passion and Institutional Opportunities and Constraints

Tozaburo Sano (1923-1994) played a key role from accepting a Chinese request to assist the agricultural development of northern Heilongjiang in 1977 to the Japanese government's final decision in December 1994 to include the Baoqing dam in its fourth yen loan package to China. Sano played an active role in promoting the idea of a Sea of Japan rim zone. In 1992, Niigata Prefecture recognized his contributions by making him the first Japanese individual to receive the prefecture's Japan Sea Rim Niigata Award. He also received the 10th Asia-Africa Award from the Asia-Africa Foundation in Tokyo specifically for his efforts in assisting agricultural development in Heilongjiang.⁷⁵ The annual Asia-Africa Award recognizes those "who have made contribution to Asian and African regional development."⁷⁶

In his lifetime, Sano visited China over thirty times. In 1978, he led the Land Improvement Association in Kameda-go and traveled to the countryside of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning Provinces of China – the prewar Manchuria area. It was on this occasion that his campaign to assist agricultural development in northeast China began. Prior to the trip, Sano had been inspired by a request personally delivered by General Wang Zhen (who was then a vice prime minister of China) to a group of former Japanese soldiers who had joined the Chinese liberation army in Jilin Province and returned to an agricultural life in Niigata after the war's end. Wang had commanded the Chinese army to develop the "great northern wasteland" (*Beidahuang* in Chinese) of northeastern Heilongjiang from 1953 to 1955. Understandably his personal plea for assistance to former Japanese soldiers in China carried a considerable emotional weight. Indeed, to turn former enemy soldiers into peacemakers was a particularly shrewd Chinese united-front strategy in dealing with Japan and worked to China's advantage in the "China boom" in Japan in the early 1980s. By the mid-1980s, "people-to-people" diplomacy began to be less important for China, thanks in a large part to the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between China and most of the Western countries. Against this background, the Chinese government began to be more selective in enlisting assistance from Japanese groups for managing its diplomatic relations with Japan.

But passion at the unofficial level had its limits. When Sano turned to the Japanese embassy in Beijing to urge financial assistance for Heilongjiang, he got a cold reply. This can be attributed to the mechanism between the Chinese and Japanese governments for selecting projects for ODA funding in the 1980s. Under the mechanism, the Chinese central government's economic planners, not those in the provincial governments, much less private groups, were in charge of proposing projects for negotiation with Japan. Indeed, the Japanese government did not decide on granting official development assistance to China until 1979. In 1980, the Chinese government did formally request the Japanese government for ODA to develop agriculture in Heilongjiang. In 1981, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), began its own feasibility study of a comprehensive agricultural development assistance plan for Heilongjiang. JICA benefited from a survey completed by Sano and his colleagues from 1978-1979. Two years (1981-1983) of JICA study resulted in a small grant (technical assistance). For addressing the core of the problem of land improvement in the vast Heilongjiang plains, JICA presented the Chinese government with a development plan in 1984. By then, the second yen loan (1984-1989) projects had already been determined. If the Chinese government was to pursue the Heilongjiang plan, it had to wait for negotiations with Japan for the third yen loan period (1990-1995) to start.

After 1984, the Chinese government continued to make use of Sano's friendship building efforts but diverted Sano's enthusiasm to the Western provinces of China (de-desertification in Gansu Province and Inner Mongolia), which Sano and his like-minded colleagues obliged. There is a larger reason for this turn of events. By the mid-1980s, the Chinese government changed its development priorities from agricultural sectors to the urban and industrial sectors. In terms of geographical focus, the national government of China concentrated its energy on expanding coastal development from the four special economic zones in the south to northern coastal cities. Inland provinces in China received less support from the central government for economic development.⁷⁷

Japanese ODA projects to China likewise coincided with the geographical and industry priorities of China. The first three yen loan programs (1979-1995) exclusively covered infrastructure and energy development projects either heavily concentrated in China's coastal provinces or directly related to Japan's energy imports from China.⁷⁸ About the only area of significance landlocked Heilongjiang held and continues to hold for Japan is the Daqing oil field. Daqing is the main source of supply of crude oil for Japanese power corporations (averaging eight million tons per year), according to the Long-term Trade

Agreements between the two national governments.⁷⁹ By 1979 Daqing had already become an established supplier, requiring no Japanese ODA.

Indeed, citing lack of funding, neither the provincial government of Heilongjiang nor the national government of China revisited the issue of utilizing Japanese aid for agricultural development in Heilongjiang until 1991. This came about partly due to Sano's personal campaign by bringing the project up again to Tian Jiyun, then China's vice premier in charge of agriculture. Discussions and negotiations with the Japanese government over funding for the Baoqing dam project and other agriculture-related projects in Heilongjiang began in December 1991 and was not completed until December 1994. In addition, the agreed amount (three billion yen) for the Baoqing dam project was only a fraction of the twenty-five billion yen Sano had suggested to then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1984, reportedly in person.

Finally, it should be noted that Sano did not act in his personal capacity. Until his death, Sano was active in a number of groups: chairman of the Niigata Japan-China Friendship Association (from 1979), chairman of the Economic Research Institute for the Japan Sea Rim (from 1985), and director of the Japan-China Northeast Development Association (from 1990). His affiliation with these groups certainly gave him the institutional legitimacy to pursue a personal passion. At the same time, the fact that he had to establish the research institute, which was dissolved upon his death, probably speaks about the waning of enthusiasm among other participants in the Friendship Association.⁸⁰ The Northeast China Development Association, headquartered in Tokyo, continues to play a role in assisting local-level economic exchanges between China's northeastern provinces and Japanese corporations and business groups.

In other words, friendship building played an irreplaceable role in identifying and drawing up a preliminary plan for China to utilize Japanese ODA to develop a backward area in China that is of no immediate economic value to Japan. But there was a limit to the impact of friendship building on actual development assistance policies between the governments of Japan and China. Without the efforts of friendship building by such devoted individuals as Sano, on the other hand, construction of the Baoqing dam project – using Japanese ODA – might not have been possible in the first place.

Conclusion: Implications for Research

This research note is only a small first step towards understanding the dynamic of local level exchanges between Japan and China since 1972. Nonetheless, it is possible to make a few observations about the role local governments play in Japan-China relations. My points here are not meant to be exhaustive, as prefectures in Japan and provinces in China are vastly different from each other when it comes to integration with the rest of the world in general and establishing local-level ties across national borders in particular.⁸¹ Rather, the remarks below are meant to indicate a possible direction of research on contemporary relations between Japan and China.

This paper shows, among other things, that by placing sub-national actors -- local governments and private groups as well as individuals devoted to promotion of friendly ties between the Chinese and the Japanese -- at the center of inquiry can be a profitable intellectual exercise. The development of Niigata-Heilongjiang relations dispels some of the usual perceptions of sister-city ties as purely ceremonial and wasteful. In many ways, without the sub-national actors' efforts, the national governments of China and Japan might not have been able to agree on projects beneficial to the geographically disadvantaged areas of both countries, at least, not as determinedly or as quickly. Passion, positive or negative, does matter. So does the national government in the growth of such ties. But sub-national actors in international relations can, albeit in limited ways, affect the behavior of national actors. In short, the Baoqing dam project well demonstrates those dynamics.

There are good reasons for pursuing more research on the roles sub-national actors play in the evolution of relations between Japan and China. First, as local governments in Japan and China pursue their local-level international ties with each other, the meaning of "friendship" seems to have changed from one based on softening harsh feelings the war incurred on people of the two countries to one based on promoting social, economic, and environmental change in China and diversifying social life in areas of Japan that are distant from the cosmopolitan centers. This is indeed a positive development. In the information age, diplomacy between Japan and China at the national level is subject to intense media scrutiny as well, which can serve as a source of restraint on pragmatic management of bilateral relations. Cooperative projects at the local level attract far less media interest and therefore have one fewer restraint. A good case in point is the

fact that among China's provinces, Jiangsu, whose capital is the very site of the Nanjing Massacre (whose scale is a matter of fierce dispute in postwar Japan-China diplomacy), has managed to establish the largest number of sister relations with its Japanese counterparts.

Second, internationalization has become a firm part of local governments' reform agenda in Japan, which enjoys support from the Japanese central government.⁸² A similar trend has been going on in China during the reform period. Although the nature of central-local relations in Japan and in China is different, it can be said that Chinese provinces are gaining a greater profile in China's inter-national diplomacy as well. In addition to establishing and managing sister-city and province relations, China's provincial governments are now involved in such tasks as border management, attracting foreign investment, managing the foreign diplomatic and business presence, and promoting international tourism.⁸³ In other words, at the turn of the century, local governments in both countries have a vested interest in continuing to pursue improvement of local governance through international cooperation.

Third, after the end of the Cold War, the basic formula for bilateral relations between Japan and China that had been established in 1972 – conceptualizing Japan-China relations as part of the Cold War “great triangle” and giving priority to *yuko/youhao* (friendship) promotion – had to change. But security/strategic relations between the two countries continue to be part of the big-power relations between the United States and China. There is virtually no established framework for confidence building between the Japanese and Chinese military establishments. The media, both in Japan and in China, play an increasingly influential role in affecting formal diplomatic acts between the two national governments.⁸⁴ At the elite level, there is a generational change in leadership in both countries (the war-generation are dying or quickly losing influence). Above all, Taiwan as a factor in Japan-China relations increases the level of stress on the 1972 formula.⁸⁵ But neither Japan nor China has been able to craft a new formula for their bilateral relations other than stressing the importance of stability and friendship. Such a state of affairs makes genuine confidence building and friendship promotion at the national level difficult. By contrast, local level ties can move on a more solid base because they involve fewer factors of geo-strategic and ideological significance.

Fourth, between Japan and China the degree of economic interdependence – measurable not just in terms of statistics (trade, investment, and Japan's development assistance to China⁸⁶) but also in terms of an increase in (legal and illegal) migration of humans from labor-rich China to rapidly aging Japan⁸⁷ – continues to increase. On the other hand, the mixture of factors of culture, history is such that growing levels of interdependence can complicate the search for a more manageable future in their bilateral relations. Future development of local-level relations in these two countries deserves watching, as it can impact national decisions as well.

On a larger scale, controversies in response to the process of globalization tell us that the recognition that international politics is inherently local is not restricted to Western democratic societies like the United States. As the populations in both China and Japan undergo generational changes, how local communities and people perceive the state of affairs in bilateral relations at the national level can conceivably become a more influential force challenging conventional domains of diplomacy. The short conclusion is: for reasons stated above and more, more efforts ought to be made to appreciate Japan-China relations at the local level, which can contribute to our understanding of dynamics of bilateral relationships at the national level as well.

Notes

- ¹ Daojiong Zha, "Chinese Migrant Workers in Japan: Policies, Institutions, and Civil Society," in Tsuneo Akaha, ed., Human Flows across National Borders in Northeast Asia, Proceedings of an International Seminar, November 2-3, 2001, Center for East Asian Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, California, pp. 92-117.
- ² Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva, "The Russian Presence in Niigata and Hokkaido: Preliminary Analysis of Interviews and Surveys," in Akaha (note 1), pp. 64-72; Gilbert Rozman, "Backdoor Japan: the Search for A Way Out via Regionalism and Decentralization," The Journal of Japanese Studies, vol. 25, no. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 3-31.
- ³ Identification of these individuals was possible thanks to a mailing list of volunteer conversation partners of the Japanese Language Program of the International University of Japan.
- ⁴ As a matter of fact, I sought assistance from professors of the Niigata University, where over two hundred students from China are enrolled, as well as the Niigata International Association, whose limited budgets and personnel prevented it from generating a mailing list of Chinese residents who made use of its service.
- ⁵ Mitsuko Oshima, Niigata-ken no Hyakunen [One hundred years of Niigata prefecture], Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1990, pp. 268-269.
- ⁶ Rong Li, Kokuryuko-sho no Nihon Kyomin [Japanese migrants in Heilongjiang province], Tokyo: Uchiyama Shoten, 2001, pp. 12-13.
- ⁷ This information was provided by Zha by an officer in the Niigata Prefectural Government's International Affairs Division.
- ⁸ "Liao Cheng-Chih Meets Japanese Niigata Prefectural Assembly Members' Delegation For Japan- China Friendship," Xinhua News Archive, January 22, 1977; "Liao Cheng-Chih Meets Second Friendship Delegation From Niigata Prefecture," Xinhua News Archive, November 27, 1978.
- ⁹ "Chinese Friendship Delegation Warmly Received in Niigata, Japan," Xinhua News Archive, May 26 1979.
- ¹⁰ Masao Ichioka, Jichitai Gaiko: Niigata no Jissen – Yuko kara Kyoryoku e [Local level diplomacy: Niigata's experience in moving from friendship promotion to international cooperation], Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Hyoron Sha, 2001, pp. 43-51.
- ¹¹ As expressed to Zha during an interview with Niigata City officials in charge of managing ties with Harbin.
- ¹² Email communication with Zha, November 16, 2001.
- ¹³ Zha's interview with Niigata Prefectural Government officials, February 10, 2002.
- ¹⁴ Zha's conversations during a class visit to the Eastern Niigata port office, February 2001.
- ¹⁵ Zha's interview with Niigata Prefectural Government officers, January 15, 2002.
- ¹⁶ In one of my own accidental encounters, a Chinese wife living in Urusa, a rural village under 10,000 people came from Shanghai.
- ¹⁷ Kokusai Koryu Gaiyo [Digest of international exchange activities], Niigata: Niigata-ken Kokusai Koryu Ka, 2000, p. 36.
- ¹⁸ Comments to Zha by one Niigata Prefectural Government official, February 15, 2002.
- ¹⁹ Masao Ichioka, *Ibid*, pp. 106-107; Kokusai Koryu Gaiyo, pp. 133-134.
- ²⁰ See Gilbert Rozman, "Japan's Images of China in the 1990s: Are They Ready for China's 'Smile Diplomacy' or Bush's 'Strong Diplomacy'?", Japanese Journal of Political Science, vol. 2, no. 1 (2001), pp. 97-125.
- ²¹ I suspect that such feelings have to do with the ongoing dispute over export of Chinese farm products of the time at the time of the survey. If so, another reading of the same statement can be that if more Chinese come to know the realities of farm life in Japan, it may become easier for them to accept Japanese curbs on Chinese agricultural imports.
- ²² Richard A. Higgott, Geoffrey R. D. Underhill, and Andreas Bieler, eds., Non-state Actors and Authority in the Global System, New York: Routledge, 2000; Phillip Taylor, Non-state Actors in International Politics: from Transregional to Substate Organizations, Boulder: Westview Press, 1984; Louis W. Pauly and Simon Reich, "National Structures and Multinational Corporate Behavior: Enduring Differences in the Age of Globalization," International Organization, vol. 51, no. 1 (Winter 1997), pp. 1-30.
- ²³ John M. Hobson, The State and International Relations, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- ²⁴ Joshua A. Fogel, The Cultural Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations: Essays on the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.
- ²⁵ For a partial listing of such names, see Satoshi Amako and Shigeto Sonoda, Nicchu Koryu no Shihanseiki [A quarter century of Japan-China exchanges], Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shinpo Sha, 1998, p. 2.
- ²⁶ Amako and Sonoda, *ibid*, p. 3.
- ²⁷ Satoshi Amako, Nicchu Kankei Nijuisseiki e no Teigen: Kanjoron to Senryakuron no Hazama, [Recommendations for Japan-China relations in the twenty-first century: between emotional arguments and strategic arguments], 2001, pp. 43-60.

²⁸ Wilbur Zelinsky, "The Twinning of the World: Sister Cities in Geographic and Historical Perspective," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, vol. 81, no. 1 (1991), pp. 1-31.

²⁹ Wilbur Zelinsky, *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁰ Japanese Local Government International Affiliation Directory 2000, Tokyo: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), 2000, p. 99.

³¹ "The Survey Reports on Regional Internationalization and U.S.-Related Exchange Activities in Japan," The Japan Foundation (Center for Global Partnership), vol. I (October 1994), and vol. II (July 1997); "The Survey Reports on Japan-Related Regional Activities in the U.S.," The Japan Foundation (Center for Global Partnership), vol. I (March 1993), vol. II (March 1994).

³² CLAIR, *ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

³³ Youhao Chengshi Tongji [Statistics of sister cities], Beijing: Zhongguo Guoji Youhao Chengshi Lianluohui, 2000, p. 4.

³⁴ A partial in-house assessment was made by the Japan Center of International Exchange and the (Japan) Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, Chiiki ga Tsunagu Nohon to Ajia: Jichitai Kokusai Kyoryoku Chosa Jigyo Hokokusho [Local-level exchange between Japan and Asia: A Report on Japanese local authorities' international exchange activities], Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 1998.

³⁵ Kurt Werner Radtke, China's Relations with Japan, 1945-83: the Role of Liao Chengzhi, New York: Manchester University Press, 1990.

³⁶ I'm thankful to Akihiro Takeuchi, a colleague in the Japanese Language Program of the International University of Japan, for alerting me to such nuances.

³⁷ Shigeto Sonoda, Nicchu Minkan Kyoryoku ga Umidasu 'Mondai' to Sono Kaiketsusaku ['Problems' arising from people-to-people exchanges between Japan and China and their solutions], 2001, pp. 127-140.

³⁸ Nicchu Yuko Kyokai, Nicchu Yuko Undo Gojunen [Fifty years of Japan-China friendship movements], Tokyo: Toho Shoten, 2000.

³⁹ Allen Whiting, China Eyes Japan, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

⁴⁰ Akihito Tanaka, Nicchu Kankei 1945-1990 [Japan-China Relations 1945-1990], Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, p. 114.

⁴¹ Glenn D. Hook and Michael A. Weiner, eds, The Internationalization of Japan, London: Routledge, 1992.

⁴² Yasushi Sugiyama, "Internal and External Aspects of Internationalization," in *ibid.*, pp. 72-103.

⁴³ Toshihiro Menjū, Jichitai Gaiko no Susume [Thinking through local government diplomacy], Tokyo: Chuo Koron, 1998, p. 208.

⁴⁴ CLAIR, *ibid.*, pp. 92-94.

⁴⁵ Susumu Takahashi, "The Internationalization of Kanazawa Prefecture," in Hook and Weiner, pp. 190-202.

⁴⁶ Kuniko Fujita and Richard Child Hill, eds., Japanese Cities in the World Economy, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

⁴⁷ Richard Child Hill and Kuniko Fujita, "State Restructuring and Local Power in Japan," Urban Studies, vol. 37, no. 4 (2000), pp. 673-690.

⁴⁸ Jain Purnendra, "Emerging Foreign Policy Actors: Subnational Governments and Nongovernmental Organizations," in Takashi Inoguchi and Jain Purnendra, eds., Japanese Foreign Policy Today: A Reader, New York, NY: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 18-39.

⁴⁹ Gilbert Rozman, "Backdoor Japan: the Search for A Way Out via Regionalism and Decentralization," The Journal of Japanese Studies, vol. 25, no. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 3-31.

⁵⁰ For a good account of Heilongjiang's ties with the outside world, see Gaye Christophersen, "Heilongjiang's Role in the Northeast Asian Regional Economy," paper presented to the International Studies Association annual meeting, 2001.

⁵¹ Mitsuko Oshima, Niigata-ken no Hyakunen [One hundred years of Niigata prefecture], Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1990, p. 268.

⁵² The number of "households" is based on registration records upon relocation in Northeast China. The first record of the time of such dispatches is April 1937, the 6th dispatch. Oshima, *ibid.*, p. 269.

⁵³ Rong Li, Kokuryuko-sho no Nihon Kyomin [Japanese migrants in Heilongjiang province], Tokyo: Uchiyama Shoten, 2001, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁴ Interview with officials in the International Affairs Section, Niigata Prefecture Government, March 2, 2001.

⁵⁵ Glenn D. Hook, "Japan and Micro-Regionalism: Constructing the Japan Sea Rim Zone," in Yoshinobu Yamamoto, ed., Globalism, Regionalism and Nationalism, London: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, pp. 126-140.

⁵⁶ Charles Smith, "Sent to Siberia: Japanese City Forges Own Trade Ties with Russia," Far Eastern Economic Review, vol. 21 (October 1993), pp. 20-21.

⁵⁷ Information about ERINA can be viewed at its website at <<http://www.erina.co.jp>>.

- ⁵⁸ *Kokusai Koryu Gaiyo* [Digest of international exchange activities], Niigata: Niigata-ken Kokusai Koryuka, 2000, p. 135.
- ⁵⁹ Hiroshi Yoshida, *Chiho Jichitai no Kokusai Kyoryoku – Chiiki Jyumin Sanka Gata no ODA o Mezashite* [Local authorities in international cooperation: a case for citizen participation in ODA projects], Tokyo: Nihon Hyoronsha, 2001.
- ⁶⁰ Author's interview with officials in the Niigata prefectural government, and the Niigata port authorities, January 2002.
- ⁶¹ "Liao Cheng-Chih Meets Japanese Niigata Prefectural Assembly Members' Delegation For Japan- China Friendship," *Xinhua News Archive*, January 22, 1977; "Liao Cheng-Chih Meets Second Friendship Delegation From Niigata Prefecture," *Xinhua News Archive*, November 27, 1978.
- ⁶² "Chinese Friendship Delegation Warmly Received in Niigata, Japan," *Xinhua News Archive*, May 26, 1979.
- ⁶³ Masao Ichioka, *Jichitai Gaiko: Niigata no Jissen – Yuko kara Kyoryoku e* [Local Level Diplomacy: Niigata's Experience in Moving from Friendship-Promotion to International Cooperation], Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Hyoron Sha, 2001, pp. 43-51.
- ⁶⁴ *Kokusai Koryu Gaiyo* [Digest of international exchange activities,] Niigata: Niigata-ken Kokusai Koryuka, 2000, pp. 133-134.
- ⁶⁵ Information about the Dalian Office can be viewed at <<http://niigata.dalian-info.com/japanese/index.htm>>. The only other such overseas office Niigata Prefecture has opened is that in Seoul, South Korea (since October 1990).
- ⁶⁶ Tanaka and Zhou signed on the Japan-China agreement for establishing normal diplomatic relations in 1972, representing their respective governments.
- ⁶⁷ Masao Ichioka, *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- ⁶⁸ Unryu Suganuma, "Japanese Yen Credits to China: Geopolitical, Geo-Economic, and Geo-Strategic Considerations of Sino-Japanese Economic Relations, 1979-1994," *Asian Economies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (March 1998), pp. 5-36.
- ⁶⁹ Based on information provided by the China Division of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, February 17, 2002.
- ⁷⁰ Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).
- ⁷¹ *Niigata Nippo*, June 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 2001.
- ⁷² The interview was carried out on November 23, 1990. See Taizo Iida, "Niigata Chosa Shuccho Hokoku" [Report on field trip to Niigata], in Yuji Suzuki, *Ajia Taiheiyō ni okeru Chiho no Kokusaika* [Local level internationalization in the Asia-Pacific], pp. 210-214.
- ⁷³ At <<http://www.niigata-inet.or.jp/njcfa/projetfollow.html>>.
- ⁷⁴ Information about this loan is from *Digest of Yen Loans to China*, the Japan Bank of International Cooperation, August 2000, p. 19 and p. 30.
- ⁷⁵ "Thanks To Niigata Man, Sanjiang Plain Has Beans," *The Daily Yomiuri*, November 28, 1992, p. 3.
- ⁷⁶ *The Daily Yomiuri*, November 20, 1990, p. 2.
- ⁷⁷ Shaoguang Wang and Angang Hu, *The Political Economy of Uneven Development: the Case of China*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999.
- ⁷⁸ Unryu Suganuma, "Japanese Yen Credits to China: Geopolitical, Geo-Economic, and Geo-Strategic Considerations of Sino-Japanese Economic Relations, 1979-1994," *Asian Economies*, vol. 27, no. 1 (March 1998), pp. 5-36.
- ⁷⁹ *Nicchu Keikyo Journal* (Japan-China Economic Association Journal), no. 86 (January 2001), pp. 5-7.
- ⁸⁰ Author's interview with Niigata city officials, January 2002.
- ⁸¹ For a report on survey findings in Japanese prefectures' attitudes towards local-level exchanges with China, see Hitoshi Yoshida, *ibid.*, pp. 2-25. For a succinct view on the diversity of Chinese provinces' international ties, see Shaun Breslin, "Decentralisation, Globalization and China's Partial Re-Engagement in the Global Economy," *New Political Economy*, vol. 5, no. 2 (July 2000), pp. 205-226.
- ⁸² See, for example, Shinyasu Hoshino, "Japanese Local Government in an Era of Global Economic Interdependency," in Jong S. Jun and Deil S. Wright, eds., *Globalization & Decentralization: Institutional Contexts, Policy Issues, and Intergovernmental Relations in Japan and the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996, pp. 359-373; Toshiaki Kitazato, "Promotion of the Regional Internationalization Policy," *Local Government Review in Japan*, no. 21 (1993), pp. 71-77.
- ⁸³ Peter T. Y. Cheung and James T. H. Tang, "The External Relations of China's Provinces," in David Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 91-122.
- ⁸⁴ As noted in Gilbert Rozman's recent works. See 2.
- ⁸⁵ Ryosei Kokubun, "*Reisen go no Nicchu Kankei: '1972 nen Taisei' no Tenkan*" [Japan-China relations after the end of the Cold War: transformation of the 1972 system], *Kokusai Mondai* (international affairs), no. 490 (January 2001), pp. 42-56.
- ⁸⁶ Japan is the single largest provider of development assistance to China, the largest trading partner for China. China is Japan's second largest trading partner and the second most important destination in Asia for outbound Japanese investment.

⁸⁷ Maurice D. Van Arsdol, Jr., Glenn DC Guarian, and Stephen Lum, "Migration, Human Security, and National Security in Northeast Asia," in Tsuneo Akaha, ed., Human Flows across National Borders in Northeast Asia. Proceedings of an International Seminar, November 2-3, 2001, Center for East Asian Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies.