

The Development of Japanese Diplomatic History in International Politics in Japan

Masaya INOUE (Keio University)

Diplomatic history is a discipline that originally developed from international law. It addresses the need to understand the history of diplomatic negotiations in order to understand the formation of laws and treaties governing relations among nations. Meanwhile, international politics, which analyzes relations between nations and the international system, is closely linked to diplomatic history. The Japan Association of International Relations (JAIR), founded in December 1956, has also traditionally emphasized the study of history, as its core members consisted of diplomatic historians¹.

Recent years have seen a decline in the study of diplomatic history worldwide. However, in Japanese international politics, the study of diplomatic history is still of primary importance. Using statistical data from the JAIR, I aim to summarize current trends in the study of diplomatic history. First, according to the JAIR's online member information management system, 314 of its 2022 members (about 15%) chose Japanese diplomatic history as their major. In terms of membership, 38 of 153 (25%) were senior members over the age of 70, while 213 of 1506 (14%) were general members under 70. Members from younger generations majoring in diplomatic history appear to be fewer. However, the actual number of student members (graduate students) majoring in Japanese diplomatic history is 54 out of 286 (18%). This indicates that many of the JAIR's student members are majoring in Japanese diplomatic history².

We will also examine the number of papers on Japanese diplomatic history in the JAIR's academic journal *Kokusai Seiji* [International Relations]. Figure 1 summarizes the number of articles on Japanese diplomatic history published in *Kokusai Seiji* over a 60-year period from 1957 to 2016. Since the 2000s, the number of papers published on the topic has decreased but maintains a certain percentage. In terms of the number of members and

¹ Tokushiro Ohata, "Nihon Kokusaiseiji Gakkai 30nen no Ayumi [30 Years of Progress of the JAIR]," *Kokusai Seiji* [International Politics], 30th anniversary volume (1986), and Lee, Jong Won, "Rekishi kara mita Kokusaiseiji Gaku [International Politics from the Perspective of History]," Nihon Kokusai Seiji Gakkai eds., *Nihon no Kokusaiseiji Gaku* [Japan's study of International Politics], Vol. 4 (Kyoto: Yuhikaku, 2009).

² Each member can answer up to three fields of study. The survey results are as of July 2018.

published articles, the study of Japanese diplomatic history continues to be a major pillar of the JAIR today.

Japanese diplomatic history at the JAIR has flourished, which may be due to the selection and concentration of researchers. Many diplomatic historians previously belonged to the Japanese Society of International Law, and it was not unusual for diplomatic history papers to be published in *Kokusai Ho Gaiko Zasshi* [The Journal of International Law and Diplomacy]. In addition, the Japanese Political Science Association has featured Japanese diplomatic history in *Nenpo Seijigaku* [The Annuals of Japanese Political Science Association]. In recent years, however, the number of Japanese diplomatic historians belonging to both academic societies has been on the decline, and there has been a unipolar concentration of the study of Japanese diplomatic history in the JAIR. In this article, I will outline how the study of Japanese diplomatic history has been transformed and developed in the study of international politics in Japan.

1. Early Years of the JAIR

The study of Japanese diplomatic history has held a special position since the founding of the JAIR. Hikomatsu Kamikawa, the first president of the JAIR and a former professor at the Imperial University of Tokyo, had been involved in compiling *Nihon Gaikou Monjo* [The Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy] for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) before World War II. Explaining the need to clarify the characteristics of diplomacy in Japan in comparison with that of other countries, Kamikawa said, "In countries outside Europe and the United States with different religions and civilizations, only Japan has experienced the rise and fall of a modern nation-state as well as a modern imperial state, so we must clarify that there is an aspect unique to our country³." In the 1950s, when World War II was still fresh in the public's memory, examining the course of Japan's modern diplomacy was not only a historical study but also a practical exercise linked to the issue of war and peace. When the JAIR was founded, one of its core missions was the development of the study of Japanese diplomatic history⁴.

Although a high standard of monographs on Japanese diplomatic history had been published since the prewar period, diplomatic documents were not publicly available, and their use was limited to a few researchers. After the war, however, the study of Japanese

³ Hikomatsu Kamikawa, "Kindai Kokusaiseiji Shi ni okeru Nihon [Japan in Modern International Political History]," *Kokusai Seiji*, Vol. 3 (1957).

⁴ Katsumi Usui, "Rekishi Kenkyu I [Historical Studies I]," *Kokusai Seiji*, Vol. 61-2 (1979).

diplomatic history made remarkable progress as diplomatic documents during the prewar period were released to the public.

It was the Study Group on Japanese Diplomatic History that led the research at the founding of the JAIR. A workshop was held with Toshio Ueda of the University of Tokyo serving as secretary from April 1957, and a total of 104 sessions were conducted until January 1970. Many of the papers on Japanese diplomatic history published in *Kokusai Seiji* were based on reports presented at this study group⁵.

What is noteworthy is the relation between the study group and the MOFA. At that time in the MOFA, senior archivist Ken Kurihara led the compilation of basic historical documents, such as *Syusen Shiroku* [The History of the Japanese End of World War II War] and *Nihon Gaiko Nenpyo narabini Syuyo Monjo* [Japanese Diplomatic Chronology and Brief History]. In the MOFA's Diplomatic Archives, Kurihara trained specialists to compile *The Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy*. The study group was initially held within the MOFA. The study of Japanese diplomatic history developed with deep ties to the MOFA archives⁶.

In the early years of the JAIR, *Kokusai Seiji* frequently featured special issues on Japanese diplomatic history. For 20 years since the JAIR was founded (from 1956 to 1976), the organization published an annual special issue on Japanese diplomatic history or bilateral relations, such as the history of U.S.–Japan relations. This was not only due to the emphasis on historical research but also due to the shortage of researchers in other fields, such as theoretical and area studies, in Japanese international politics. Diplomatic historians supported early Japanese international politics.

After World War II, Marxist historiography gained influence in historical studies. In response, the study of Japanese diplomatic history at the JAIR highlighted the clarification of policy decisions based on primary documents. Unlike the Marxist view of history, which emphasizes structural factors, the study of Japanese diplomatic history developed an elite-centered analysis of the policy process. Under such circumstances, a major project undertaken by the JAIR was to investigate the causes of the Asia–Pacific War. Not only researchers but also many Japanese citizens questioned why Japan plunged into a reckless war. In response, in May 1959, Taiheiyo Senso Gen'in Kyumei-bu [the Department of Pacific War Causes Research] was established within the JAIR. This research department, led by Jun Tsunoda of the National Diet Library and major Japanese diplomatic historians,

⁵ Ohata, "Nihon Kokusaiseiji Gakkai 30nen no ayumi."

⁶ Chihiro Hosoya, "Sosetsu [Review]" *Kokusai Seiji*, Vol. 61–2 (1979).

conducted joint research with area studies scholars specializing in the United States, the Soviet Union, and China as well as some international political scientists and produced a comprehensive analysis of Japanese diplomacy leading up to the Pacific War. The culmination of this joint research can be seen in the publication of *Taiheiyo Senso eno Michi* [The Road to the Pacific War] by the *Asahi Shimbun Sha*. To empirically explain historical facts as well as discover historical materials related to the MOFA and the military, scholars energetically conducted interviews with those involved. The published series therefor provoked some dispute with Marxist historians, but its pursuit of unraveling historical facts was highly appreciated and showed to the world a high standard of the study of Japanese diplomatic history⁷.

2. Internationalization of the Study of Japanese Diplomatic History

Since the end of the 1960s, Japanese diplomatic history has also entered an era of internationalization. Based on collaborations with overseas academic societies that the JAIR has promoted since its founding, academic exchanges with overseas researchers became active. The driving force was Chihiro Hosoya of Hitotsubashi University. The Kawaguchiko Conference, held in July 1969, was a joint study of diplomatic historians from both Japan and the United States and, as a developed version of *The Road to the Pacific War*, aimed to conduct a comparative study of policymaking processes in both countries in the 10-year Far East crisis from the Manchurian Incident to the attack on Pearl Harbor. This conference led to the publication of *Nichibei Kankei Shi: Kaisen ni itaru 10nen: 1931-1941* [The History of U.S.-Japan Relations: 10 Years to the Beginning of the War]. The success of this joint research spurred the promotion of other international research, followed by the publication of *Washington Taisei to Nichibei Kankei* [The Washington System and Japan-US Relations] and *Nichiei Kankei Shi: 1917-1949* [The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations: 1917-1949], which internationally showcased the achievements of the study of Japanese diplomatic history⁸.

⁷ Nihon Kokusaiseiji Gakkai Taiheiyo Senso Gen'in Kyumei bu eds. *Taiheiyo Senso eno Michi* [The Road to the Pacific War], 8 Volumes. (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Sha, 1962–3).

⁸ Chihiro Hosoya, Makoto Saito, and Seiichi Imai eds., *Nichibei Kankei Shi: Kaisen ni itaru 10 nen : 1931–1941* [The History of U.S. –Japan Relations: 10 Years to the Beginning of the War], 4 volumes. (University of Tokyo Press, 1971–2); Chihiro Hosoya and Makoto Saito eds., *Washington Taisei to Nichibei Kankei* [The Washington System and Japan–US Relations], (University of Tokyo Press, 1978); and Chihiro Hosoya eds., *Nichiei Kankei Shi*

Research themes in Japanese diplomatic history have also changed with the progress of internationalization. In the early years of *Kokusai Seiji*, many papers focused on Japanese foreign policy, but their attention gradually shifted from one-nation diplomacy to thematic history and the international history that analyzed bilateral relations. This led to a decline in the chronological study of Japanese diplomatic history. The research approach also transitioned from the traditional approach, which analyzed the policymaking process of top government officials, to the nontraditional approach, which focused on informal actors, public opinion, and interest groups. The study of Japanese diplomatic history, which until then had been biased toward analyzing trends among the government elite, expanded its analysis scope to include diverse actors such as the military, congress, private organizations, mass media, and intellectuals. *Kokusai Seiji* also began featuring issues devoted to research that delved into the role of informal actors and examining the intersection between diplomatic history and financial and economic history by focusing on the role of business leaders.

3. Japanese Diplomatic History and Theoretical Studies

When considering the development of the study of Japanese diplomatic history, the influence of American modern political theories and behavioral science approaches cannot be ignored. The 1970s saw a growing movement to use the theoretical analytical framework of foreign policy as a historical narrative of Japanese diplomatic history. Specifically, studies began to analyze examples from Japanese diplomatic history by invoking Richard Snyder's framework for analyzing the foreign policymaking process and Graham T. Allison's organizational process model⁹. In addition, based on the theory of linkage politics, recent studies adopted the perspective of the linkage between domestic and foreign affairs and the rivalry and coordination of domestic groups in shaping foreign policy into historical narratives.

Of course, Japanese diplomatic history was not unilaterally influenced by American international political theory. As argued by diplomatic historian Tetsuya Sakai, the study of modern Japanese diplomatic history was originally less about the history of bilateral relations as opposed to that of Western countries and more about the policymaking analysis of one

1917–1949 [The History of Anglo–Japanese Relations: 1917–1949] (University of Tokyo Press, 1982).

⁹ Graham Allison. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 1ed. (Boston: Little Brown, 1971).

country. In addition, compared with studies of diplomatic history in Western countries, which clearly distinguish between domestic politics and diplomacy, Japanese diplomatic history has traditionally incorporated the interaction between domestic and foreign affairs into its analytical perspectives. Indeed, in international relations theory, transnationalism, which focuses on the role of nonstate actors, became popular from the late 1970s, but such an approach has long been common in studies of Japanese diplomatic history. In this sense, rather than accepting the latest American theory, Japanese diplomatic history can be said to have “rediscovered” the strengths of its own research within the American theory approach. The policymaking process theory in international politics originally had a high affinity with Japanese diplomatic history¹⁰.

Meanwhile, there was also an attempt to present a new theoretical model of the policymaking process from the study of Japanese diplomatic history. From the perspective of modern Japanese diplomatic history, Chihiro Hosoya argued that Japan’s policymaking model, after the collapse of the oligarchy model in the Meiji period, became a “cone-shaped system” in which the “middle echelon” within the military and the bureaucracy became the real players in policymaking because of the lack of top-level policy coordination. After World War II, he asserted, this system transformed into a “tripod system” in which political leaders, led by the prime minister, make policy decisions with the Liberal Democratic Party, the bureaucracy, and the business community as advisory groups¹¹.

However, outside Hosoya’s work, there has been little active exploration of a new theory of the policymaking process in modern Japanese diplomatic history. Historians interested in individual events have been willing to explain historical events using the theory but have not been keenly interested in theory-building.

The theorization of the policymaking process had more affinity with the analysis of postwar Japanese diplomacy. This is because, in the 1970s, most Japanese diplomatic records of the postwar period remained classified, and the policymaking process was in a black box. Japanese international political scientists, educated in U.S. graduate schools, used the policymaking process theory to conduct case studies of Japanese diplomacy regarding

¹⁰ Tetsuya Sakai, *Kindai Nihon no Kokusai Chitsujō Ron* [Theory of International Order in Modern Japan], (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007) 4–5.

¹¹ Chihiro Hosoya and Joji Watanuki eds., *Taigai Seisaku Kettei Katei no Nichibei Hikaku* [A Comparison of the Process of Foreign Policy Making between Japan and the United States] (University of Tokyo Press, 1977); Akio Watanabe, “III Riron Kenkyū 2 [III: Theoretical Studies (Part 2)],” *Kokusai Seiji*, vol. 61–2 (1979).

the Okinawa reversion negotiations and the U.S.–Japan trade friction¹².

4. Development of Postwar Diplomatic History Studies

In the 1960s, the use of primary documents in various countries to reconstruct the history of international relations began to spread in the United States. Even in Japan, research conducted with this multiarchival approach has been around since the 1950s¹³. However, it was not until the 1970s, when it became easier for Japanese to travel abroad, when the multiarchival approach became widespread among Japanese researchers.

The multiarchival approach to Japanese diplomatic history began with the study of the occupation period from 1945 to 1952. As Britain and the United States declassified their diplomatic records one by one, Japanese historians began actively collecting documents in Washington and London in the 1970s and dramatically developed occupation studies. Following the study of the occupation period, empirical research based on primary documents also progressed regarding the origins of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty¹⁴.

The declassification of Japanese diplomatic records on postwar Japan was another factor that encouraged occupation studies. In May 1976, the MOFA's Diplomatic Archives began opening its postwar diplomatic records to the public, which made it possible to analyze postwar history with Japanese documents. Nevertheless, the level of declassification of diplomatic records in Japan was still far below those of the United Kingdom and the United States. Therefore, those who wanted to study postwar Japanese diplomacy first had to investigate the American and British archives.

The mainstream of prewar Japanese diplomatic history has been Japan's policy on

¹² Haruhiro Fukui, *Jiyu Minshuto to Seisaku Kettei* [Liberal Democratic Party and Policy Making], (Tokyo: Fukumura Publishing, 1969); I.M. Destler and Hideo Sato eds., *Coping with U.S.–Japanese economic conflicts*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1982).

¹³ See. Chihiro Hosoya, *Siberia Shuppei no Shiteki Kenkyu* [A Historical study of the Siberian Intervention] (Kyoto: Yuhikaku, 1955).

¹⁴ Okurasho Zaisei Shi Shitsu eds., *Showa Zaisei Shi: Shusen kara Kowa made (3) America no Tainichi Senryo Seisaku* [Showa Financial History: From the End of the War to the Peace (3) U.S. occupation policy toward Japan] (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai, Inc., 1976); Makoto Iokibe, *Beikoku no Nihon Senryo Seisaku* [U.S. occupation policy toward Japan], 2 volumes (Tokyo: Chuokoron Sha, 1985); and Chihiro Hosoya, *San Francisco Kowa eno Michi* [The Road to the San Francisco Peace Treaty] (Tokyo: Chuokoron Sha, 1984).

the Chinese continent and its relations with China, but in the study of postwar diplomatic history, the history of U.S.–Japanese relations has become popular partly because of America’s active disclosure of historical documents. In parallel with the progress in the study of the history of postwar U.S.–Japanese relations, the study of Cold War history by international political scientists also flourished in Japan. The achievements of Cold War studies and the primary documents that were declassified in the United States have advanced the study of postwar Japanese diplomatic history.

In contrast to postwar U.S.–Japan relations, however, other bilateral relations have stagnated partly because of delays in Japan’s declassification of its diplomatic records. In the 1990s, some researchers conducted empirical studies on Japan’s relations with South Korea, China, and the Soviet Union mainly using diplomatic records from the United States and Britain¹⁵.

In the early 21st century, the situation surrounding Japanese diplomatic records significantly changed. First, the Administrative Document Information Disclosure Act was enforced in 2001. Under the law, diplomatic historians could request disclosure of diplomatic documents from the MOFA. Additionally, the 2010s saw an improvement in the MOFA’s document management, and many diplomatic records were transferred to the Diplomatic Archives. These institutional reforms widened the scope of Japanese diplomatic history, which had depended on the archives of the United States and Britain and led to the emergence of a series of studies on Sino–Japanese and Japan–Korea relations.

Japan’s change of government in 2009 also greatly improved the situation surrounding postwar diplomatic history. The administration of the Democratic Party of Japan launched a commission to investigate secret agreements in postwar U.S.–Japan relations. Through this investigation, the MOFA declassified diplomatic records on negotiations to revise the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty in 1960 and the return of Okinawa in 1972, which have long been classified. This allowed for an analysis of the history of postwar relations between Japan and the United States from primary documents on both sides. The study of postwar Japanese diplomatic history, published in the 2010s, used a combination of

¹⁵ Takahiko Tanaka, *Nisso Kokko Kaifuku no Shiteki Kenkyu* [A Historical Study of the Soviet – Japanese Normalization], (Kyoto: Yuhikaku, 1993); Lee, Jong Won, *Kan’ichi Seijoka no Seiritsu to America, 1960–65* [Normalization of Korea and Japan and the United States, 1960 to 65], *Kindai Nihon Kenkyu* [Annual Modern Japanese Studies], Vol. 16 (1994); and Chen Zhaobin, *Sengo Nihon no Chugoku Seisaku* [Japan’s China Policy in Postwar] (University of Tokyo Press, 2000).

historical documents from multiple countries and oral histories to describe the policymaking process in detail and examined how the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats transformed over the formation of foreign policy.

5. The Future of the Study of Japanese Diplomatic History

How will the study of Japanese diplomatic history develop in the future? A recent notable trend is the shift in research themes from prewar to postwar. From 2012 to 2016, nearly 90% of articles on Japanese diplomatic history published in *Kokusai Seiji* discussed postwar diplomacy. In the field of prewar studies, the classical analysis of the policymaking process is on the decline, but more studies have recently focused on diplomatic initiatives and ideas of specific individuals. In fact, the study of Japanese diplomatic history, which probes the personalities and external perceptions of political, military, and opinion leaders, has a long history in academic circles¹⁶. Based on these traditions, recent studies can be considered attempts to bridge the history of diplomacy and political thought.

Furthermore, in recent years, the connection with global history has been attracting attention. Japanese diplomatic history, which has traditionally focused on transnational actors, has shifted its focus from power games among sovereign states to the analysis of the flow of people, goods, and money. The question for future research is how to situate the micro analysis of the policymaking process, which has been the specialty of Japanese diplomatic history research, in the context of global history.

In the 2010s, a full-fledged study of diplomatic history on the return of Okinawa and the Sino–Japan normalization was published. Recently, the 1970s and 1980s, during which the international community developed interdependence, have become the subject of diplomatic history. To describe “economic diplomacy,” which highlights the involvement of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry in foreign affairs, scholars will be required to adopt a different analytical approach from the traditional method of tracing policymaking processes.

The issue of historical perceptions, which has existed since the 1980s, is another critical issue in the study of diplomatic history. Ways to remember and recount the past cannot be clarified only through a conventional analysis of the policymaking process. Nationalism and identity in a nation’s foreign actions are important research topics in Japanese diplomatic history.

As discussed above, Japanese diplomatic history has reflected theories of

¹⁶ See. Akira Irie, *Nihon no Gaiko* [Diplomacy of Japan] (Tokyo: Chuokoron Sha, 1966).

international politics in its historical narratives. However, compared with the 1970s, when historians were actively learning theories of international politics, recent years have witnessed less mutual exchange owing to the fragmentation of historical and theoretical studies. As a result, historical researchers have fewer opportunities to confront theory.

Another issue is globalization. While Japanese diplomatic history research has reflected the latest overseas research and historical materials, it has not actively published its findings abroad. As a result, the latest research results on Japanese diplomatic history have not been fully reflected in research conducted by English-speaking countries. Future scholarly efforts would require a strengthened dissemination of research on Japanese diplomatic history abroad.

Figure 1 Number of articles on Japanese diplomatic history published in *Kokusai Seiji* (Aggregated by the author)

