

研究ノート

## Sino-Japanese Relations in the Year 1958: Steps Toward Reconciliation

Casper WITS

### Introduction

The period from the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 to the Sino-Japanese rapprochement in 1972 was an era in which Japan and China did not maintain diplomatic relations. There was plenty of contact however, but always in a nominally nongovernmental framework. Already in the early 1950s the newly formed government of the People's Republic of China decided on prioritizing the achievement of diplomatic normalization in its relations with Japan. However, while Japan was ruled by the government of Yoshida Shigeru (吉田茂), both under U.S. occupation and after, there was little chance of rapprochement with the PRC. Under U.S. pressure, the Japanese government officially recognized the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan as the legitimate government of China when it signed the Treaty of Taipei on April 28, 1952 that served as a formal end to the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). During the successive governments of Hatoyama Ichiro (鳩山一郎 In office: December 1954-December 1956) and Ishibashi Tanzan (石橋湛山 In office: December 1956-January 1957) there was much more chance of a Sino-Japanese rapprochement, especially after the Hatoyama government normalized relations with the USSR in 1956. Policy in Beijing was crafted accordingly, and strengthened ties with Japan featured prominently in Premier Zhou Enlai's East Asia strategy. Seemingly, the situation changed when Ishibashi resigned due to ill health and he was succeeded by former "Class A" war crimes suspect Kishi Nobusuke (岸信介 In office: January 1957-July 1960), who was a pro-ROC conservative and therefore less inclined to pursue policies favourable to the PRC. Interestingly, this would not alter the importance Zhou Enlai placed on ties with Japan, and throughout the latter half of the 1950s Japan would maintain its central place in his strategic vision. With direct government ties a distant prospect, in practise this meant cultivating ties with Japanese people from all walks of life, both inside and outside politics. This became known as the

“Promoting government relations via people- to- people exchange” (以民促官) policy. Taking a closer look at how relations with Japan were managed by the Chinese in the year 1958 will help us gain a deeper understanding of Zhou Enlai’s strategic craftsmanship. This was an eventful year with not only the start of the Great Leap Forward in China but also with a complete breakdown of Sino-Japanese relations after the Nagasaki Flag Incident on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the year in which Zhou established the groundwork for his Japan policy in years to come. Central in his dealings with Japan was the cultivation of a “pipe” (as the Japanese like to call it) or backchannel; a direct personal connection between two people of importance from both sides. This practise, established in the 1950s, was to prove highly effective in the era before the 1972 rapprochement as well as after. A recent International Crisis Group report has linked the current troubles in Sino-Japanese relations to the disappearance of the last personal “pipe” between two influential politicians on both sides in 2008.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1958 saw the creation of a “pipe” with two Japanese who were to play a pivotal role in Sino-Japanese relations in the years before 1972. One was the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) politician Matsumura Kenzo (松村謙三, 1883-1971) and the other was the aristocrat Saionji Kinkazu (西園寺公一, 1906- 1993), who was invited to live in Beijing and would stay there with his family until 1970 and was often referred to as the “People’s Ambassador” (民間大使) . On the Chinese side of the “pipe” the most important person was Liao Chengzhi (廖承志, 1908-1983), who had grown up in Japan and was fluent in Japanese. By the latter half of the 1950s he had become one of Zhou Enlai’s most trusted aides and was charged with carrying out Zhou’s Japan policy. In addition to the establishment of the “pipe” between Liao and the two Japanese, Liao had set out on the orders of Zhou to establish the *Japan Group* (日本組); a group of talented Japan Hands affiliated with different government organs who were to give shape to Zhou’s vision for a pro-active Japan policy. While there were some earlier incarnations, under different names, of the *Japan Group* before 1958, the group found its final form and central position in Japan affairs in 1958. So while generally the year 1958 is viewed as a bleak one for Sino-Japanese relations, with China’s furious reaction to the Nagasaki Flag Incident taking the two parties back to square one, in fact Zhou Enlai’s long-term strategy of strong engagement with Japan crystallized in exactly this year.

## 1. The Historical Background

### 1.1 Growing Trade in the 1950s and the Nagasaki Flag Incident

Though there were no official diplomatic relations between Japan and the PRC, throughout the 1950s there were efforts by both sides to improve trade relations, culminating in several “private” agreements on trade, the first of which (the Sino-Japanese Nongovernmental Trade Agreement) was signed in 1952. These agreements were signed by trade groups formed especially for this purpose, and were independent from the government. Only nominally independent in the case of the Chinese, but on the Japanese side the government could have no direct influence, despite the relevant trade group consisting mostly of Diet members.<sup>2</sup> From 1955 a regular trade fair was held in both countries, promoting mutual trade. However, a stumbling block was whether or not the PRC flag could be flown at such fairs in Japan, since the Japanese government did not recognize the PRC’s legitimacy. A major breakthrough appeared to have been made with the signing of the 4<sup>th</sup> Sino-Japanese Nongovernmental Trade Agreement on March 3, 1958. It was agreed trade liaison offices would be established in both countries, that trade representatives would have certain diplomatic rights, and that the PRC flag could be flown at China’s office in Japan. However, though the Japanese government stated that most of the agreement was acceptable to them, soon Prime Minister Kishi made a critical comment on the agreement in the Diet, saying the government could not agree to the flag clause.<sup>3</sup> After threats coming from Taipei of economic repercussions<sup>4</sup> the Japanese government on April 9 again stated unequivocally that it did not support the PRC’s right to hoist its flag.<sup>5</sup> Distrust of Kishi’s government was already running high in Beijing after Kishi had become the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit Taiwan in 1957, where he voiced his support for Chiang Kai-shek’s recovery of the mainland.<sup>6</sup> As Soeya Yoshihide has argued, the Chinese were very frustrated at this time because of their inability to influence Japanese government policy via these “private” trade agreements.<sup>7</sup> Things were about to get worse at the trade fair that had been going on since early April in Nagasaki. According to Tanaka Akihiko, Kishi at this point still thought some of the agreement could be salvaged and the growing economic relationship protected, but the flag issue would prove too big a hurdle.<sup>8</sup> Possibly many had

hoped that the PRC flag could quietly continue to be present at the fair, as it had been at previous fairs, but forces beyond the control of the government were to prevent this. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the flag was taken down by force by a right-wing youth, who was then only briefly held in custody before being released.<sup>9</sup> This mild reaction by the authorities could only be interpreted by the Chinese as that their flag was not seen as one representing a sovereign nation. Prominent *Japan Group* member Sun Pinghua (孫平化) notes in his memoirs that the ROC consulate in Nagasaki had already voiced its objection to the flag to no avail, and that the incident was probably no coincidence.<sup>10</sup> While it is unclear whether Taipei was actually involved in the incident, the conclusion in Beijing seems to have been that it was. But the furious reaction that followed was more likely due to the careless reaction of the Japanese government. In short, Beijing decided to cut off all contact and halt all trade. This became known as the “Nagasaki Flag Incident,” a historic event and low-point in Sino-Japanese relations. Despite the outward anger of the Chinese leadership however, Zhou Enlai and his underlings remained busy as ever carving out the framework with which they wanted to improve relations and eventually achieve diplomatic normalization.

## 1.2 China’s Evolving Japan Policy in the 1950s

As Ishii Akira has pointed out, in the first years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, most of the focus of the Chinese leadership’s Japan policy was concentrated on cultivating ties with Japanese left-wing civic groups and parties such as the Japanese Communist Party and Socialist Party.<sup>11</sup> Possibly this was done in the hope that there would be a future government led by the Socialist Party, or at least a more progressive government. According to high-ranking Japan Hand Zhang Xiangshan, this lasted until 1955, when the Chinese leadership became more open to meeting with other Japanese groups.<sup>12</sup> By the mid-1950s, Zhou Enlai decided to cast a wider net, and place equal if not greater importance on the cultivation of ties with those from other sectors of Japanese society. In a way he was ahead of the curve with this, and after Kishi became Prime Minister in 1957 and diplomatic normalization was shelved, the new tactics of building ties with a wide variety of people seemed an appropriate framework for the long-term, as the Chinese could use friends in a variety of places willing to advance their cause. Throughout this process, Liao Chengzhi

was the person under Zhou who was responsible for giving concrete form to Zhou's evolving vision. Since he was born and partially raised in Tokyo, Liao was fluent in Japanese and well-versed in matters concerning Japan as well as Overseas Chinese affairs. Moreover, considering Liao was the son of KMT revolutionary and Sun Yat-sen confidant Liao Zhongkai (廖仲愷) and an early member of the CCP, he had an impeccable ideological pedigree. Clearly he was the ideal person to deal with Japanese affairs under Zhou Enlai, and to serve at the Chinese end of the desired "pipe" that Zhou was keen to construct with many influential Japanese. Already in 1952 or 1953 Liao, by then a member of the Central Committee, was charged by Zhou Enlai to form a task force of Japan Hands, which was to take different shapes until morphing into the *Japan Group* in 1958.<sup>13</sup> He began to connect Japan Hands from different departments, for the execution of Japanese affairs. Concretely the Japan Hands were to be engaged in researching Japanese politicians as well as economic and cultural figures, and after 1955 they tried to establish connections with Japanese from all walks of life. Generally they were expected to keep a finger on the Japanese pulse by following the Japanese media, meeting with Japanese visitors and working with and within Chinese groups visiting Japan. While Liao Chengzhi is a well known figure and has been the subject of several academic studies,<sup>14</sup> the Japan Hands that were instrumental in the day-to-day affairs regarding relations with Japan have received only very limited academic attention. Recently however, a group of scholars in Japan has published an excellent collection of essays that illuminate the role played by what would become the *Japan Group*.<sup>15</sup> The first incarnation of the group was informally gathered by Liao in 1953 from Japanese speakers in the Foreign Ministry and the Foreign Trade Office.<sup>16</sup> The first issues they dealt with were negotiations with the Japanese government about Japanese left behind in China, and preparations for the first *Sino-Japanese Nongovernmental Trade Agreement*.<sup>17</sup> Realizing that there was a shortage of (ideologically suitable) Japanese speakers readily available, it took Liao until 1958 to recruit people from different backgrounds, the three main groups being (1) overseas Chinese who had returned from Japan, (2) those who had studied in Japan before 1949, and (3) from the latter half of the 1950s, students who had studied Japanese at Chinese universities after 1949.<sup>18</sup> Most of the prominent older members of the *Japan Group* belonged in the second category. An example of someone in the first group is Lin Liyun (林麗韞) who

was to become an interpreter for the Chinese leadership. She recalls how in a meeting with her father, with whom she had moved to China from Japan after 1949, Liao noticed her fluent Japanese and recruited her on the spot.<sup>19</sup> Another important interpreter for the leadership was Zhou Bin (周斌), who came to Liao's attention because of his Japanese proficiency while still a student at Peking University in the late 1950s, is an example of someone from the third group.<sup>20</sup> So by 1958 a team was in place that was ready to work intensively with people on the other side, and work towards rapprochement following Zhou and Liao's orders.

## 2. Establishing a “pipe”

For finding the right kind of “pipe” or channel on the Japanese side outside of the obvious leftist circles, Zhou Enlai was interested in one person who was willing to move to Beijing and work from there, as well as in politicians in Tokyo on the right, obviously not be the usual allies for a communist regime to have. From the late 1950s through the 1960s this strategy was to prove highly effective, and maintaining these kinds of channels worked well for the Japanese too. Chalmers Johnson has argued that this was “one of the most skilfully executed foreign policies pursued by Japan in the postwar era,” because it provided a separate backchannel to the mainland while the LDP leadership could continue to “take pro-Taiwan positions in order to placate the Americans.”<sup>21</sup>

### 2.1 Saionji Kinkazu

By 1957 the search was on for someone from Japan with strong connections in both the business world and among intellectuals who could serve as a bridge, or “pipe,” with his homeland while being based in China. This person was to contribute to paving the way for diplomatic normalization. As Saionji Kinkazu's son, Saionji Kazuteru (西園寺一晃) recalled in a personal interview, the person they were looking for had to: (1) have connections not only on the left but on the right as well, (2) be well versed in international affairs while having a favourable opinion of China, and (3) be without selfish motives.<sup>22</sup> Liao Chengzhi already had the right candidate in mind. Saionji Kinkazu's connections with the new Chinese leadership dated from 1952, when he was a delegate to the World Peace Conference in Vienna in December. The Chinese delegation was made up of

prominent people such as Song Qingling (宋慶齡) and Guo Moruo (郭沫若), as well as Liao Chengzhi, who probably used the opportunity to discuss the PRC's Japan policy with the Japanese delegates.<sup>23</sup> Here, at their first meeting, Saionji had already expressed a wish to visit China to Liao.<sup>24</sup> Saionji Kinkazu, born in 1906, hailed from the prominent aristocratic Saionji family and was the grandson (by adoption) of the former Prime Minister; Prince Saionji Kinmochi (in office 1906-1908 and 1911-1912). Saionji Kinkazu was educated at Oxford and before the war he had been a moderate member of Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro's "Breakfast Club" of advisors. After the war he became a Diet member and peace activist. While his personal beliefs were clearly progressive and leftist, due to his very upper-class background he had plenty of connections in more conservative circles. So with his political beliefs quite palatable to the Chinese leadership and his background ensuring wide access, he was the perfect candidate for the role of unofficial ambassador, or "People's Ambassador," between the two countries. According to Saionji Kazuteru, Zhou Enlai had taken an interest in Saionji Kinkazu already around the middle of the 1950s, and thought he could play an important role in facilitating diplomatic normalization.<sup>25</sup> In March 1957, after he had been living in Vienna for 3 years, Saionji returned home to Japan via China. While in Beijing he met Liao Chengzhi and was informed that the Chinese were looking for someone who could live in Beijing and serve as their "pipe," connecting them with the Japanese business world and intellectuals, and as Saionji recalled it, Liao asked him directly: "Not just anyone would do. If possible, Mr. Saionji, would you like to come here?"<sup>26</sup> Upon returning to Japan, Saionji sought advice on the future of Sino-Japanese relations from his many prominent contacts with an interest in the PRC, such as those in the *Japan-China Friendship Association* (日中友好協会), and the *Japan Association for the Promotion of International Trade*, or JAPIT (日本国際貿易促進協会). He described the general reaction as optimistic, and many thought a Sino-Japanese rapprochement was not far away now that diplomatic relations with the USSR had already been normalized.<sup>27</sup> Saionji knew that returning to Japan regularly would be hard and that, if he moved to China, he probably had to stay there until diplomatic normalization was achieved.<sup>28</sup> In 1958 he decided to move to Beijing with his family and would stay for twelve years, until 1970.

## 2.2 Matsumura Kenzo

Another target for a “pipe” that could be cultivated by the Chinese was a conservative politician, preferably from the LDP. In fact several connections were made around the year 1957, and the most obvious candidate for the job was the previous Prime Minister, Ishibashi Tanzan. These contacts would eventually lead to Ishibashi’s visit to China in May 1959. In the end though, another LDP politician was to prove an even more influential connection. Matsumura Kenzo had been a prominent politician since the pre-war period and he had recently been Education Minister in the Hatoyama government. His growing involvement from the late 1950s with China was representative of a perhaps surprisingly pro-PRC attitude among many LDP conservatives. According to Chalmers Johnson, this strain of thinking among Japanese conservatives can be traced back straight to Yoshida Shigeru, who in 1952 was in fact opposed to the recognition of the ROC government in Taiwan and tried to resist it in the face of pressure from the US, to no avail.<sup>29</sup> The first meeting between Liao Chengzhi and Matsumura Kenzo took place in late 1957 or early 1958. From December 5 to January 9 a delegation of the Chinese Red Cross visited Japan; the delegation was full of members of the *Japan Group* and headed by Liao. While there, Liao requested two of his Japanese confidants, Miyazaki Ryusuke (宮崎龍介, a Socialist Party politician who had been close to Sun Yat-sen) and businessman Horiike Tomoji (堀池友治) to arrange a meeting with a conservative politician.<sup>30</sup> Miyazaki and Horiike suggested both Ishibashi Tanzan and Matsumura Kenzo, but since the former was still plagued by the health issues that had forced him to resign as Prime Minister a year earlier, they focussed on the latter. A meeting took place in a restaurant in Akasaka, Tokyo, where they exchanged ideas about the Sino-Japanese relationship and Matsumura’s potential future role.<sup>31</sup> But at this stage Beijing was still very interested in cultivating the ties with Ishibashi as well as with Matsumura, and logically they would have made quite a good team. Both politicians had long been interested in reconciliation efforts towards China and Southeast Asia, and during Ishibashi’s brief tenure as Prime Minister he had envisioned Matsumura to be dispatched as a kind of Southeast Asia peace envoy.<sup>32</sup> So, in all likelihood, Liao Chengzhi in 1958 also saw them as a duo that could work together as his “pipe.” In the end, both politicians were to make important visits to China, but

separately. Urged on by China as his health improved slightly in the spring of 1959, Ishibashi invited Matsumura to go together, but the latter declined. Furukawa Mantaro has argued that since the two were in very different stages of their career, with Ishibashi a retired Elder Statesman free to say what he liked while Matsumura was still heavily involved in LDP factionalism with an eye on the post-Kishi government, Matsumura felt that they were better off pursuing ties with Beijing separately.<sup>33</sup> Both would make important visits to China in 1959. At the end of the year, Matsumura took a large group of Japanese people to China for 40 days and travelled there extensively, and in this period he met Chinese leaders such as Zhou and Liao of course, but also Zhu De (朱德) and Foreign Minister Chen Yi (陳毅). He was accompanied by several *Japan Group* members such as Sun Pinghua, Wang Shaoyun (王曉雲) and Wu Xuewen (吳學文).<sup>34</sup> His efforts are generally seen as essential for the progress that was made in the following years, such as the establishment of mutual Trade Liaison Offices and the exchange of journalists in 1964.

### Conclusion

In a simplistic interpretation of history, the year 1958 can only be seen as a detrimental one for Sino-Japanese relations. While China was swept up in the fervour brought on by Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward, the little progress that had been made in the previous decade to bring the two countries closer together again was seemingly undone when Beijing broke off all contact following the Nagasaki Flag Incident in May. Japanese Prime Minister Kishi was the most pro-Taiwan of all Japanese Prime Ministers to date and he won another election in the same month. Yet around this time a process was set in motion that would lead to considerable success in the first half of the 1960s, with the establishment of Trade Liaison Offices and the exchange of journalists. These successes were not just a result of there being a new Japanese Prime Minister but were the fruits of hard labour by people on both sides dedicated to building personal bridges in service of advancing mutual relations, regardless of prevailing political winds. Zhou Enlai's strategic vision was essential for bringing this about and around the year 1958 he pushed on with the construction of the backchannels that were to prove so vital later on. Of course this was a process that did not start suddenly in 1958, but rather one that took years to

take shape and only crystallized around this time. The formation of the *Japan Group* had already started in the early 1950s and contacts with Japanese willing to work with the Chinese like Saionji, Ishibashi and Matsumura were gradually enhanced. The importance of the cultivation of a “pipe” like this in Zhou’s strategic vision can be surmised by the fact that these efforts continued unabated during the turbulence of the year 1958. It should also be noted that this strategy would prove a perfect fit for the Japanese leadership who could remain in good standing with the US by being pro-Taiwan while condoning expanding contacts with Beijing. These ongoing contacts meant that both sides were well prepared when rapprochement was finally realized in 1972. The “pipe” would continue to be of use until well into the 2000s, by now maintained by different people of course, and the apparent lapse in maintaining such connections among leadership figures in recent years might actually have contributed to the current tensions.

Endnotes:

- 1 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks*, 8 April 2013, Asia Report N°245, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51b830571.html> [accessed 30 September 2014]
- 2 Yoshihide Soeya, *Japan's Economic Diplomacy with China, 1945-1978* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 32.
- 3 “Seifu kakunin ha konnan” Kokki joko de shushou toben [“Government recognition is difficult” Premier’s reply to the flag clause],” *Asahi Shimbun*, March 6, 1958.
- 4 “Sho Soutou kara messe-ji “Kokki mondai” de [Message from President Jiang on the “Flag Issue”],” *Asahi Shimbun*, March 13, 1958.
- 5 Akihiko Tanaka, *Nicchu kankei 1945-1990* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppansha, 1991), 50.
- 6 “Asia ha rendai seyo,” *Asahi Shimbun*, June 4, 1957.
- 7 Yoshihide Soeya, *Japan's Economic Diplomacy with China, 1945-1978* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 39.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 9 “Chukyokui hizuriorosu, Nagasaki no kiteten de koufun shita seinen, [CCP flag downed at Nagasaki stamp stall by agitated youth],” *Asahi Shimbun*, May 3, 1958.
- 10 Pinghua Sun, *Zhongri youhao suixianglu* (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1986), 82.
- 11 Akira Ishii, “Chugoku no tainichi seisaku kettei- Soshiki to jinmyaku,” *Toa* No.255 (September 1988): 14, 15.
- 12 Xiangshan Zhang, *Nicchu kankei no kanken to kensho- Kokkoseijoka 30nen no ayumi*, trans. Eiji Suzuki (Tokyo: Sanwa Shoseki, 2002), 3.
- 13 Xueping Wang, “Ryo Shoshi to ryoben no tainichi gyomu tantosha,” in *Sengo Nicchu Kankei to*

- Ryo Shoshi*, ed. Xueping Wang et al. (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2013), 22.
- 14 See for example: Radtke, Kurt W., and Chengzhi Liao. *China's Relations with Japan, 1945-83: The Role of Liao Chengzhi*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.
- 15 Xueping Wang et al. *Sengo Nicchu Kankei to Ryo Shoshi*. Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2013.
- 16 Xueping Wang, "Ryo Shoshi to ryoben no tainichi gyomu tantosha," in *Sengo Nicchu Kankei to Ryo Shoshi*, ed. Xueping Wang et al. (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2013), 31.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 19 Interview by author, Beijing, August 2014.
- 20 Interview by author, Shanghai, August 2014.
- 21 Chalmers Johnson, "The Patterns of Japanese Relations with China, 1952-1982," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.59, No.3 (Autumn 1986): 405.
- 22 Interview by author, Tokyo, January 2014.
- 23 Radtke, Kurt W., and Chengzhi Liao, *China's Relations with Japan, 1945-83: The Role of Liao Chengzhi* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 101.
- 24 Kinkazu Saionji, *Saionji Kinkazu Kaikoroku "Sugisari shi, Showa"* (Tokyo: IPEC Press, 1991), 305.
- 25 Interview by author, Tokyo, January 2014.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 319. Translation by the author.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 319, 320.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 320.
- 29 Chalmers Johnson, "The Patterns of Japanese Relations with China, 1952-1982," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.59, No.3 (Autumn 1986): 404.
- 30 Seiichi Tagawa, *Matsumura Kenzo to Chugoku* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1972), 80.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 32 Mantaro Furukawa, *Nicchu Sengo Kankei Shi* (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1981), 173.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 174.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 179, 180.

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Abstract

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Casper WITS

The purpose of this paper is to take a closer look at the eventful year 1958 in Sino-Japanese relations.

Generally seen as a bad year due to the break off of all trade in May, it was also a year in which great progress was made, maybe not recognized at the time, toward stronger people-to-people ties.

The 1950s, as far as Sino-Japanese relations were concerned, was a period of cautious rebuilding of ties despite the fact that there were no diplomatic relations between the two countries.

During the Hatoyama and Ishibashi governments in Japan (1954-1957) there was a willingness on the Japanese side to re-engage, and this atmosphere continued during the initial stages of the succeeding Kishi government (1957-1960). There was a corresponding optimism on the Chinese side, and Japan began to occupy a central role in the strategic vision of Zhou Enlai. This led to several crucial decisions in 1958 that would create a new framework in which China's relations with Japan would be conducted. One decision was the formation of a group of Chinese "Japan Hands" under the direct leadership of Liao Chengzhi (although ordered to do so by Zhou). This informal group would be known as the *Japan Group*. Zhou then invited the prominent Japanese aristocrat Saionji Koichi to relocate to Beijing and serve as an unofficial "People's Ambassador." Also of critical importance were the increased Chinese activities of LDP politician Matsumura Kenzo, who would play a pivotal role in rebuilding trade relations. What makes the year 1958 so important to focus on, is that it is also the year of the "Nagasaki Flag Incident" that would cause deterioration in the Sino-Japanese relationship. The fact that the efforts on the Chinese side here described continued regardless is due to Zhou's grand strategic vision. It was the creation of a "pipe" or backchannel between different high-ranking people on both sides that was to prove of vital importance for Sino-Japanese relations in the years to come.

