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Japan and the Rise of China

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MAX MUNDAY, JAN 5 2014

Japan's relationship with China is one involving multiple strategies of cooperative engagement and competitive balancing, designed to manage both the perceived risks and potential benefits of a rising China. These strategies are a result of a complex history and an uncertain future between the two states. The major pressures facing the Sino-Japanese relationship are heavily influenced by significant domestic legitimacy anxieties in both countries. Calls to nationalistic sentiment, long known to improve domestic legitimacy, rely heavily on sensitive issues such as Japan's wartime atrocities and the fear of a military or economic threat. Calling on this nationalist sentiment to improve domestic legitimacy means destabilising the bilateral relationship that is essential to resolving contemporary dilemmas. The issues faced include the need to foster an atmosphere of 'mutual respect' within historical pressures, the domestic Japanese 'China Threat' debate and associated competitive military balancing, territorial disputes, environmental degradation and energy security, and regional influence and leadership. Despite these significant pressures and the requirement to make certain adjustments, there are strong mutual interests that work to preserve bilateral stability. The most important of these are a strong economic and strategic interdependence between Japan and China, and the presence of the United States and regional powers hoping to maintain the status quo. This essay will primarily look at Japan's relationship with China and will present Japan's strategic policies toward China. This essay will argue that adjustments need to be made to ensure domestic legitimacy concerns do not exploit existing pressures that would destabilise the Sino-Japanese relationship.

China and Japan are historically rivals and their histories, particularly concerning Japan's wartime activity, continues to affect their relationship today. Post-war Sino-Japan relations began with the normalisation of relations in 1972, which particularly focused on partnered economic growth and a Japanese policy of *seikei bunri*, that is, the separation of politics and economics.[1] This culminated in the *Treaty of Peace and Friendship*, a treaty in which Japan acknowledged "the responsibility for the serious damage that Japan caused in the past to the Chinese people through the war" and "express[ed] its deep remorse".[2] Despite this acknowledgement, Japan's historical burden continues to exert pressure on the Sino-Japanese relationship. A series of textbook controversies in the 1980s over Japanese officials changing key terms in school textbooks in order to lessen Japanese culpability in the Second World War saw a marked decline in diplomatic relations between China and Japan.[3] Also, a number of high profile visits by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro in 2005 and 2006 to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, a Japanese war memorial, saw diplomatic relations plummet to "an all-time low"[4]. Current PM Shinzo Abe has tried to smooth the diplomatic unease by refusing to visit the shrine.[5] Mike Mochizuki, however, points to an increase in nationalist sentiment every time the shrine is visited, which could potentially be used as a tool to shore up domestic legitimacy in the event of a weakened political leadership.[6] China's use of the 'history card' has also been criticised as a propaganda tool to exert political pressure to meet their interests.[7] For example in 1995, Japanese criticisms of Chinese nuclear tests were met by Chinese reminders of Japanese war violence.[8] Furthermore, Barry Buzan points out that "one has to ask . . . how much of this sensitivity is actually to do with the war and how much of it simply uses the symbolism of the war to reflect more contemporary worries." [9] The potential need for either country to increase nationalist sentiment in the event of failing domestic legitimacy could see a resurgence of this competitive historical discourse, which would undoubtedly lead to a breakdown of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This is a significant pressure on the Sino-Japanese relationship and continues to be a policy and security issue. Toshiya Hoshino and Haruko Satoh state that a "reconciliation over history [will be a] significant contribution towards regional stability, prosperity and, ultimately, peace." [10]

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The shaping of foreign policy in Japan is, in part, based on public perception through democratic elections and internal debates. As such, public opinion becomes relevant.[11] According to opinion polls, China has an exceedingly low popularity with the Japanese public.[12] This low popularity is a significant pressure as, in the past, it has led to riots, attacks and commercial boycotts across the two states, which has not only damaged relations but also trade agreements.[13] Hoshino and Satoh argue that 'mutual respect' between China and Japan is an essential element in the relationship and is necessary to secure bilateral cooperation; however, is damaged by these negative perceptions[14]. As China continues to grow, adjustment must be made to accommodate an atmosphere of 'mutual respect' between China and Japan so as to ensure continued cooperative efforts.

The Japanese 'friendship diplomacy' strategy that started with the normalisation of relations in the 1970s started to shift from the 1990s, seeing Japan engaging in a balancing strategy to counter China's rise.[15] This was in part due to the perceived failure of the Japanese strategy of 'commercial liberalism', that is, that economic inducements and commercial imperative would be enough to stabilise relations between China and Japan.[16] A number of events triggered this shifting strategy, particularly the growing military assertiveness of China in regards to Taiwan and the East China Sea, and Chinese rhetoric concerning Japanese-US bilateral security agreements in the mid 1990s.[17] This contributed to today's 'China Threat' debate in domestic Japanese circles that has seen Japan enter into a strategy of 'reluctant realism', that is, direct power hedging to counter China's rise.[18] Current Japanese diplomatic and military publications state regional threats are "increasingly severe"[19] and "increasingly tangible, acute, and serious".[20] Another significant pressure for the relationship is the situation in the East China Sea regarding the disputed territorial rights to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. This situation is "certainly the most serious for Sino-Japanese relations ... in terms of the risk of militarised conflict".[21] This hedging has seen a strengthened US-Japan security alliance and a Japanese military build up to, in Japanese words, 'deter' and 'respond' to the Chinese threat.[22] Japanese efforts to produce a ballistic missile defence system jointly with the US have worried Chinese analysts; citing China's reliance on missile technology, then stating that Japan is "producing shields for the ultimate goal of making swords".[23] This is a statement that, if heeded by Chinese policy makers, might justify a potential arms race; see the region enter into a 'security dilemma' situation; or worse still, escalate to military conflict. Again, like the historical issue, there is potential for this military balancing to be used to fuel nationalist sentiment to counter fledgling domestic legitimacy in either country, and, as such, remains a serious threat to regional security. However, negotiated bilateral agreements have been shown to be able to manage issues arising over the East China Sea – provided the relationship remains strong. Adjustments must be made to ensure a healthy bilateral arrangement to manage potential escalation over the East China Sea and military threat perceptions.

Japan is also concerned about China's growing resource needs, regional energy security, and the environmental degradation caused by China's rapid growth. Caroline Rose points out that perceptions of these insecurities form part of the 'China Threat' debate, and as such, are responsible for competitive hedging measures such as the overlap between the energy security and territorial disputes with the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.[24] The 2011 earthquake was disastrous for Japan, and according to the diplomatic bluebook, "posed challenges on Japan that could have weakened its influence in the international community".[25] This shows the importance that a stable natural environment has for Japan, and inference could be made that any threat to the environment could be seen as a security issue for Japan. Again, stable bilateral agreements must be in place to have any real effect on the environmental degradation of the region.

Japan and China have also been acting competitively in the arenas of international diplomatic and political influence, and regional leadership. China's rise has "opened the way for it to become a competitor for the economic and political leadership of the region"[26]; a role that, until recently, has been undertaken by Japan. Robert Sutter contends that Japanese perception of China as a "rival for regional influence"[27] indicates a greater Sino-Japanese rivalry. Sutter points to competing proposals to establish free trade agreements with ASEAN, and leaderships struggles leading up to the Asian Leadership Summit in 2005 as evidence.[28] Beijing lobbied against Japan's bid for a permanent United Nations Security Council seat, and rejected Japan's suggestion of China's inclusion in the 2000 G8 summit; a "clear indication that Beijing was determined to keep Tokyo from playing a dominant diplomatic role in the region".[29] Michael Connors suggests that the regional hegemonic challenge may set conditions that "draw Japan... into a regional conflagration".[30] This rivalry is unlikely to result in military conflict; however, there is scope to include such a rivalry in a domestic discourse to fuel negative rhetoric to increase nationalist sentiment that could

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destabilise the Sino-Japanese relationship. It is important that both states adjust diplomatic rhetoric to be as non-inflammatory as possible, so as to minimise media or academic sensationalism.

Despite the significant issue that domestic legitimacy concerns pose, perhaps the most important priority in ensuring domestic legitimacy is the continuation of economic growth. This perhaps is the strongest argument that shows a mutual interest that would increase stability in the Sino-Japanese relationship. Sino-Japanese trade has increased thousand-fold since the normalisation of relations and is now worth more than \$200 billion annually; China being Japan's largest trading partner.[31] Continued political rhetoric emphasises China's rise as an opportunity, rather than a threat.[32] The Japanese *White Paper on International and Foreign Direct Investment* states that "the perception of China has changed from 'threat' to 'opportunity'".[33] Sutter points to the importance of the dependence on foreign investment between the two states, and argues that both states believe that continued economic development requires "a prolonged, peaceful and cooperative relationship".[34] Multinational cooperative efforts such as the Six Party Talks to diplomatically resolve the issue of North Korean nuclear provocations show evidence of a cooperative Japan and China relationship.[35] Furthermore, the United States and other regional allies also favor cooperative engagement and a stable Asia-Pacific region. Richard Bush the Director of the Centre for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, states that "clashes at any level are not in the US interest, because they force the United States to choose among countries with which it seeks good relations", and that the "United States has both the need and the opportunity to facilitate through quiet diplomacy a reduction in the probability of physical clashes and the attendant tensions".[36]

There are many pressures facing the Sino-Japanese relationship, namely historical issues, threat perceptions, territorial, and leadership disputes. It is the sum of these issues, and the pressure of a weakened domestic legitimacy, that could inflame the situation and potentially disrupt the relationship. Adjustments must be made on several levels to ensure that the bilateral relationship is able to manage these issues without succumbing to the pressure of domestic politics. It appears the mutual interest of economic development and the presence of willing allies will, in all likelihood, lead to a more stable and prosperous Sino-Japanese relationship.

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