

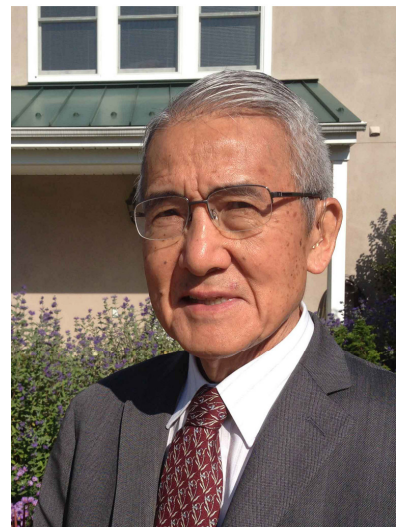


# Japan, the United States, and China in the Twenty-First Century: A Historian's Perspective

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I was born in Tokyo in 1934, eighty years ago, and lived in Japan for nineteen years, until 1953. Since 1953, I have spent almost sixty-one years in the United States. That is why what I know about Japan is probably quite different from what Japan really is today. My knowledge about Japan is mostly based on my memory before 1953. I have spent the last sixty-one years, from 1953 to 2014, in the United States, primarily in the teaching profession. I have met a great variety of people since entering university.

I have paid occasional visits to China over that period of time. However, the time I have spent in Japan and China is not as long as the years I have spent in the United States. Therefore, I am not sure how much I can discuss the grand theme of China, Japan, and the United States in the twenty-first century. Also, when I study Japan-China relations, Japan-US-China relations, or general world affairs, I can do so only as a historian. In much of what follows, I shall present a historian's perspective on the world's future in the twenty-first century, in particular the relationship among China, Japan, and the United States.



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In my opinion, how you approach history is very important. For example, I give a lecture on “Japan, the United States and China in the Twenty-first Century.” Now, I will focus on what the twenty-first century is and when the twenty-first century began as a simple question. I think that this question is quite interesting.

The twenty-first century began in 2001. Of course, as you know, the United States was struck by the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Therefore, it is possible to regard the twenty-first century as the age of terrorism on the basis of the fact that orchestrated terrorist attacks happened in the United States in 2001.

However, I think it is very interesting that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared that it would designate the first ten years of the twenty-first century



from 2001 to 2010 as the decade of international cultural exchange in 2001. This makes me think that you can take a different approach to the twenty-first century, depending on whether you look at the century as the age of terrorism or the age of cultural exchange.

Right now, I still cannot tell whether the twenty-first century will be the age in which unpleasant and disgusting things, like terrorism, occur or the age in which people enjoy cultural exchange, as UNESCO stated. However, if you only think abstractly about which possibility will become a reality, it is not very insightful. It is too mechanical to think that the twenty-first century began in 2001. I have a different way of thinking about the twenty-first century and I will present my approach in the following text.

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This is how I think, though I am not sure if other historians think the same way. I am of the opinion that the twenty-first century began in the 1970s. One of the reasons why I think this is that if we assume that the twentieth century began around 1900, I still cannot avoid thinking about World War I, whose 100th anniversary is marked this year. The world underwent a gloomy ten years from World War I to the 1930s, which were followed by World War II and the Cold War. Therefore, some think that the twentieth century was the age of war. There were two world wars, a war between China and Japan, a war between Japan and the United States, the Korean War and a clash between China and the United States. Even when there were no clashes, the Cold War continued for many years and many people claim that the twentieth century was the age of war. Although this way of thinking is not inconceivable, many other movements and trends offering some room for other ways of thinking emerged in the 1970s. I think that those streams have continued to this day.

To put it simply, although we must note that the issues of war, the Cold War and nuclear weapons have remained with us since the 1970s, a new trend also came into being in the 1970s. Of course, the most typical example is globalization in the realm of the economy. Globalization is an international economic trend, but the global economy was led by the United States before the 1970s, and Western Europe also became a major player in the world economy in the 1970s. The so-called West, or the United States and Europe, were previously leading players in the international economy but such a situation could not be described as globalization. The full-blown globalization of the international economy began with the participation of Japan, which began to build up economic power in the 1970s, China, which entered the international economy in the 1980s, and other countries, such as India and Turkey. Based on this recognition, I think that the actual trend of globalization began in the 1970s.

In addition, in my opinion, energy issues, such as serious cross-border environmental problems and oil crises, which were triggered by environmental pollution, also became increasingly noticeable in the 1970s. Human rights issues also came into the spotlight in many parts of the world. Eastern European countries that were militarily allied with the former Soviet Union through the Warsaw Treaty Organization (also known as the Warsaw Pact) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a collective security alliance between the United States and other Western countries, signed the Helsinki Agreement in 1975. This means that both the Eastern and Western blocs declared that human rights were



exceedingly significant. Although I do not know how seriously they took the issue, at least both the Soviet Union and the United States became increasingly aware of the grave significance of human rights in the coming age. Specifically, the First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1973 to enhance gender equality and the concept of human rights began to materialize. I also think that the recognition of human rights as an international ideal that could be universally applied to all countries around the world started in the 1970s.

I think that world movements began to change in the 1970s in line with the recognition that multilateral cooperation was very desirable for tackling international challenges, including environmental problems and human rights issues. As for how you should understand this, I think that three points of view are essential to thinking about the world no matter what age you are in, though it may be a little bit of a formalized approach currently.

The first focal point is the nation. It is quite natural that you think about every single age through the filter of nation. As long as there are nations in the world, the United States had its own 1970s, China had its own 1970s and Japan had its own 1970s. Things happened separately in each country. However, at the same time, massive changes occurred in bilateral relationships, including China-Japan and U.S.-China, in the 1970s. After infrequent contact, the United States and China had their first major diplomatic contact and China and Japan also established diplomatic relations. In this sense, the 1970s was a very important decade in terms of international relations as well.

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For another thing, in recent years, I have become keenly interested in the development of cross-border human connections, that is, relationships at a different level from intergovernmental relations. If you describe intergovernmental relations as international relations, how should you describe cross-border exchanges and connections involving ordinary citizens beyond the framework of intergovernmental relations? The word “transnational” (cross-border relations) is an expression that some historians, including myself, have been using recently. This concept is different from internationalism, which is international relations established through various arrangements, such as international law and treaties among many different governments and nations. I think that civil-level connections, such as cultural and educational exchanges and economic relations, are at a different level from international relations. To describe such relations, I use the word “transnational” as a provisional means of expression. The forging of those relations has begun between China and the United States and between Japan and China.

I have been a university teacher in the United States for many years. The inflow of Chinese students into U.S. universities accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s. I no longer teach at Harvard University, but I still have my library study at Harvard. What I always note is that 20 to 25% of the first-year students at Harvard are Chinese students. Currently, I see only one Japanese student or even no Japanese students at Harvard and this is always discussed as a serious issue. However, I cannot force young Japanese people to go to American universities and I cannot do anything about the situation.



Certainly, it is now hoped that young Japanese people will look to the outside world. Many young Chinese people are highly motivated to look to the outside world and are willing to take every opportunity to go abroad and go to the United States. On my recent visit to China, I happened to meet a young Chinese person who was eager to study in the United States. In addition, many Chinese university students aspire to study at graduate schools in the United States and Europe. I think that trend began in the 1970s.

While I was teaching at the University of Chicago, I saw a gradual increase in students from China and I think that this trend began in 1981 or 1982. People who were in their twenties at that time are now in their fifties. Many of those people are still active in the United States and some demonstrate great talents as excellent scholars back in China and Hong Kong. Some Chinese scholars have top-level talent. I have the impression that it was in the 1970s that this trend emerged. I also think that it was in the 1970s that such cross-border, transnational connections at a different level from international relations began to develop. In my opinion, we can find the origins of the twenty-first century in those phenomena.

That is to say, if you focus in particular on the one hundred years from the 1870s to the 1970s, for example, by highlighting the major part of the twentieth century, you can say that the period was the century of international confrontation. For example, if you assume that international disputes, including between Great Britain and Germany, between Germany and France, between Japan and China and between the United States and Japan, had a very strong impact on the international community and history during these one hundred years, we have already begun to see the end of such an age. Of course, international conflicts will still occur, but World War III is quite unlikely to break out. In recent years I have often been asked by Chinese people, “Do you think that history will repeat itself?” and “Do you think that World War III will occur?” In response to these questions, I flatly assert that such a thing would never occur. I am eighty years old now and I can be so irresponsible as to say such a thing because if World War III should break out during the twenty-first century, I will be dead by then. However, I do say that World War III will absolutely never occur. I am totally convinced that there will be no war between China and Japan or between China and the United States in the future.

The reason I think this is that people from these countries are currently closely connected with one another. I pay keen attention to the personal relationships between ordinary Chinese and American people. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese students and tourists in the United States have built connections with Americans in many ways. I think that the deeper their relationships become, the more unlikely a war between those countries is to occur, although this way of thinking may be a bit too wishful and optimistic.

Although there were some cases of such private-sector connections between Japan and the United States or between China and Japan before World War II, private connections separate from national intention and policy were very weak at that time. However, things are quite different now. Nation-to-nation relations and government-to-government relations, especially the current relationship between the Japanese and Chinese governments, does not seem to be working properly. However, it can be said that the personal relationships between individual Japanese and Chinese citizens, particularly among scholars, have become very close, as far as I know. In addition, with regard to what went wrong between



Japan and the United States before World War II, I suspect that the small amount of substantial private contact between Japanese and American people led Japan-U.S. relations to turn sour.

In contrast, today we see cross-border, transnational connections becoming increasingly strong in the areas of economy, culture and education. That is why I speculate that the 1970s, when this trend emerged, marked the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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When I think about this theme from a broader perspective, I cannot help focusing on a keyword which I have recently seen and heard. It has often been mentioned, particularly among American and European historians. The keyword for historical studies used to be national identity and uniqueness in the 1950s when I went to study in the United States for the first time. At that time, American teachers actively emphasized how unique America's national identity was.

However, this way of thinking has recently been rejected. It is completely inconceivable that Japan or the United States is particularly unique. The idea has come to the fore that national identity always changes and there is no such thing as individual or national identity that will remain everlasting and unchanged. Therefore, when you discuss China, it is wrong to base your argument on the assumption that a certain form of Chinese identity has remained unchanged from the past to the present and that China is a unique and distinctive nation. By the same token, I am very critical of the nation-centered and patriotic way of thinking that Japan is a unique nation with a remarkable, distinctive culture. I think that this strange narrow-minded patriotism that one's own nation is particularly unique and has something that cannot be understood by people of other nations has been fading away since the 1970s.

The trend of cross-border connections has become increasingly strong in recent years. As mentioned above, academic experts have recently started using the word "encounter" often. World history is a series of encounters. That is, no nation or race has a history in which they lived totally by themselves. World history is a history of encounters. Encounters develop into interactions. The concept of encounters and interactions has recently become a mainstream topic of discussion in American and European academic circles, and I totally agree with it. I also strongly agree with the recent trend of avoiding using the word "identity," which used to be mentioned frequently. Fundamentally, I do not think anything like an unchanging national identity has existed, and I am delighted that this word has fallen out of use.

The word "admixture" has taken the place of the word "identity." This word means a mixture and fusion of many different things. The word "hybridity" has also come into use. In this situation, the words "identity" and "cultural uniqueness," which were frequently used sixty years ago when I visited the United States for the first time, have now fallen out of use. Recently, it has often been said that all cultures are admixtures and the history of humankind is a sequence of encounters, interactions, admixtures and hybrids. To put it in extreme terms, the history of humankind is said to be a history of hybridization.

In my opinion, you can say exactly this if you assume that world history from the 1970s on is the history of the twenty-first century. That is, the history of the twenty-first century is a series of cross-border encounters that began around the 1970s and there have been interactions, admixtures and hybridity in





many ways since then. The hybridity in this context encompasses not only a fusion and admixture of all peoples and races but also a fusion and admixture of lifestyles, foods, clothes and houses.

This is also the case with academia. Essentially, academia is very much a hybridity and admixture and there are neither Japanese-style studies nor American-style studies. The truth is that the whole academic system is made up of an admixture of the United States, Japan, China, and other countries. Recently, I visited China, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and the UK and met scholars in each country. In all these countries, I did not think either that British scholars said this because they were British or that Polish scholars said that because they were Polish. In fact, they were all mixed and I think that they should be like that. Therefore, there is no distinctively unique Japanese historiographic way of thinking and if anyone says that there is such a way of thinking, it is completely wrong. Such a thing is inconceivable. I am of the opinion that the world is a form of admixture and hybridity as a whole in the twenty-first century.

If I outline my view of the future of the twenty-first century, I project that the trend of cross-border encounters, interactions and admixtures that began in the 1970s will become even more noticeable. Specifically, if I focus on the relationships between Japan, China and the United States, which are currently under discussion, this projection can be totally applied to U.S.-Japan relations or U.S.-China relations. There is no boundary between Japan and the United States and the two nations are completely mixed together. I think that this is also the case with the relationship among China and the United States.

What does it mean to be a scholar in the United States? Today, scholars in the United State include people from China, Japan and Europe. That is why it does not make any sense to say “a scholar in the United States” or “a scholar in Japan.” I think that this is also the case with China to some degree. There are not very many foreign scholars who teach in Chinese universities. Japanese universities also do not have very many foreign scholars, but there are currently about 1,000 Chinese scholars who teach in Japanese universities. Some of them came from the United States and many others came from China to study in Japan.

It hardly matters in the United States where you come from. Although I am no longer a teacher in the History Department of Harvard University, I used to work there for many years. Of about the fifty teachers in the History Department, at least half of them, or more, were always from other countries. However, no one paid attention to their foreign background. Every teacher taught, worked and wrote at the same university and national borders did not matter at all.

It is said that academia is borderless, but there used to be some exceptions. However, many Chinese people began to visit the United States and Japan in the 1970s and this trend is now remarkable. Recently, the influx of many Indian people as well as Chinese people has become particularly active and I think that this is a noticeable phenomenon. National borders and nationalities do not matter at all if you are talented and highly motivated and can do a good job. In recent years, Harvard University has had an increasing number of Indian students and teachers. Many Chinese people had come to Harvard before that, but now the number of Indian students and teachers is gradually rising in addition to Chinese. I think that this trend is remarkable.

As these examples show, diversity has become a significant keyword in the United States and other countries. However, although diversity is highlighted, it is widely taken for granted and is hardly treated



as something special. That is, whoever you are, your racial and religious background and nationality no longer matter at all. I think that the 1970s is of vital importance in that this trend emerged during that period. As mentioned above, I think that the 1970s could be said to have been the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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What will happen with Japan, China and the United States in the future? From the perspective of the aforementioned three frameworks, I note the concepts of nation, international networks and cross-border transnational networks. Nations still continue to exist. National politics and society are naturally influenced by particular domestic factors and movements rather than by other countries.

However, I suspect that this situation will change. Domestic politics may remain just the way it is, but the concept of nation and nationality might gradually become less significant. This is even the case with China. Needless to say, the concept of nationality exists in the United States. But I have the impression that when ordinary Americans think about their country, more people focus on the position of the United States in the context of the international community and its economic and cultural connections with other countries more than domestic politics.

I think that this is also true of Japan. Japan's domestic politics is changeable and many people seem to be very pessimistic about current Japanese politicians. It may be unavoidable that each country is impacted by its own domestic trends, traditions and movements. China, Japan and the United States may move in their respective directions, but I think that domestic factors will become less significant than international factors, as noted above.

For international relations, the relationship between Japan and the United States is based on the bilateral security alliance. The relationships between China, the United States and Japan are based on economic interests. In this sense, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which is being negotiated now, is very important. I think that cross-border economic relationships among different countries are incredibly important and I expect that economic networks, including the TPP, will propel countries all around the world, such as the United States, Japan and eventually China, in a better direction.

My prediction is that cross-border transnational networks will grow closer in the twenty-first century than in the twentieth century. If the world moves in that direction, cross-border networks at the personal and private-sector level will become exceedingly important in the future.

As mentioned above, American and Japanese people are building very close connections at the personal level. Amidst the recent situation in which the number of Japanese students in U.S. universities has been decreasing, I think that there are some concerns about Japan's ability to continue to maintain the same course in the future as well. I think that the cross-border networks between China and Japan or between China and the United States have been accelerating rapidly. There are some four million international students throughout the world. Of them, 886,000 students study in the United States and 275,000 of the foreign students in the United States are Chinese. I think that this influx of Chinese students to the United States is very encouraging. Unless Japan emulates this U.S. model and actively



encourages foreign students, including Chinese students, to come to the country, it is somewhat likely that its networks will grow weaker in the international community. In this sense, I think it desirable for Japan, the United States and China to develop transnational networks in the areas of economy, culture and education.

In addition, cross-border cooperation in solving problems is another example of the transnational trend. Cross-border cooperation is quite natural in academic circles. Historians from Japan, the United States and China often have meetings, exchange opinions and present papers to one other. National borders make little sense in these cases. I sincerely hope that strong cross-border networks at this level will influence other areas, such as art and culture, in the twenty-first century.

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In conclusion, I would like to discuss the relationships between Japan, the United States and China in the twenty-first century. I think that if the private-sector trilateral networks that have continued until today since the 1970s become even closer, the relationships between the three countries will grow even closer. This is not only valuable for the three countries but also reflects historical trends. Because world history is going in that direction, if the three nations develop even closer cross-border connections, they will be role models for other countries and regions. The European Union (EU) has already built networks among its member states. In my opinion, the EU is a regional community in which European countries have developed cross-border networks. If this model can also be realized between Japan, the United States and China, it will be very desirable in terms of nation-to-nation relations, as well as among the specific actors concerned.

Fundamentally, the reason why I am relatively optimistic is that the transnational trend did not suddenly emerge in the twenty-first century but has already existed for more than forty years, since around the 1970s. Probably, I am a little bit too optimistic, but I think that if world history moves in a direction that further enhances the transnational trend, the twenty-first century will very likely be a more peaceful and cooperation-oriented era than the twentieth century.

I have presented a similar point of view in China, the United States and Europe as well and many people said to me, “You are too optimistic.” I know that it is true, but I present this view of an old man’s privilege. However, viewpoints of history and world affairs can be divided into the optimistic way of thinking in which the world is changing for the better and the cynical and pessimistic way of thinking in which things are completely horrible and changing for the worse. Focusing on the relationships between the United States, China and Japan, I do not think that pessimism can be applied. It is easier to take an optimistic stance on the trilateral relationships and I speculate that the relationships between the three countries will continue to progress in that direction.

Lastly, I am the type of person who can only teach and write books as an educator. I sincerely hope that you will also be like that. I have just recently delivered the same message in Washington, London, Eastern Europe and China. I got the impression that I received favorable responses from young people in those countries.





The twentieth century was ruled by too pessimistic a world view and many people had a pessimistic way of thinking, believing that the world was just moving in the wrong direction. However, the twenty-first century in which you and your children and grandchildren will live will never return to the twentieth century. This is because the trend of the times has already been progressing in a better direction for more than forty years. That is why it is impossible to turn history back in a reverse direction. This may be an optimistic way of thinking based on my personal perspective, but this is exactly what I would like to say. I'll wrap up this long lecture now. Thank you very much for your attention.

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Born in 1934, Iriye Akira moved to the U.S. in 1953 on scholarship from the Grew Foundation after graduating from Seikei Senior High School. Iriye graduated from Haverford College in 1957 and received a Ph.D. in History from Harvard University Graduate School in 1961. He majored in American Diplomatic History. As a U.S.-based Japanese historian, Iriye has made significant contributions to his field over a long period of time. Iriye's approach is characterized by an emphasis on ideological and cultural impact and he has proposed international history research that incorporates a multinational perspective that goes beyond research on the diplomatic history of one or two countries. Iriye is recognized as “one of the people who changed the way we view the diplomatic history of America.” Iriye became the first Japanese citizen to serve as President of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations and as President of the American Historical Association and made a significant contribution as a pioneer in Japan-U.S. exchange.

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